Representations of Islam:
A Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis of Australian Newspapers

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In addition, I hereby declare that the work embodied in this thesis also generated the following publications:

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Abstract

This research is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of local Australian newspaper coverage of proposed Islamic property developments in three specific communities: Doveton, Victoria; Camden, New South Wales; and Gungahlin, the Australian Capital Territory. Prior research has shown that Orientalist depictions of Islam are evident in Western news media, and this study explores if such representations are manifest in three contemporary case studies. The research compares coverage of Islamic development proposals that were granted approval, and proposals that were denied, to identify similarities and differences that could indicate particular news discourses might have affected the outcomes.

Within the comparative case study framework, a combined critical discourse and content analysis has been conducted on both textual and visual elements of news items published in Doveton’s Berwick Leader, Camden’s Camden Advertiser, and Gungahlin’s The Canberra Times. The variety of news items studied includes news reports, editorials and Letters to the Editor, which have been scrutinized for Orientalist depictions of Islam and Muslims. Analysis reveals evidence of ‘Othering’ discourses across the three cases studies that have been expressed in diverse ways. Importantly, it also produces evidence of more inclusive discourses in each instance. This original research contributes valuable insights and new knowledge about how representations of Islam and Muslims in news media discourses may influence community perceptions of Islam and Muslims, and subsequently have real world effects in respect of proposed Islamic property developments in specific locations.
1. Introduction

The representation of Islam in Western media is a growing area of research in the communication field due to recent socio-historical occurrences. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been stimulus for such research, although previous events such as the Gulf War, had already inspired enquiry as to how Muslims and Arabs were being portrayed in Western news media. In the current context, the global presence of Islamic State has only served to increase suspicion and criticism of Muslim communities internationally, including in Australia. In September 2016 it was reported that an Australian poll had found 49% of people surveyed supported a ban on Muslim immigration to Australia (Medhora 21 September 2016). Such results highlight that opinions about the presence of Islam and Muslims in Australia point to community tensions which are therefore rich sites for analysis.

There are ever increasing discussions and depictions of Islam in the Australian news media which have been considered highly problematic. Arguably the most recognised theorist of representations of Islam in Western media is Edward Said. Said’s theory of Orientalism (2003, 1997, 1994) argues that Islam has been portrayed and understood as an inferior, strange and threatening ‘Other’ in the West. Said states that Orientalism began around the eighteenth century as a way of “dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (2003, p. 3). Orientalism is based on the alleged polarisation of the Orient ‘other’ and the Occident West (Said 1997, p. 4), and emphasises geographical distinctions and economic and cultural power relations as the basis for the West’s supposed superiority. Said argues that the dominant media representations of Islam are highly problematic and that the media have “covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterised it, analysed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it ‘known’” (Said 1997, p. li), in particularly negative ways. Therefore stereotypes, moral panics (Al-Natour 2010a, 2010b; Denham 2013; Thompson 2013) and undercurrents of racism against Islam and Muslims continue to be circulated and promoted in mainstream Western media.

In the Australian context, research has reinforced Said’s claims that the Muslim community is often portrayed very negatively in mainstream media, and it has been revealed that “there is a good deal of empirically demonstrated anti-Muslim sentiment
in Australia” (Dunn & Kamp 2012, p. 151). A key researcher of representations of Islam in Australian media is Anne Aly. Aly’s examination of Australian media reporting has revealed that “the media discourse directly situates Australian Muslims outside mainstream Australia” (2007, p. 32). Specifically in her research on responses to media discourses of terrorism, including Australian Muslim responses, Aly has “found that Australian Muslims were not given a voice amongst the dominant discourse of terrorism in Australian media and this marginalised them into the position of ‘the Other’” (McGregor 2013, p. 109). Another important Australian researcher is Kevin Dunn, who has argued that “the news media in Australia usually portray Islam very negatively” (2004, p. 335-336) and more specifically, that “Muslims proposing mosques and Islamic centres in Sydney [have been] portrayed as alien ‘Others’: as unknown, unfamiliar, foreign, mysterious and as threatening” (Dunn 2001, p. 304). According to Dunn, the negative portrayals and representations of Islam, as well as the “frustrations in getting places of worship, schools and renovations approved by local councils” (2014, n.p.) reflect the presence of Orientalist depictions in contemporary discussions about Islam in Australia.

Efforts to address these problematic representations, particularly in terms of educating journalists, have been the focus of research by Jacqui Ewart and Mark Pearson. As part of their ongoing research effort, Ewart & Pearson have developed the ‘Reporting Islam Reportage Handbook’ which aims to “offer reporters, editors and journalism students some basic guidance about the mindful coverage of stories about Islam or involving Muslim people” (2016, p. 1). There are therefore concerted research efforts working towards correcting Orientalist depictions of Islam in Australian media. In Tania Dreher’s research on cultural diversity in Australian media, she has found “considerable evidence of shifting representations and attempts by media professionals to produce more diverse and balanced representations” (2010, p. 283). However, the majority of the research does not support these findings; instead “the arguments put forward to support the idea of misrepresentation of the Islamic faith in Western media, far outweigh those that argue against the misrepresentation of the Islamic faith in Western media” (Herring 2015, p. 66). This original research therefore aims to extend on the previous work in the area of media representations of Islam and Muslims to investigate if these Orientalist depictions of Islam are evident in contemporary local news media discourse regarding proposed Islamic developments.
1.1. Research Aims

Through a comparative case study approach, utilising critical discourse analysis (CDA), this project builds on work which has already been completed on representations of Islam in Australian media, but it analyses a new sample of texts in order to determine if Orientalist depictions of Islam and Muslims are still evident in local Australian newspapers. Furthermore, considering prominent communication research on media effects (Hall 1980b; McCombs 2005; van Dijk 2014, 1991) in combination with the pervasive and powerful nature of discourses (Foucault 1989, 1980) and particularly media discourses (Talbot 2007) in society, this research considers if representations of Islam in local Australian newspapers could have effected decisions regarding development proposals such as mosques and Islamic schools, in three specific locales. The three case studies chosen for analysis include a proposed mosque in the Victorian suburb of Doveton, which was approved; a proposed Islamic school in the New South Wales suburb of Camden, which was denied; and a proposed mosque in the Australian Capital Territory suburb of Gungahlin which was approved. The newspaper items analysed predominantly consist of news reports, editorials and Letters to the Editor, presenting the opportunity to explore some of the dynamic relationships between these distinctive news discourses. Each category could have been studied in isolation, however by analysing how the editorials have been informed by the news reports, and how Letters to the Editor have responded to editorials, reports and other letters, a more holistic understanding of the cumulative effects each type of content may have had on the communities’ understandings of the proposed Islamic developments has emerged.

Four specific research questions have been designed for this study. Research question 1 was developed out of the literature review, particularly in regard to identifying previous research on problematic representations of Islam in the Australian media context. Its core focus is on Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism (2003) which suggests that Orientalism is a way for the West to talk about the Orient in a way that dominates it, and that as a result, Muslim communities are often portrayed in highly negative and stereotypical ways in Western media products. Research question 1 therefore asks: Is Orientalism evident in the news items studied?

Research questions 2 – 4 emerged from a formative understanding of media effects theory, anticipating correlational links between the ways the proposed Islamic
developments were reported on, and the eventual decisions as to whether or not they went ahead. In Doveton, the Green Street mosque development was instigated by the Afghan Mosque Project Committee in November 2012. The main opposition to the mosque came from Catch the Fire Ministries, led by politician Daniel Nalliah from the Rise Up Australia Party. The official line of the opposition was that Catch the Fire Ministries was going to build a church on land adjacent to the Afghan Mosque Project Committee’s proposed mosque site. The Doveton mosque was approved by Casey Council in March 2013, but Catch the Fire Ministries launched an appeal with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). The case was dropped by Catch the Fire Ministries in October 2013 when the group was offered an alternate site for its church. Research questions 2 asks: Can reporting on the Doveton mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?

In Camden, an Islamic school, to be called Camden College, was instigated by the Quranic Society in October 2007. The proposal was opposed by the local community and the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group. The school was rejected by Camden Council in May 2008, and a challenge mounted to the NSW Land and Environment Court by the Quranic Society was also rejected in June 2009. Research question 3 therefore asks: Can reporting on the proposed Camden school be deemed to be more negative, accounting for its denial?

Finally, the Gungahlin mosque was proposed in July 2009 by the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. (CMC). The ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) approved the Gungahlin mosque in August 2012, but the main opposition group, the Concerned Citizens of Canberra (CCC), took their appeal to the ACT Supreme Court. The ACT Supreme Court ruled against the CCC in July 2014. The CCC then appealed that decision, resulting in the legal battle being drawn out until November 2015 when the appeal was again denied. In January 2016 the CCC announced they would not pursue any further challenges in the High Court, allowing the mosque construction to go ahead. Research question 4 asks: Can reporting on the Gungahlin mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?

These four research questions have allowed for a thorough investigation of published news items in order to understand: how local Muslim communities have been represented in news media discourses; and how these news media discourses may have
impacted the ways that local communities constructed the potential impacts of proposed Islamic developments in their areas.

1.2. Thesis Outline

To appropriately situate the current research, Chapter Two of this thesis provides an overview of the relevant literature on representations of Islam in the Western media contexts. It also provides information on key related themes, including racism and moral panics, critical discourse analysis, media constructs and potential effects, and local reporting. The literature review demonstrates that these various areas of research are interrelated, and that although some of these approaches have been used together in prior research, the unique quality of the current project is the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). A CDA platform has been applied here to identify power relationships within a new set of local media discourses, and to account for the effects these may have had on (re)constructions of, or challenges to, Orientalism, racism, Islamophobia and moral panics within the local communities under study.

The methodology discussed in Chapter Three outlines the qualitative CDA and comparative case study approaches which have enabled the in-depth examination of nuanced factors within the local news items. The combined content analysis and CDA of both written and visual elements of the news media texts has provided a strong interpretive framework for examining Orientalist (and alternative) discourses within the local news under study.

Chapter Four outlines anticipated and unique discourses which have been identified in the *Berwick Leader’s* coverage of the proposed Green Street mosque in Doveton, Victoria. *Political discourses* highlight the role of politicians in the mosque debate, and also demonstrate how planning regulations were used as a framework for discussing the development proposal. The analysis of *discursive voices and power roles* explains how speaking opportunities were granted to Catch the Fire Ministries opposition group, yet simultaneously denied to the Afghan Mosque Project Committee. *Discourses of local community inclusion/involvement* demonstrate high levels of engagement between the *Berwick Leader* and its readership. Anti-Islamic sentiments are exposed in *discourses of the ‘Other’*, although there are also more *inclusive discourses* identified in the *Berwick*
Leader’s coverage. Additionally, visual discourses contribute to the ‘Othering’ of the Doveton Muslim community through limited and generalised depictions.

Chapter Five analyses the various discourses found in the **Camden Advertiser’s** coverage of a proposed Islamic school (to be called Camden College) in Camden, New South Wales. Political discourses demonstrate the use of authoritative voices and official discourses to influence power relations in the debate. The rural discourses represent a distinct characteristic of Camden’s community identity and are used most convincingly to oppose the Islamic school. Discourses of ‘Othering’ and discourses of inclusion demonstrate two contrary sides of the discussions and highlight tensions amongst the local community during the controversial debate. A self-referential discourse reveals the Camden Advertiser’s awareness of its team’s professional practice and the newspaper’s relationship with the local community.

Chapter Six explores **The Canberra Times’** coverage of a mosque development proposed for The Valley Avenue in Gungahlin, ACT. A discourse of concerns emerges as an attempt to reframe discussions regarding the development according to official planning protocols. Discourses of power reveal that certain actors are portrayed with authority whilst others (particularly opponents of the proposed mosque) simultaneously have their power undermined. Anti-Muslim sentiment is expressed throughout the published news items, including ideas of Westernisation, which contribute to the ‘Othering’ of the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. However, the Concerned Citizens of Canberra are also arguably ‘Othered’ by The Canberra Times. In contrast to these divisive discourses, more inclusive attitudes in both the written and visual elements of the texts are also evident.

Chapter Seven comprises a comparative analysis of the three cases under study, and demonstrates distinct differences between them in terms of breadth of coverage, oppositional groups, and certain actors who were granted chances to speak about various opinions on the Islamic development proposals. The comparison also reveals similarities amongst the cases, as all three make references to ‘the dreaded Lakemba’ (McGregor 2016) as part of the Orientalist discourse, and expose a common set of ‘acceptable’ reasons for opposing Islamic developments. Each case also shows evidence of more inclusive discourses regarding local Muslim communities, along with ‘Othering’ strategies.
Chapter Eight provides concluding remarks, makes recommendations for future research and explains that whilst Orientalist depictions of Islam are evident in the three cases studied here, unequivocally there is also evidence of inclusive discourses in each instance. The conclusion also outlines that although direct links cannot be drawn between the news discourses and the actual decisions made regarding the development proposals, it would be naïve to argue that the published content did not influence local community members’ knowledge of proposed Islamic developments. This research therefore contributes new knowledge regarding how varying representations of Islam and Muslims in news media can contribute to the construction of knowledge in society about proposed Islamic developments.
2. Literature Review

2.1. Islam in Western Media Contexts

Research into representations of Islam in Western media has increased since the events of 9/11 and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Abu-Fadil 2005; Afzal 2015; Kothari 2013). Previous research has found that “Western media have generally failed to provide fair and balanced reporting of Islam, the Arabs and have often mixed up the two” (Abu-Fadil 2005, p. 1). This problematic treatment is supported by research from Kothari who reports on the “increasing chances of misrepresentations and stereotypes, resulting in hate crimes against Muslims and the stigmatisation of the religion of Islam” (2013, p. 107) and van Dijk who states that “research in several countries has repeatedly demonstrated that ethnic and racial minority groups always have been, and continue to be, portrayed negatively or stereotypically by the press” (1997, p. 50 in Kabir 2013, p. 238). In fact, research into discursive representations of Islam in Western media has repeatedly shown that Islam has been treated unfairly, with Muslim communities often portrayed as strange, inferior and even threatening to Western society (Abu-Fadil 2005; Abukhattala 2004; Afzal, 2015; Akbarzadeh & Smith 2005; Al-Natour 2010a; Alharbi 2012; Aly 2007, 2006; Anderson 2015; Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery 2013; Bouma, Cahill, Dellal & Zwartz 2011; DeFoster 2015; Dreher 2003; Dunn 2004, 2001; Dunn, Klocker and Salabay 2007; el-Aswad 2013; Forum on Australia’s Islamic Relations (FAIR) 2013; Griffiths & Pedersen 2009; Hafez 2002; Herring 2015; Hollinsworth 2006; Kabir 2013, 2006; Keeble 2008; Kincheloe 2004a, 2004b; McGregor 2016, 2013; Manning 2006, 2003; Martinkus, Ewart & Rane 2014; Pederson, Aly, Hartley & McGarty 2009; Poole 2002; Said 2003, 1997, 1994; Saniotis 2004; Stonebanks 2004; Welch 2012; Youngblood n.d.). Ozalp has argued that “the ever increasing suspicion and scrutiny over the Muslim community in Australia seems to have reached new heights with the emergence of ISIS” (in Underabi 2014, p. 7), so that the original research presented in this project has become even more relevant and important than ever, in the contemporary context.

Although some researchers consider that the media does not promote such racial and ethnic stereotypes, and that the media simply reflects violence in a violent society (Kabir 2013, p. 239), Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism (2003) sustains the argument that the majority of the Muslim community worldwide continues to be scapegoated and stereotyped in Western media, contributing to an “increasing level of discomfort and
anxiety over the increasing Muslim population in the West” (Iner & Yucel 2015, p. 5). Kapoor, Testerman & Brehm have explained that in his discussions of Western dominance “Said’s writings make us mindful of the unresolved dialectic between Christianity and Islam” (2016, p. 47). They also point out that in much public discourse “Islam is constructed as a demonic voice in opposition to Judeo-Christian religions” (2016, p. 56). To address some of these ideological concerns, this project explores if scapegoating and stereotypical reporting has occurred in local newspaper coverage of proposed Islamic developments in three separate Australian communities across three locations; in Camden, New South Wales, Doveton, Victoria and Gungahlin, the Australian Capital Territory.

2.1.1. Islam in Australian Media

In the Australian context, research has shown that the Muslim community is often portrayed very negatively in mainstream media, and “there is a good deal of empirically demonstrated anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia” (Dunn & Kamp 2012, p. 151). Australian reporting on Islam frequently portrays “Islam as a religion in direct conflict with the values and traditions of Western culture, and deem[s] Muslims unable to commit to the values of liberal democracy on the basis of their religious beliefs” (Pedersen, Aly, Hartley & McGarty 2009, p. 81). Significantly, Muslim community members are regularly denied a voice or right of reply in Australian media (Hafez 2002) and are often discursively placed into the position of ‘the Other’.

Efforts to address these problematic representations, particularly in terms of educating journalists, has been the focus of research by Jacqui Ewart and Mark Pearson. Their research is based on what they have identified as “a pressing ethical and political obligation to counteract the distorted reporting” of Islam and Muslims (Ewart, Pearson & Healy 2016, p. 139). As part of their ongoing research effort, Ewart & Pearson have developed the ‘Reporting Islam Reportage Handbook’ which aims to “offer reporters, editors and journalism students some basic guidance about the mindful coverage of stories about Islam or involving Muslim people” (2016, p. 1). There are therefore concerted research efforts working towards correcting Orientalist depictions of Islam in Australian media.
In her research on cultural diversity in Australian media, Tania Dreher has found “considerable evidence of shifting representations and attempts by media professionals to produce more diverse and balanced representations” (2010, p. 283). Despite these positive findings, “the arguments put forward to support the idea of misrepresentation of the Islamic faith in Western media, far outweigh those that argue against the misrepresentation of the Islamic faith in Western media” (Herring 2015, p. 66). Kabir suggests that these misrepresentations may be “deliberately perpetrated, either to marginalise Muslim people as the uncivilised ‘Other’ in the dichotomy between Eastern and Western culture, or for purely commercial reasons – sensational stories guarantee higher newspaper sales” (2006, p. 313). Whatever the motivations behind Orientalist depictions, and whether they could be considered intentional or naturalised ‘othering’, the majority of studies to date have found that representations of Islam in Australian media is a problem (Akbarzadeh & Smith 2005; Al-Natour 2010a, 2010b; Alharbi 2012; Aly 2010, 2007; Anderson, 2015; Bouma, Cahill, Dellal & Zwartz 2011; Bugg 2009; Cauchi, 2008; Dreher 2009, 2003; Dunn 2005, 2004; Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007; Ewart & Pearson 2016; FAIR 2013; Kabir 2015, 2013, 2007, 2006; Manning 2003; Nakhoul 2013; Padgett & Allen 2003; Rane, Ewart & Abdalla 2010; Saniotis 2004). This original research therefore aims to extend on the previous work in the area and investigate if these problematic Orientalist depictions of Islam are evident in contemporary local news media discourse regarding proposed Islamic developments.

A key researcher of representations of Islam in Australian media is Anne Aly. Aly’s examination of Australian media reporting has revealed that “the media discourse directly situates Australian Muslims outside mainstream Australia” (2007, p. 32). She explains that religion is used as the primary marker of identity for the Australian Muslim community (as opposed to the diverse ethnicities amongst Muslim communities) and that this identity marker portrays Muslims as a homogenous unit. Specifically in her research on responses to media discourses of terrorism, including Australian Muslim responses, Aly has “found that Australian Muslims were not given a voice amongst the dominant discourse of terrorism in Australian media and this marginalised them into the position of ‘the Other’” (McGregor 2013, p. 109). Furthermore, she has argued this ‘Othering’ has increased since the events of September 11, although it had previously been evident “albeit less saliently” (Aly 2006, p. 23). The research presented in this original project extends on Aly’s earlier work by exploring if
Muslim community members are still being ‘Othered’ in the specific Australian locales under study.

Another important Australian researcher is Kevin Dunn, who argues that “the news media in Australia usually portray Islam very negatively” (2004, p. 335-336) and more specifically, that “Muslims proposing mosques and Islamic centres in Sydney [have been] portrayed as alien ‘Others’: as unknown, unfamiliar, foreign, mysterious and as threatening” (Dunn 2001, p. 304). Dunn has also reported and refuted “claims that Australia’s half a million Muslims have particular difficulty ‘fitting in’ and that their presence is a threat to social cohesion” (2014, n.p.). According to Dunn, the negative portrayals and representations of Islam, as well as the “frustrations in getting places of worship, schools and renovations approved by local councils” (2014, n.p.) reflect Said’s concerns around ‘Othering’ in contemporary discussions about Islam in Australia. Additionally, Dunn, Klocker and Salabay argue that these Orientalist constructions “rely upon a narrow construction of the Australian Self, perhaps as Christian or white, but most certainly as ‘not Muslim’” (2007, p. 574). These identity constructions and negative portrayals can be partially attributed to the “accumulated Western heritage of Islamophobia” (Dunn 2001, p. 292), which impacts locally in opposition to proposed Islamic developments including mosques and private schools.

A study by Foley on mosque proposals in the United States occurring in the 18 month period post 9/11 found “what once would have been local land use controversies are now being presented as issues of national and international significance. More importantly, they are serving as proxies for a number of more complex struggles commonly reduced to simple dichotomies: Islam versus the West, Islam versus Judeo-Christian culture” (2010, p. 7). In the Australian context, a case study of Islamic schools refused by local governments in Sydney, NSW, Bugg confirmed Dunn’s (2002) assertion that “opposition to the establishment of mosques is one of the most visible forms of anti-Islamic sentiment” (in 2009, p. 1). In Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia, Bouma, Cahill, Dellal & Zwartz also speak of the “difficulties in building schools and places of worship in the face of concerted local opposition” (2011, p. 24). A 2014 study into NSW mosques by Underabi similarly discovered that:

approximately half of the mosques faced resistance and opposition from the local community when first being built. This represents an ongoing concern and challenge as the numbers of Muslims attending mosques are
increasing and mosques struggle with space in accommodating for their increased numbers. There is no evidence to indicate that opposition to mosque building will reduce in the foreseeable future (2014, p. 12).

Underabi’s report also found that this opposition was “often based on fear, ignorance and misinformation. Having access to more accurate information and details would enable them [the communities] to form educated opinions and decisions” (2014, p. 15). Similar reactions have been found in regard to Islamic school proposals in Australia, with Jones stating there is an “apparent contradiction between the growing demand for the schools and increased public opposition, in particular since the events of September 2001” (2012, p. iii). Dunn has factored in the important view that opposition to Islamic developments draws on “cultural constructions of what constitutes a local citizen and the local community” (2001, p. 306), or in other words, “who are citizens (and, by the same token, who are not?)” (emphasis in original) (Donald 1996, p. 172). Increasingly, Muslim community members are being denied this civic recognition, particularly because of the ways they’re represented in media content.

2.1.2. Orientalism and Conceptions of the ‘Other’

The notion of ‘the Other’ introduced above, stems from Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, which sees Islam as an inferior, strange and threatening ‘Other’. Said states that Orientalism began around the eighteenth century, and the concept was:

- discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short,
- Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient (2003, p. 3).

Orientalism therefore has its basis in the polarisation of the Orient ‘other’ and the Occidental West (Said 1997, p. 4), and is grounded in geographical distinctions and economic and cultural power relations. Said has previously identified Orientalist attitudes in literature and traditional media sources, although with technological advances in the electronic world Orientalism has only intensified as television, films and general media resources have continued to increase standardisation and cultural
stereotyping (Said 2003). Said therefore argues that the dominant representations of Islam in mediated frameworks create problems, rather than Islam itself. In emphasizing the privileged roles that media have in shaping dominant perceptions of ‘others’ Said points out “the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterised it, analysed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it ‘known’” (Said 1997, p. li), particularly in negative ways. Said proposes that Islam is afforded a unique social demarcation through Orientalism, in that “for no other ethnic or religious group is it true that virtually anything can be written or said about it, without challenge or demurral” (Said 2003, p. 287). That is, stereotypes and undercurrents of racism continue to be circulated and perpetuated. Said’s key point is that he finds a lack of understanding about Islam to be a key problem, particularly because of media audiences’ susceptibilities to dominant and prejudicial media content. Dervin aligns with this view, arguing that Othering occurs from “differentiating discourses that lead to moral and political judgement of superiority and inferiority between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (2015, p. 1). Said finds that in media reporting “clichês, caricatures, ignorance, unqualified ethnocentrism and inaccuracy [are] inordinately evident” (1997, p. 130), so that “the misrepresentations and distortions committed in the portrayal of Islam today argue neither a genuine desire to understand nor a willingness to listen and see what there is to see and listen to” (1997, p. xlvii).

The ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis by Samuel Huntington is frequently cited in reference to Said’s work. In his book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, Huntington proposed that following the end of the Cold War, “the most important distinctions among peoples [were] not ideological, political or economic. They [were] cultural” (1997, p. 21), so that “the rivalry of the superpowers [was] replaced by the clash of civilisations” (Huntington 1997, p. 28). He proposes that the most important clash occurs between Islam and the West, but his ideas have been critiqued because he “tends to overly homogenise both” (Kellner 2004, p. 27) cultures. The clash of civilizations thesis is controversial and has been critiqued for being too simplistic and emphasising differences over similarities (Karim & Eid 2012; Kellner 2004; Ozalp & Keskin 2015), although it provides an example of how Orientalist themes are still evident in the academic discourse, as well as the public discourse. The original research in this thesis will uncover if the ‘clash of civilisations’ is evident in the newspaper coverage under study as an example of Orientalist depictions of Islam.
Theories about Orientalism have been taken up and extended by other theorists including Hamdi who argues that “the Orientalist mentality of which Said speaks is still very much alive today” (2013, p. 131), and Abu-Fadil who states that in the 21st century, “Orientalism…fits into glib 10-second sound bites and clickable links with downloadable PDFs or MP3s” (2005, p. 4). It is even referenced in an Australian context with ‘Australian Orientalism’ described as being “a portrait of deep and sustained fear” (Manning 2003, p. 69), and in Nakhoul’s description of the ‘Orientalist Aussie’ which refers to “ordinary Australian men and women, as well as to officials, politicians, media people and persons” (2013, p. 7) who’s main characteristics include “racism, stereotyping, manipulation of truth, obsession with power and control, with an innate aversion to Arabs, Lebanese, Middle Easterners and Muslims” (Nakhoul 2013, p. 7). Previous research therefore identifies Australian media as a rich site for the potential identification of Orientalist representations.

However, Said’s critics have written that there are flaws within Orientalism. Bernard Lewis is a major opponent of the Orientalism theory and in his article ‘The Roots of Muslim Rage’, Lewis says that Muslim people see Western imperialist domination as “the domination of infidels over true believers” (2001, p. 23). This statement attempts to construct the problem as being based in the Muslim perspective, rather than the racist views that allowed imperialism to happen in the first place. Lewis therefore continues to perpetuate an Orientalist stereotype in his writing, by firstly blaming ‘them’ for conflict with ‘us’, and also by referring to “a keen and growing awareness of the weakness, poverty and backwardness of the Islamic world as compared with the advancing West” (Lewis 2001, p. 24). Lewis’ critique is therefore difficult to consider objectively when he displays the very characteristics he is writing against.

An important critique of Orientalism is that it provides a biased framework for interpreting texts. Warby says that “it encourages reading of novels at an oblique angle in order to discover hidden colonialist subtexts” (2008, p. 50), while Kothari has argued that following the Orientalist framework “limits our understanding of evolving construction and resistance to media-constructed identities [and]…does not allow room for exploration of alternative representations of Muslims and Islam in the general-media market” (2013, p. 111). Although this is a relevant critique, Halliday has argued that “a reading of much of the literature on the history, society and politics of the region will give evidence that these ideas do occur and recur in the analysis and language” (1993, p.
and Scott states “it is easy enough to find such attitudes” (2008, p. 64) in texts. Even so, this potential bias was accounted for in the research in that Orientalism was not applied as a theoretical framework. The research sought and identified Orientalist discourses in the articles under study, but also remained open to other options, including the more inclusive discourses which emerged through the critical discourse analysis. The open CDA approach has allowed a comprehensive analysis of the varied discourses in local newspaper reporting of proposed Islamic developments in specific communities.

2.2. Race, Racism and Racist Tendencies

Despite the current consensus that ‘race’ is a social construct and not a real phenomenon, “the use of ‘race’ as a concept persists” (particularly in its basis for “exclusionary practices” to be enacted (Babacan 2006, p. 35). According to Gopalkrishan & Babacan, racism has generally been understood as being related to the ethnic background of citizens and the “coded societal messages and public discourses on immigration, ethnic minorities, indigenous people, multiculturalism, refugees and citizenship” (2006, p. 6). Racialisation has been defined as the process by which people are stereotyped by characteristics (Kobayashia & Peake 2000 in Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007) and is subsequently, deeply connected to power and privilege (Babacan 2006; Hollinsworth 2006). ‘New racism’ (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald 2004), occasionally described as cultural racism (Markus 2001), moves beyond traditional categories of ‘race’ to consider minority cultural identities and even religion, as the basis for discrimination. Balibar (1991) and Dervin (2015) refer to this concept as neo-racism, meaning racism without race, where culture or religion serve as the basis for discrimination, such as with Islamophobia (Al-Natour & Morgan 2012; Allen 2010; Birt 2010; Dunn & Kamp 2012; Khan 2010; Meer & Modood 2010; Morgan & Poynting 2012; Sayyid 2010; Tyrer 2010; Vakil 2010; Welch 2012). Corlett argues that “while the basis of the old and new racism has shifted, the core element of the old remains central to the new: the incompatibility to co-exist” (2002, p. 46). Another derivative of racism is ethnocentrism, which “involves intolerance of cultural difference and of minorities and, in its more extreme forms, the superiority of one’s own ethnicity” (Forrest & Dunn 2007, p. 701), and “these beliefs provide justification for discriminating against people from other cultures on those grounds of perceived cultural
superiority” (McConnochie, Hollinsworth & Pettman 1988, p. 23). Hoffman proposes that ethnocentrism may be expressed as “a lack of open-mindedness towards other cultures” (2016, p. 244), and (significantly for this research project) impresses how in news production “story selectors tend to choose actors and activities that express or embody what are seen as ‘national values’” (Clarke 2014, p. 91). Said calls this phenomenon “Europocentrism” (2003, p. 108) to directly relate to the perceived superiority of the West by the West. These varied conceptions of racism, including explicit and more implicit tactics, are all important to consider when analysing the reporting of minority groups in news media.

In Australia, theorists have described how “racism, as an ideology, is deeply embedded in the structures of Australian society” (Encel 1971) (Jayasuriya 2002, p. 40), and is “doing great damage to our society. All Australians are affected by racism” (McConnochie, Hollinsworth & Pettman 1988, p. xi). McLeod & Yates have stated that racism involves “questions about nationalism, about what and who rightfully constitutes and belongs in the nation” (2003, p. 32). These crucial conceptions in regard to national belonging have been extended by Hage (1998) who has:

…suggested the utility of the binary concepts of ‘spatial managers’ and the ‘spatially managed’ to better understand belonging and nationalism. The spatial managers are those who feel empowered to express an opinion about the nation, and about who belongs, and who should be allowed into the national space. The spatially managed are those who have opinions expressed about them, where they should be put, what they are doing, or where they should be sent back to (in Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald 2004, p. 417).

This concept of spatial-management reinforces the inherent power relations in racism and its status as “a complex and embedded system of oppression” (Johnson, Rush & Feagin 2000, p. 95). A specific example of these complexities, especially pertinent to this research project, can be seen in Dunn’s description that “even those Anglo-Celtic Australians who speak in favour of a mosque further affirm their spatial-manager status simply by speaking out” (2005, p. 44). The use of CDA as an analytic framework in the current research accounts for the network of power relations between the local actors involved in the debate of proposed Islamic developments, and investigates who is allowed to speak and under what circumstances.
As racist principles have become less accepted in Western societies, it has been claimed that “overt racism has been replaced by new constructions of covert racism, manifest as cultural intolerance” (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald 2004, p. 411). As the term implies, covert racism (Sniderman, Piazza, Tetlock & Kendrick 1991, p. 424) is frequently referenced as being a more subtle type of discrimination since “explicitly racist derogatory terms are used far less regularly in the contemporary discourse than a century or even fifty years ago” (Jiwani & Richardson 2011, p. 242). Therefore it is due to negative public perceptions of racism (Augoustinos & Every 2007; Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald 2004; van Dijk 1992), that modern racism is expressed in more illusive ways (Guerin 2003; Kleiner 1998). Augoustinos & Every argue that “the denial of racism and prejudice is so ubiquitous that this denial itself is sometimes treated by analysts as evidence of the existence of underlying prejudice in the speaker” (2007, p. 124), for example, the phrase ‘I’m not racist, but…’ (Dunn & Kamp 2012; Innes 2011; van Dijk 1992). Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery explain that this kind of denial was apparent in their study of Islam in the British press with statements such as “‘Most Muslims are not fanatics/terrorists…’” functioning “like a legitimation strategy” (Baker, 2013, p. 257). Denial is a useful tactic in racist talk, because it “allows a speaker to present the ‘Other’ in a negative light, while not damaging one’s own self-presentation (van Dijk 1992)” (Nelson 2013, p. 90). The importance of “positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation” (van Dijk 1992, p. 88) is unquestionable in maintaining networks of dominance in society. These performance strategies can also help to explain how “even on ethnic events minority spokespersons are less quoted, less credibly quoted, and if they are quoted their opinions are often ‘balanced’ by the more ‘neutral’ comments of white spokespersons” (van Dijk 1992, p. 101). Investigations into alleged reporting imbalances should therefore ask questions such as “who is speaking, how often and how prominently, and about what are quoted news actors allow to give their opinions?” (van Dijk 1991, p. 143). As such, the differences in representation in news media between Muslim and non-Muslim community members could reveal Orientalist attitudes within the published content. These matters are addresses in detail in the case study analyses of local news coverage of proposed Islamic property developments.

Dreher identifies that there is “a well-established body of research which critiques representation and identifies racism in Australian media” (2009, p. 446) and that the
social impacts of this media-spread racism are “devastating” (O’Donnell, Lloyd & Dreher 2009, p. 424). Racism in the media is important to analyse because as van Dijk (1999) has stated “speakers routinely refer to…newspapers as their source (and authority) of knowledge or opinions about ethnic minorities’” (in Meer, Dwyer & Modood 2010, p. 221 – 222). Furthermore, van Dijk argues that the reproduction of racism in the press is a process of “how media discourses contribute to the formation and change of the social representations of the readers about themselves as a group, about ethnic minorities, and about the relations between these groups” (1991, p. 226-227). Hollinsworth emphasises the dual role that media can have when it comes to matters of racism, explaining that “the mass media (newspapers, radio, television and the Internet) are among the most significant sites for racial vilification and for positive initiatives in anti-racism (HREOC 2004)” (2006, p. 253). Stockwell and Scott similarly outline how the media have “contributed a great deal to widespread community rejection of overt racism…However covert racism can still be present” (2000, p. 12). These connections between media representations and societal understandings are collaborative as the media may shape how people see and understand ethnic minorities. But “according to Roy Greenslade (2005, p. 11) most journalists who are responsible for racist material genuinely believe they are reflecting the views of society and therefore mirroring reality” (Keeble 2008, p. 180). KhosraviNik has acknowledged that people such as journalists and politicians, “who have access to and control over mass public discourses…have preferential control over the re/production and re/creation of hegemonic narratives in mass communication events” (2015, p. 49). He refers to such people as “symbolic elites” (KhosraviNik 2015, p. 49), and acknowledges their powerful roles in terms of communicating and shaping public opinions about race. However, as Hollinsworth asserts, it is important to note that:

Racial stereotyping and racism in the media is institutional, not individual. That is, it results from news values, editorial policies, from routines of news gathering that are not in themselves racist or consciously prejudicial. It results from the fact that most news stories are already written before an individual journalist is assigned to them, even before the event takes place (2006, p. 256).
Therefore in a thorough critique of news media content, consideration should also be given to the structural frameworks in which journalists construct their media texts.

2.2.1. Racism and Anti-Islam Sentiments in an Australian Context

There are explicit connections drawn in the research literature between Islam and racism (Corlett 2002; Said 2003), whereby “Post-White-Australia immigrants from Asia, especially those who were Muslims, along with Indigenous Australians, came to be especially identified as key Others in the national imaginary” (Forrest & Dunn 2007, p. 700). Anderson (2015) suggests that anti-Muslim prejudice has been documented in Australia since the early 1990s, and Manning articulates that “as a society we have a problem with racism and we are ignorant about Arabs and Muslims, and our politicians and media have preyed upon this” (2006, p. 275). This perceived ignorance was demonstrated in a University of New South Wales study’s findings which showed that “one in three Australians admits to knowing nothing about Islam and even more know things that turn out to be wrong” (Manning 2006, p. 275). Muslims are often ascribed characteristics to either differentiate or relate ‘them’ to ‘us’: “One instance of this is the radical differentiation of Muslims (as ‘extremists’) and their relative de-differentiation (as ‘moderates’)” (Tyrer 2010, p. 95). These descriptive terms label some Muslims as ‘acceptable’ whilst others “are seen as a threat to the cultural integrity of the dominant culture” (Jayasuriya 2002, p. 42). These racist differentiations, pitched against the Australian Muslim community, have primarily been expressed through opposition to proposed mosques and Islamic private schools (Dunn 2001; Jones 2012). Underpinning most of these concerns is a discourse of Islamophobia.

2.2.2. Islamophobia

Underabi has defined Islamophobia “as the irrational fear of Muslims and Islam, which can manifest as hostile and offensive views and actions towards Muslims and Islamic

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1 The research had early aims of understanding the production and reception of news content about Islam and Muslims, from the perspective of journalists and Muslim community leaders. However, relevant parties from the communities under study declined invitations to participate in the project, resulting in a review of the research design. After reviewing the relevant literature, and data collected through a critical discourse framework, it was determined that a CDA approach would still allow conclusions to be drawn regarding the core issues of racial/ cultural/ religious prejudices as represented in local news coverage.
institutions. In recent decades, Islamophobia in Western societies has become a widely accepted phenomenon” (2014, p. 46). It is important, however, to note that Islamophobia “is neither consistent nor uniform, neither in the way in which it is manifested nor in the way that it is defined. It may even be that a plurality of ‘Islamophobias’ – or more so a multiplicity – rather more than a single, all-encompassing entity is that which exists” (Allen 2010, p. 62). Ozalp and Keskin maintain that “Islamophobia is a mixture of racism, xenophobia and prejudice, and emerges from a lack of understanding of Islam and Muslims, association of Islam with terrorism and the media’s appetite for stories that consistently depict Muslims in a negative manner” (2015, p. 224). It is therefore important to consider the varying manifestations of Islamophobia in order to effectively analyse and counter them. In her study on representations of Muslims in Australian broadsheets, Anderson found that an effective strategy to combat Islamophobia in the media was through peace journalism, which “directs attention to the challenging dominant news conventions such as the focus on the elite, bureaucratic sources” (2015, p. 266). As such, challenging stereotypes and negativity often found in reporting about Muslims and Islam, partially through providing opportunities for ordinary Muslim voices to be heard in news media reports, can be an effective strategy to shift patterns of representation. The original research presented in this project explores if such opportunities have been granted to Muslim community members in the cases under study.

2.2.3. Moral Panics about ‘Others’

Moral panic literature centres on “a threat to the fundamental moral basis of society – evil threatens the good” (Thompson 2013, p. 396). It is “a process in which the response to an alleged social problem appears exaggerated, that is, disproportionate to the actual threat posed” (Denham 2013, p. 320). A moral panic is therefore “not about real deviance, or about real activities subsequently classified as deviant, but about ‘the manufacture of the chimaera of the existence of those activities’” (Davies 1986 in Hunt 1997, p. 633). It is the perception of the threat that is important, not the actual threat itself (if the threat is even really present). As such, moral panics can be related to ideas about risk, specifically “the cultural theory of risk perception (Douglas & Wildavsky 1982; Rayner 1992) [which] asserts that individuals’ perceptions of risk reflect and reinforce their commitments to visions of how society should be organised” (Kahan,
Braman, Gastil, Slovic & Mertz 2013, p. 165). Under this theory, society is likely to perceive a threat if the ‘folk devil’ is not following cultural norms, therefore the more deviation observed from the norm, the greater the risk perceived. The ‘folk devil’ is the name given to the deviant group, usually referring to “individuals, minorities, or subcultures” (Al-Natour 2010a, p. 574). Many of the ideas surrounding moral panics centre on the youth group as a folk devil, however, “Cohen has correctly identified how notions of ‘race’ are utilised” (Al-Natour 2010b, p. 44), and it has been argued that the ‘other’ or ‘folk devil’ is likely to be a vulnerable group in society (Hunt 1997; Chomsky 1991). Chomsky writes that:

a menace for today should be remote: ‘the other’, very different from ‘us’, or at least what we are trained to aspire to be. The designated targets should also be weak enough to be attacked without cost; the wrong colour helps as well. In short, the menace should be situated in the Third World, whether abroad or in the inner city of name (1991, p. 114) (in Padgett & Allen 2003, p. 35).

Chomsky’s perspective is pertinent to an understanding of how dominant discourses around Muslim communities of Australia frames and situates discussion.

Another important aspect of the moral panic literature is the links to the media, because they are “key source of risk information for the public” (McCallum, Hammond & Covello 1991 in Wakefield & Elliott 2003, p. 217). Hunt identifies “the media itself, as an ‘especially important carrier and producer of moral panics’” (2003, p. 231), whilst Dreher specifically speaks of the role of news media in “regularly contribut[ing] to ‘moral panic’ directed at migrant or ethnic communities assumed to be inherently criminal, threatening or ‘un-Australian’” (2010, p. 275). The media allows contentious issues, such as proposed Islamic developments, to be reported to a wider audience than it perhaps would have otherwise reached. Cohen (2001, p. 11), argues that folk devils were being “publicised not just in oral tradition but to much larger audiences and with much greater dramatic resources” (in Morgan & Poynting 2012, p. 5). Eleven years after Cohen’s statement, and with the ever-growing presence of digital media, Morgan & Poynting asked: “How much larger the audience now, and how more instantaneous the publicising?” (2012, p. 5). van Dijk states that “over-reporting precisely defines [sic] an issue as a scandal or affair, and this will again spawn further reactions from politicians and others involved, which again need to be reported, and so on, thus creating what may
be called the ‘panic circle’” (1991, p. 88). This is referred to elsewhere as deviance amplification (Thompson 2013), whereby the media draw attention to the panic through continuing coverage. The size and frequency of the coverage of the proposed Islamic developments in local newspapers can therefore be used as a partial indicator of the extent to which the mosques and Islamic schools were seen to threaten the local communities under study.

It has been suggested that “in contemporary Australia we are witnessing the emergence of the ‘Arab other’ as the pre-eminent ‘folk devil’ of our time” (Poynting et al 2004, p. 3 in Al-Natour 2010b, p. 45), and these folk devils have been produced “at the local, national as well as international” level (Welch 2012, p. xi). Reasons for the moral panics surrounding Arab and Muslim people have been suggested to include “fears of neighbourhood change, and...the formation of ‘ethnic ghettos’” (Dunn 2001, p. 299), as well as the links frequently made in the media and public discourses between Islam, terrorism and fundamentalism (Poynting, Noble, Tabar & Collins 2004 in Bugg 2009; Said 1994). These varying causes show how Islamophobic morals panics are formed by melding “local grievances and fears, inflected by xenophobia, with a globally constructed ‘radical Muslim’ folk demon” (Morgan & Poynting 2012, p. 5). In each local case of moral panic, there are therefore peculiarities but also similarities with other cases across the Western world, as will be demonstrated by the comparative case studies in this research. During the moral panic, “the diverse identities of Arabs, Lebanese and Muslims are used interchangeably” (Al-Natour 2010b, p. 44), and this simplification of identity is typical of the panic process. Al-Natour has also looked at the controversy surrounding the Camden school, and he states that “the events at Camden show that the Arab folk devil still preys upon the moral concerns of mainstream Australia and can be depicted through the media as a threat to national well-being” (emphasis in original) (2010a, p. 583). This idea of national well-being is also raised by Humphrey who argues that “the moral panic around terrorism has led to the situation where any expression of Islamic religious identity is suspected as a sign of fundamentalism or radicalism and therefore a potential national threat” (2007, p. 13-14). In this way, the moral panic fuels itself and continues to perpetuate. Moral panics have even been linked specifically to proposed mosque developments by Dunn & Kamp:

> If non-Christians are said not to belong in a certain place, for example, if mosques are judged to be culturally incompatible then this implies that
Christians belong there, and that the place is Christian. In other words, outcasting the folk devil involves both the construction of the Other as well as the Self (Dunn et al 2007) (2012, p. 149 – 150).

Ideas about the folk devil are therefore connected to the concepts of identity and ‘Othering’. The three local case studies in this research will be analysed to investigate if moral panics are part of the ‘Othering’ process inherent in Orientalist depictions of Islam.

2.3. Discourse and CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

Paltridge defines discourse as “an approach to the analysis of language that looks at patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur” (2006, p. 1). Discourse can be understood as:

- a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a topic and producing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. Thus the term refers both to the production of knowledge and representations and the way that knowledge is institutionalised, shaping social practices and setting new practices into play (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004, p. 236).

Research into discourse is therefore interested in how some ideologies are embodied in texts, while others are concealed (Kilby, Horowitz & Hylton 2013). Foucault argues that “in order to account for the choices that were made out of all those that could have been made (and those alone), one must describe the specific authorities that guided one’s choice” (1989, p. 74), particularly in regard to the language used in textual constructions. It is therefore vitally important to consider wider socio-cultural contexts in which texts are produced (Hall 1980b; Heck 1980; Hobbs 2008; Morley 1980) in order to account for their ideologically–charged meanings.

Specifically of interest to this research is critical discourse analysis which as both a theoretical and methodological (Fairclough 2013, p.225) framework:

- involves the use of discourse analytic techniques, combined with a critical perspective to interrogate social phenomena. It builds on cultural studies insofar as it draws on social constructionist assumptions, but provides systematic techniques with which to implement them in the academic
project, and also provides a critical framework with which to explore material effects (Ainsworth & Hardy 2004, p. 236).

Critical discourse analysis is particularly interested in investigating power relationships and recognises the constructive element of meaning making (Augoustinos & Every 2007) whilst providing a framework for understanding how this construction occurs. It can therefore be used “to understand and examine how social identity is constructed, as well as the effects of such identity construction” (Ainsworth & Hardy 2004, p. 226). Critiquing the capacity for discourses to influence “socially shared knowledges, attitudes and ideologies”, is described by van Dijk as “the core of critical discourse analysis” (1993, p. 258-259).

As a concept, power is referenced in this project according to Foucault’s views (1980, 1989), as both enabling and constraining and as circulating through multiple organisations in society. Foucault reasons that power must be enabling as well as constraining, because:

if power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (1980, p. 119).

Foucault therefore argues that power is also productive, not simply prohibitive, and that “the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information” (1980, p. 51). In this way, power allows people to construct knowledge and generate discourses through societal relationships. Specifically in regard to this research project, dynamic displays of power enable dominant social groups to generate ideas about Islam, and to dispense these through the media. Similarly, if minority groups are equipped with powerful resources (through a representative spokesperson, for example) they may challenge dominant discourses, thereby constructing new ones.

Foucault also maintains that power circulates through multiple organisations in society, and is not simply exercised by one governing authority:
Power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual’s consolidated and homogenous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others…is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do have it and submit to it. Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation…Individuals…are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power…In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application (1980, p. 98).

Foucault argues that even organisations such as the army, which have a clear pyramid structure of power, do not have all of the power bearing down from one source. He says that the top and bottom of the pyramid must “stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual ‘hold’” (1980, p. 159), because power requires not just someone to issue it, but someone to accept it and to legitimise it. Therefore even those at the lower levels of society are not completely powerless. All human agents can use their power by opposing dominant ideologies being filtered through media content, and attempting to circulate their own, as previously discussed.

Networks of power within society also contribute to and influence the networks of discourse within society in the following way:

Discursive fields consist of competing discourses or ways of giving meaning to the world, and these discourses organise social institutions and processes. However, within discursive fields not all discourses carry equal weight and they inevitably compete for dominance. Some will reaffirm the status quo and others will challenge it. Some are seen as ‘natural’ and others must fight for recognition (McIntyre 2012, p. 63).

Therefore power can influence which discourses become naturalised as ‘truths’ and which discourses become ‘alternates’. There are always alternate discourses/knowledges because “as Foucault writes, ‘there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed
right at the point where relations of power are exercised’ (1980, p. 142)” (Schirato, Danaher & Webb 2012, p. 48). Power is always contested, and as knowledge and discourse are linked to power, they too are always contested.

Foucault explains, “every attempt to put something in meaning comes about from a position of power, because power connects and organises the social positions from which meaning comes about” (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 166). For example, when one source is chosen over another for a newspaper article, one source is given a voice over the other; this is representative of a clear power relation that has been organised and institutionalised (van Dijk 1993). One source’s message is able to be heard while the other falls by the wayside. Voyer, Dreher, Gladstone & Goodall point out that “the dominance of a handful of voices can also discourage participation in the debate by other members of the community (Wahl-Jorgensen 2006). A variety of voices or perspectives, both across stakeholder groups and within them, is therefore required in order to seek middle ground, and build community consensus” (2013, p. 37). In this original research project, privileged ‘statements’ (Foucault 1980) occurring in news items have been partially determined by ideas about what can and cannot be said about and/or by Muslim people. Wodak emphasizes that “language is used to determine and define similarities and differences; to draw clear boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘others’” (2012, p. 216). Her ideas of exclusive and inclusive language functions are key to this project’s critical discourse analysis of local Australian newspaper content.

Finally, Wodak outlines three key ways in which power is directly related to discourse:

‘Power in discourse’, ‘power over discourse’, and ‘power of discourse’.

The first of these means the struggle over meanings and interpretations of terms and discourses…the choice of ‘specific linguistic codes, rules for interaction, rules for access to the meaning-making forum, rules for decision-making, turn-taking, opening of sessions, making contributions and interventions’ (Holzscheiter 2005, p. 69). ‘Power over discourse’ generally means access to publics, i.e. the extent to which specific actors become seen and heard (ibid., p. 57). And the ‘power of discourse’ implies ‘the influence of historically grown macro-structures of meaning, of the conventions of the language game in which actors find themselves’ (ibid.) (2012, p. 217).
So it is important to conceive of these complex interactions as Foucault does by considering “discourse as more than just language, power as more than just hierarchy, and knowledge as more than information” (Kapoor, Testerman & Brehm 2016, p. 49). Relative to this research project, it has been crucial to consider how specific language choices have been used to create discourses and to what effect; to identify who has been able to manipulate discourses to their advantage, to make themselves visible and exclude ‘Others’; and finally, to ascertain the effects particular discourses may have had on local newspaper readers and their understandings of proposed Islamic developments.

2.3.1. Media Discourse

Media discourse is a distinct area of focus for CDA which is “deeply embedded in the daily life and daily interaction of almost everyone” (Talbot 2007, p. 5). Due to the reach and influence of media discourses, and the authoritative ideological positions of news entities, the “media coverage of an issue does not just function as a representation of the issue but influences social reality itself” (DeFoster 2015, p. 69). In other words, the construction and interpretation of a media discourse is “shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them” (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak 2011, p. 357) through reciprocal power relationships. van Dijk explains that these complex socio-cultural relationships mean that “most of human knowledge is acquired and shaped by discourse, and on the other hand…language use, in general, and the production and understanding of discourse, in particular, are impossible without the activation of massive amounts of knowledge of the world” (2014, p. 5). As a result of these interactions “discourses produce effects. They provide the very means by which we apprehend and experience the world” (Hollinsworth 2006, p. 27). Therefore the relationship between discourse and knowledge is recursive, explaining in part how people’s knowledge of Islam may impact their responses to media discourses regarding proposed Islamic developments, and how media discourses have contributed to the construction of these knowledges in the first place.

This research is especially interested in media discourses and the meaning-making potential of newspapers, in that the media – as a significant discursive conduit – has a critical role in constructing knowledge, particularly about ‘Others’, because we live in a second-hand world. This means that people:
are aware of much more than they have personally experienced; and their own experience is always indirect. The quality of their lives is determined by meanings they have received from others...But in their everyday life they do not experience a world of solid fact; their experience itself is selected by stereotyped meanings and shaped by ready-made interpretations. Their images of the world, and of themselves, are given to them by crowds of witnesses they have never met and never shall meet (C. Wright Mill 1967, p. 405-406 in Said 1997, p. 46-47).

According to these views, most people very rarely have knowledge of complex social phenomenon beyond their immediate experiences (Fowler 2013, p. 11) outside of what is presented to them through the media, and must therefore engage with mediations to build knowledge and produce meaning. As such, news media discourses surrounding proposed Islamic developments (and other Islamic issues outside the scope of this original research) are fundamental influencers of public opinion and social knowledge.

2.3.2. News Media Discourses

In her discussions of the potential impact of media news content, Weerakkody emphasizes that “a dominant discourse specifies what can be said and how it may be said, and by extension what can be done with respect to an area of concern to a culture” (2009, p. 273). Cotter reinforces this point, arguing that “news language both reflects what is socially acceptable usage as well as what is conventionalised and contingent within the profession” (2010, p. 10). Similarly, in his considerations of news discourses, Fowler expresses that “anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position: language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium” (2013, p. 10). News discourses are therefore highly structured systems providing producers of news and their audiences with ways to talk about particular issues and persons. Said discusses these influences in direct reference to media discourses on Islam:

We have to do with what Foucault, in another connection, has called ‘an incitement to discourse’. Very different from a simply interventionary censorship, the intellectual regulation of discourse about distant and alien
cultures positively and affirmatively encourages more of itself. This is why it has persisted despite changes taking place in the world, and this is why it has continued to draw recruits to its service. All in all, present coverage of Islam and of non-Western societies in effect canonises certain notions, texts, and authorities. The idea that Islam is medieval and dangerous, as well as hostile and threatening to ‘us’, for example, has acquired a place both in the culture and in the polity that is very well defined: authorities can be cited for it readily, references can be made to it, arguments about particular instances of Islam can be adduced from it – by anyone, not just by experts or by journalists. And in turn such an idea furnishes a kind of *a priori* touchstone to be taken account of by anyone wishing to discuss or say something about Islam… It enters the cultural canon and this makes the task of changing it very difficult indeed (1997, p. 157).

Here Said argues that dominant media discourses about Islam have defined an ‘acceptable’ way of talking about Islam as dangerous and threatening to the West, so that the pervasive and hegemonic status of this problematic discourse makes it very complicated to propose alternative discourses. In an effort to explore some of these concerns, this research project considers whether Orientalist depictions of Muslims/Islam are evident in local Australian newspaper reporting on proposed Islamic developments, through the application of a critical discourse analysis.

### 2.3.3. News Media Analysis and CDA

There are various discursive techniques for uncovering hidden meanings in newspaper items, including: analysing linguistic structures (syntax, lexical choices, semantic and pragmatic structure) which have ideological implications (Fowler 2013, p. 67); considering intertextuality - the embedding of evidentiality through reported speech (Bednarek & Caple 2012a, p. 90); and the style and structure of news reports, editorials, images etc. Considering the powerful impacts of news language, an important starting point is to take account of lexical style, or word choice. “Lexicalisation of semantic content…is never neutral: the choice of one word rather than another to express more or less the same meaning, or to denote the same referent, may signal the opinions,
emotions, or social position of a speaker” (van Dijk 1991, p. 53). For example, “the use of ‘thug’ rather than ‘demonstrator’ signals different underlying opinions about the people referred to” (van Dijk 1991, p. 210). The choice between alternatives is a choice “controlled by socially shared opinions, attitudes, and ideologies” (van Dijk 1991, p. 210). In this original project it is evident that some of the lexical choices used to describe Muslim (and some non-Muslim) community members, as well as Islamic property development proposals, are problematic. Lexical styles are a point of interest in the analytical discussions where observations have also been made of “discursive resources that perform social actions such as blaming, justifying, rationalising and constructing particular social identities for speakers and those who are positioned as other” (Augoustinos & Every 2007, p. 125).

From the CDA perspective adopted for this research, the consideration of lexical styles also takes into consideration:

who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language (langage)? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? What is the status of the individuals who – alone – have the right…to proffer such a discourse? (Foucault 1989, p. 55).

The CDA therefore considers the identity and social roles of the people who contributed to and constructed news items, including community members who wrote Letters to the Editor, as well as the people (some formalised groups, some institutional members and some individuals) who are featured in the news reports. When analysing who is talking, it is also important to consider how they are addressed within the article, because naming subjects constructs their place in society (Jiwani & Richardson 2011):

Some are verbally defined as ‘representative individuals’; they are not only named but have the authority to speak, their ‘representative’ credentials presented: ‘The Prime Minister’…Others are referred to only as a collective – ‘the militants’ motion…’. Not only are they presented without credentials but their representativeness is either heavily qualified or denied (Connell 1980, p. 155).
These naming decisions can go a long way to building a perception of authority amongst the readers, and may therefore have some effect of how the readers interpret the information being presented to them. Due to the links to power relations, this is an important component of critical discourse analysis.

2.3.4. Identity Constructions in Media Discourses

When considering the concept of identity, one of the most important realisations is that identity is a construct (De Fina 2011; Grossberg 1996; Hall 1996; Hassan 2015; Said 2003; Wodak 2012). The construction of identity “is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society” (Said 2003, p. 332), and is a result of discursive practices (De Fina 2011; Hall 1996) that are always in process. “For Foucault, the subject only emerges by way of the workings of the discourses, categories and procedures of power” (Schirato, Danaher & Webb 2012, p. 167). Hall expands on the link between identity and discourse:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity (1996, p. 4).

It is therefore through conceptions of ‘the Other’ and difference that identity is formed (Grossberg 1996) and this process of ‘Othering’ can be seen in the construction of a Muslim identity through Australian newspapers. Said argues that Orientalism has become such a focal point of identity for people from the West to apply to Arab and Muslim people that “the attribute of being oriental overrode any countervailing instance. An Oriental man was first an Oriental and only second a man” (2003, p. 231). Orientalism thus became a static and perpetuating marker of identity. Such interpellation creates a “dissonance between image and self-image” (Donald 1996, p. 171) for the Muslim community and the way they are being portrayed in Australian media. This dissonance occurs partly because “no one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting points” (Said
The plurality of identity was demonstrated in a study by Kabir of young Muslims aged 15-30 across Australia, Britain and America, in which she found that “all 48 participants retained a bicultural stance; they were part of both their Muslim/ethnic community and the wider society” (2015, p. 123). Jones also found that the students in his study “were comfortable with their identities as Australian and Muslim” (2012, p. 277). Such labels are therefore only surface interpretations of identity, and fail to look in depth at how people construct their own identities, whether that is via nationality, ethnic background, religion, gender and so forth, or a combination of any of the above.

This inability to escape from a single fixed identity reflects “the damage done to minority and/or oppressed groups by lack of recognition [or misrecognition] by the dominant culture” (Hollinsworth 2006, p. 58), as well as the role of power in people being “positioned into roles that they cannot easily refute” (De Fina 2011, p. 273). These unequal power relations can “enforce a dichotomous representation of Us vs Them” (KhosraviNik 2015, p. 71), and the media play an increasingly important role in these productions (Schirato, Danaher & Webb 2012, p. 170). It is also important to acknowledge “the diversity of Islamic culture (it is a question of Islams, not Islam). It is constituted of a variety of sects, movements, parties, forms of activity, and points of view” (Robins 1996, p. 76-77). There has been a tendency to “use religion as the primary marker of identity for Muslims with a simultaneous propensity to ignore the diversity among Australia’s Muslim communities” (Aly 2007, p. 28). Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery found that in 71% of the times the phrase ‘Muslim community’ was used in their research corpus of British newspapers it was “prefaced by the definite article the, suggesting that the British press normally references the notion of Muslim community as a single, homogenous mass” (emphasis in original) (2013, p. 124). The lack of acknowledgment of the diversity of Muslim identities (Cauchi 2008) is therefore an international issue. More recognition is needed of the fact that “language choice, and language itself, are part of identity construction (both individual and collective)” (Wodak 2012, p. 216). As such, when applying labels like ‘Muslim’ to a group of people, the labeller is again using simplistic categorisations that may not be appropriate or considered accurate by the person being identified. Also, “spokespeople for certain religions, cultures and sexual minorities do not always represent the ‘majority’ and have their own agendas. The image that they construct of their identities does not always
match those of their peers, who feel that they are being othered by these spokespeople” (Dervin 2015, p. 2-3). Identity is therefore a hugely complex construct which should be carefully applied and analysed in relation to its consequences in society.

2.4. Media Constructs and Potential Effects

Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding theory is used in this research due to the consideration it gives to both the production and consumption of texts. This model proposes that “certain codes and conventions are drawn on in the production of a media text as encoding, whereas decoding refers to the process in which readers, viewers or auditors draw on certain codes in their interpretation of a media text” (Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock 2007, p. 145). The encoding occurs at the hands of the journalists writing the newspaper articles, or the community members contributing Letters to the Editor. The process is essentially, also discursive, as it is “framed throughout by meanings and ideas: knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of [texts] through this production structure” (Hall 1980b, p. 129). Encoding can therefore be used to intentionally frame an issue in a certain way, or to promote one aspect of a story.

Heck argues that “the coding and decoding of a message implies the usage of the same code” (1980, p. 124); however, Hall states that “the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical” (1980b, p. 131). This asymmetry means that depending on numerous factors the receiver may not decode the message in the way the encoder intended. Hall proposes that there are three ways a reader may respond to a media message. The first is referred to as “the dominant-hegemonic position. When the [audience] takes the connoted meaning…and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the [audience] is operating inside the dominant code” (Hall 1980b, p. 136). In the dominant reading, the audience generally accepts what has been encoded into the text, because “encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate” (Hall 1980b, p. 135). Secondly, there is the negotiated reading, which:
contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule…Negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics are sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power (Hall 1980b, p. 137).

Therefore the audience takes some of the encoded meaning and combines it with their own knowledge to come to an understanding about the issue. Finally, there is the oppositional reading, where the audience understands the message but chooses to decode it in a contrary way. “He/she detotalises the message in the preferred code in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference…an *oppositional code*” (Hall 1980b, p. 137-138). Therefore as Coesemans explains, “the generation of meaning is an interactive process between writer and reader” (2012, p. 68). The encoding/decoding interpretive model has received some criticism because of claims that “the active reader is not necessarily resistant, although this is frequently implied” (Clarke 2014, p. 112). Hall has also been critiqued for his insistence that the ‘preferred meaning’ of the text can be found within the text itself (Morley 2006, p. 109), which seems to ignore the modern acknowledgement of the polysemic nature of texts. The model however, is entirely appropriate for the current research framework because it gives consideration to both construction and deconstruction, for as McIntyre says: “his [Hall’s] model admits to the possibility that while interpretation is an important aspect to the creative process, a degree of power to control meaning still may reside with the producer” (2012, p. 66). Production levels of meaning-making are very important aspects of the analytical work presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. However, the analytical discussion concentrates more so on the published outcomes of news media encodings and potential decodings, rather than interrogating journalism practices *per se*.

Also important in looking at media effects is van Dijk’s concept of mental models. van Dijk writes that “models are mental structures of information which, besides the new information offered in a news report, feature information about such a situation as inferred from general knowledge scripts” (1991, p. 74). Such mental models come from
our personal experiences as well as readers’ socialisation. “While the formal properties of texts are cues in the process of interpretation, the interpretation of these cues is mediated by the assumptions, values, beliefs, and internalised representations of the world that readers or listener bring with them to the text” (Hobbs 2008, p. 245). Mental models therefore allow the audience (in this case local newspaper readers) to infer large amounts of knowledge relative to an article. “The text is like an iceberg of information of which only the tip is actually expressed in words and sentences. The rest is assumed to be supplied by the knowledge scripts and models of the media users, and therefore usually left unsaid” (van Dijk 1991, p. 151). Mental models are also partially constructed through “an ongoing and fluid process of text-audience-media interaction within a broader socio-political context…in response to the introduction of new information, the acquisition of new cultural competencies, new interactions and changes in the socio-political milieu within which media texts are interpreted” (Aly 2010, p. 33). In these ways, each newspaper article a reader interacts with can change, even slightly, their mental model. In reference to the encoding/decoding model above, van Dijk has suggested that readers of newspaper articles who have existing mental models about Islam may be more likely to construct oppositional or negotiated readings of problematic news reports than those who have no relevant models to turn to for comparison.

The mental model theory can be further applied specifically to the way audiences understand Islam through reporting on terrorism in the news and the application of social amplification theory. “The core idea behind the social amplification framework is that an accident or act of terrorism will interact with psychological, institutional and cultural processes in ways that may amplify (or attenuate) community response” (Burns & Slovic 2013, p. 286). There are therefore many indirect impacts when the media report on an event, such as terrorism, and the information in the report is interpreted based on the audience’s existing mental models. Depending on the mental model of the individual, this will either aid in alleviating or amplifying the risk perceived. This can also be linked to ideas about cultural trauma, whereby “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 2004, p. 1 in Thompson 2013, p. 388). As an example of the way that media discourses produce knowledge in society
(van Dijk 2014), a study by Gottschalk & Greenberg (2008) asked Americans what words came to mind when they thought about ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’. They recalled “events and names that associated with violence such as Osama bin Laden, the 9/11 tragedies, the idea and practices related to oppression such as jihad, and the places limited to the Middle East such as Iraq and Iran” (Jahedi, Abdullah & Mukundan 2014, p. 298). If theories of mental models are applied to the local news reporting of proposed Islamic developments, it may be suggested that readers’ views of Islam could have impacted risk perceptions and negative reactions to the news. For as Bowles advises, when carrying out interpretive work “we need to understand representations in terms of their relationship to real-world ‘settings’ because of their potential impact on decision-making behaviour” (2010, p. 50).

When considering the implications of the mental model theory, it is important to note that in this project individual journalists who wrote specific articles or reports have not been singled out as being accountable for problematizing Islam. As Akbarzadeh & Smith have outlined:

Neutral articles about Muslim[s]…may contain non-inflammatory language as events are reported. But the reader may eventually derive a negative image of Islam…due to a series of articles that link them to extremism, violence and conflict. Therefore, the effect from reading a neutral article may be negative. This, then, has little to do with the journalists who simply report the event (as news stories), and has more to do with the wider social environments and attitudes of the reading public (2005, p. 14).

In interpretive terms, mental models theory is concerned with the accumulative effects of mediated experiences, for “in the absence of personal experience, we become highly dependent on representation to form our sense of the meaning of events, people and places in the past” (Bowles 2010, p. 53). Humphrey argues that particularly in the Australia context, Islam is primarily experienced through the media “since most Australians have little or no direct knowledge of Islam and Muslims” (2007, p. 11), and therefore the media’s significant role in influencing public opinions about Islam (Herring 2015) is profound.
In regard to both Hall’s encoding/decoding model of communication and van Dijk’s mental models theory, it is important to conceive of the audience as active in meaning making processes (Ang 1990, 1991; van Dijk 1991). van Dijk argues that “readers…do not simply register conveyed meanings, but construct them” (1991, p. 42), while Kabir cautions that “to believe that…media images do not impact upon reader’s perceptions is naïve” (2006, p. 315). Some audiences do realise the effectual power of media, yet fall into the trap of the third-person effect. “The third-person effect is an indirect media effect, caused by an individual’s perception that while he or she is immune to media influence that others (third persons) are not and that they thereby come to accept, approve, or support the media message” (Kothari 2013, p. 118). Audiences often do not realise that:

while individuals, as active agents, make conscious choices and uses of media in their everyday life, they may not always be fully aware of the consequences of their choices. In this sense they are at once active players in the media communication process but also vulnerable, albeit unconsciously, to media messages (Aly 2007, p. 33).

Despite individual choice-making it must also be acknowledged then that “the language used in the media and news is argued to be the most pervasive and widespread discourse that people from all backgrounds are exposed to” (KhosraviNik 2015, p. 73). In relation to coverage of what van Dijk refers to as ‘ethnic events and relations’, he explains that “through extensive reporting, the media in general, and the Press in particular, are able to define a public debate and to communicate the essential contents of ethnic situation models that have a lasting effect on people ‘social knowledge’” (1991, p. 244). With specific regard to media constructions of Muslim identity, Kothari (2013) argues that the media creates public perceptions of particular social groups, and Said concurs stating that the “mass media can be said to constitute a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture of Islam” (1997, p. 47-48). It is Said’s argument in Orientalism (2003) that this ‘picture’ is a highly negative one.

2.4.1. Agenda-Setting and Framing

One final aspect of media effects theory pertinent to this project is agenda setting through framing:
McCombs and Shaw argued that mass media have an agenda-setting function. That is, the media emphasise certain issues in their coverage of politics by devoting a greater proportion of the news hole to them or by placing them more prominently in the newspaper or newscast. This emphasis on issues in the media, in turn, influences the salience of these issues among the audience (Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan 2002, p. 7).

In this way, the media can tell the audience “what to think about” (emphasis in original) (Denham 2013, p. 320) as well as “how to think about this issue” (Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan 2002, p. 21). The media are able to select particular facts to “preformulate preferred meanings and opinions” (van Dijk 1991, p. 39). Another important factor is the notion of treatment, which involves “the prominence and space given over to a topic, repetition, and so on” (Bromley 2003, p. 9). For example, the story on the front page has been chosen to be the most important story of the day and is likely to be highly influential in the news cycle. Treatment can therefore indicate whether or not a proposed Islamic development is considered to be an important and/or contentious community issue.

Another important aspect of agenda setting to consider is framing.

News frames allow journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely (Gitlin 1980, p. 7), using ‘principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tactic theories about what exists, what happens and what matters’ (Gitlin 1980, p. 6 – 7). Framing helps to organise the world, both for the journalists who report it and for those who rely on their reports (Gitlin 1980, p. 7) (Bowd 2007, p. 81).

Framing is a necessary media practice, as it is impossible to report on every detail of every incident and all the implications, as newspapers only have limited space afforded to them. “Framing often involves the use of specific language, symbols and stereotypes. The selection of a frame or a theme for the story creates a perspective for thinking about particular issues” (Slattery 2003, p. 102). Through a combination of agenda-setting and framing it is possible for news media to influence what audiences think about and how they think about it. For as Connell asserts, “we see only that reality which has been jointly produced by the journalistic practices of signification and by the other practices
of signification employed by journalism’s accredited witnesses in the political-economic sphere” (Connell 1980, p. 154). Said has argued that since newspapers observe certain rules and conventions to get things across intelligibly…and since the media strive to reach the same audience which they believe is ruled by a uniform set of assumptions about reality, the picture of Islam (and of anything else, for that matter) is likely to be quite uniform, in some ways reductive, and monochromatic (1997, p. 49).

This limited view occurs as an effect of agenda setting and framing, and also links directly to van Dijk’s ideas about mental models, as “people are primarily motivated by their own system of frames…and the ‘facts must make sense in terms of their system of frames, or they will be ignored’” (Lakoff 2010 in Voyer et al., 2013, p. 30). Therefore, in communities where there is already concern or uncertainty about the local Muslim community, or Islam more generally, “media coverage which emphasises ideological differences may be influential in undermining support” (Voyer et al., 2013, p. 30) for proposed Islamic developments. This is especially true where people have limited experiences or knowledge of Islam, because when there is no mental model to compare with, people have shown greater effects of agenda-setting (McCombs 2005). Boydstun & Glazier have also shown that the way an issue is framed can change public opinion and that “self/other frames elicit strong reactions from media consumers” (2013, p. 713). This original research will therefore identify if such self/other frames were employed in the local newspaper coverage of proposed Islamic developments.

There are a number of important factors that the research will investigate in relation to media effects when analysing the newspapers’ published content. These are predominantly related to choices made by the journalists in the production of the newspaper articles. It should be noted that the researcher was unable to conduct interviews with journalists who had written news articles being examined and analysed in this study to discuss their choices when producing the articles. Therefore, whilst the specific choices may not be able to be analysed in detail, the literature demonstrates that choices are made by journalists in the production of texts, and that these do impact on the final text with which audience engage. For example:
A journalist conceivably can make a source prominent by allowing that source to speak frequently in a news story and by introducing that source early in the story. To make a source dominant, a journalist allows the source to speak more directly than indirectly to readers, or through more full quotations than partial quotes and paraphrases (Massey 1998) (Ewart & Massey 2005, p. 100).

These choices are therefore evident in the decoding of a text, and will be critically analysed to uncover power relationships. It is just as important to note whose voices are not represented as Said states that “in reading a text, one must open it out both to what went into it and to what its author excluded” (1994, p. 79). Analysing voice in this way is important because “who is invited to speak as a commentator on and in the news says vitally important things about who ‘counts’ in society, and whose voices have legitimacy and status” (Ross 2011, p. 11 in Clarke 2014, p. 190). Every choice made by the journalist reflects a choice on how to represent the issue, and this can have a great effect on how the issue is interpreted by the audience. In a study on media reporting of proposed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Voyer, Dreher, Gladstone & Goodall found that “the way in which local news outlets present and explain MPAs to local communities is likely to be influential in determining how they respond to the proposal” (2013, p. 29). This research suggests that a similar relationship may exist between local newspapers and the reactions of local communities to proposed mosques and Islamic private schools.

2.5. Local Reporting

The newspaper content analysed for this research has been sourced from three local newspapers. Following Bowd, “local, in this sense, is generally defined as representing the geographical area encompassed within the circulation of the newspaper” (2009, p. 51). In past years, the term ‘local newspaper’ usually referred to the ownership and production of the paper which would have “employed local people as journalists, reported local concerns of consequence and were read by local people…In the new millennium, local newspapers are local in name only” (Franklin 2006, p. xxi). Many of the ‘local newspapers’ are now owned by large media conglomerates, as are the newspapers under study. The *Berwick Leader* (Doveton) is owned by News Corp
Australia; and the *Camden Advertiser* (Camden) and *The Canberra Times* (Gungahlin) are both owned by Fairfax Media Limited. It is therefore inappropriate to continue to define ‘local newspapers’ by ownership.

Bowd suggests that local can instead be defined by “the extent to which the audience regards the newspaper as ‘theirs’. Residents of regional areas often speak of ‘our local paper’ or ‘our local rag’, suggesting a close relationship and a sense of local ‘ownership’” (2009, p. 51). Cotter suggests that this relationship is reciprocal, as “community is an important framing concept: the news media sees itself in relationship to the community they cover, as responsive and responsible, as a friend and as an authority” (2010, p. 30). Other important factors in the identification of local newspapers include “information about local government and local communities” (Williams 2006, p. 83 – 84) and inclusion of a “community voice…through news coverage and opportunities for community members to make their voices heard” (Bowd 2007, p. 78). The newspapers under study have been identified as possessing these characteristics.

Local newspapers play a key role in “the local democratic process as investigators for, and informers of, the public” (Williams 2006, p. 83). Because of this important responsibility placed on them, “local newspapers should offer independent and critical commentary on local issues, make local elites accountable, provide a forum for the expression of local views on issues of community concern, as well as ‘holding the ring’ in debates on significant issues arising within and beyond the community” (Franklin 2006, p. xix). There is also the expectation from the public for local media to “provide a space for public deliberation, and to foster a general sense of connection and cohesion, as well as ensuring voice or inclusion from marginalised groups (Meijer 2010)” (Hodgetts & Chamberlain 2013, p. 391). Local newspapers therefore “are critical to the coverage of matters of local interest” (Finkelstein 2013 in Richardson 2014, p. 87), and have established for themselves “a central position in local communication networks” (Hess & Bowd 2015, p. 22). The local newspaper therefore has a large responsibility in keeping the community properly informed of relevant and contentious issues such as religious development applications.

Local newspapers have been chosen for focus due to the important role they play in identity and community building (Bowd 2009, 2007; Hindman 1996; Stamm, Emig & Hesse 1997). As Ewart (2000) argues, “local media provide a forum for interaction and
debate, and 'play a central role in constructing and cementing the identity and culture of communities and their publics’” (in Bowd 2009, p. 53). In this way, local newspapers are able to support community norms (Hindman 1996), and “by framing stories to support the idea of a united community, country newspapers further define themselves as advocates for, and promoters of, these communities” (Bowd 2007, p. 83). The question that needs to be asked here is if the local Muslim community being included in this advocacy. Bowd argues that “local newspapers are often fierce advocates for their communities and strong promoters of their town or region” (2003, p. 121), and that “news stories are often framed from a perspective which seeks to unite the newspapers’ community of circulation in its opposition to an outside ‘threat’. Use of ‘our’, ‘us’ or other terms denoting ownership or unity are often apparent in such stories, which may also incorporate criticism of ‘them’” (Bowd 2003, p. 122). In the context of this research, the local Muslim community proposing a mosque or Islamic school may be seen to be such a threat. The local media may therefore help the local readership identify that this could be a problem with consequences and “may help individuals to think about and understand the problem, to clarify or construct his/her own view” (Stamm, Emig & Hesse 1997, p. 100). Through this discussion, the local newspaper will play “a role in contributing to local communities of readers collectively imagining themselves as also belonging to a community” (Dowling 1996, p. 242), or as the case may be, as not belonging to a community.

Questions of identity and inclusion are very relevant to this original research because Hindman argues that “local newspapers are integral components of the community that tend to reflect both the agenda and the tactics of the local power structure” (1996, p. 708). Hadwin agrees that local papers are in “a commanding position to expose wrong doing” (2006, p. 144), and that the “local newspaper should provide the individual with a platform – often his only platform” (Hadwin 2006, p. 146). Power is therefore another issue that has been carefully examined in the research in order to investigate if the Muslim community members are given the same ‘platform’ as their fellow local community members. Due to the financial and staffing limitations placed on local journalists, Nielson argues that local journalism is “often based on single sources, frequently self-interested ones like politicians” (2015, p. 13) with “ordinary citizens rarely making it into the news” (Nielson 2015, p. 13). The reliance on institutional sources is supported by Le Cam and Domingo, who state that journalists “defend a
hegemonic position in the construction of an event’s narrative by dismissing alternative voices in favour of the trusted institutional ones” (2015, p. 103). Recognising these tendencies as limitations of news media, Said suggests that it would be very beneficial for the Muslim community members to be given access to local media platforms, as it is “that in studying Orientals, Muslims, or Arabs ‘we’ can get to know another people, their way of life and thought, and so on. To this end it is always better to let them speak for themselves, to represent themselves” (2003, p. 293). The analysis of voice in the news items will identify if such opportunities have been provided to local Muslim community members.

The diversity (or lack thereof) of sources can also be linked to ideas about belonging and nationalism, which Dunn (2005, p. 29) suggests are clearly evident in local reporting, which as previously discussed can be constructed through ideas about who does or does not constitute the local community. These ideas on belonging can also be influenced by larger related discourses, because “the local and the global are in constant interplay” (Kapoor, Testerman & Brehm 2016, p. 42). This link is supported by Cauchi, who argued that “the negotiation of ‘Muslimness’ is not restricted to their worth as migrants within a national scale but is negotiated on a global discourse” (2008, p. 4).

Aside from her assertion that Muslims are migrants (which ignores the increasingly large population of Muslims who were born in Australia), Cauchi helps to demonstrate how discourses of ‘the Other’ can be developed through ideologies of belonging if minority groups are not portrayed as fitting into the local or national image, or being included as part of community discussion.

The community discussion that results from local reporting is unique, in that it creates social knowledge: “beliefs that are communicatively shared and accepted by a community” (emphasis in original) (van Dijk 2014, p. 20). The community knowledge and discussion is “acquired and socially reproduced by situated discourses” (van Dijk 2014, p. 43) and thus unique because it is relative, both to the community involved and the individual participants and their mental models (as previously discussed).

Communities can only function with shared social representations, including knowledge, norms and values (van Dijk 2014, p. 321), and without these shared representations, tensions may arise. It is therefore the role of the local newspapers to attempt to build relations within the community, and the CDA will examine if such inclusive discourses are evident in the coverage of proposed Islamic developments.
2.6. Concluding Remarks

This research acknowledges and draws on the diversity of previous work that has been completed in the areas of Islam in the media, racism, moral panics, discourse, identity, media effects and local reporting. There are studies, outlined above, which have combined parts of these works to explore representations of Islam in Australian media, however, the unique quality of this research is the use of CDA to uncover power relations within local media discourses, and the effect this may have had on community identities and on the (re)construction or challenge of Orientalism, racism, Islamophobia and moral panics within local communities. The open qualitative approach, to be discussed in the methodology, has allowed for the investigation of dominant hegemonic representations of Islam, as well as emerging representations which may be more inclusive in their conceptions of who constitutes a local citizen within the communities under study. The original research will therefore extend on previous research in order to draw more contemporary conclusions regarding the presence and effect of Orientalist representations of Islam in Australian local newspapers.
3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Research Questions

As detailed in the introduction and literature review chapters, this project investigates published news items by the Berwick Leader in Doveton, VIC, the Camden Advertiser in Camden, NSW, and The Canberra Times in Gungahlin, ACT, on proposed Islamic developments in the local areas. It explores if the news coverage of each prospective development varied, especially in regard to notions of ‘otherness’ (Said 1994, 1997, 2003) and what these variations might reveal in terms of which sites were eventually approved or denied. To begin to tackle these considerations the following set of preliminary research questions were designed:

1. Is Orientalism evident in the news items studied?
2. Can reporting on the Doveton mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?
3. Can reporting on the proposed Camden school be deemed to be more negative, accounting for its denial?
4. Can the reporting on the proposed Gungahlin mosque be deemed to be more positive or more negative, and could a likely result therefore be suggested?
5. Do journalists consider they have satisfactory professional protocols for reporting on Islam with cultural sensitivity?
6. Do Muslim community leaders consider that the local news content was fair and balanced, showing cultural sensitivity?

Research question 1 was developed out of the literature review, particularly in regard to identifying previous research on problematic representations of Islam in the Australian media context. Its core focus is on Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism (2003) which suggests that Orientalism is a way for the West to talk about the Orient in a way that dominates it, and that as a result, Muslim communities are often portrayed in highly negative and stereotypical ways in Western media products. As a result, work on Orientalism and ‘Othering’ have been used as a reference point in order to identify how notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ may have influenced the outcomes of the proposed Islamic developments.

Research questions 2 – 4 emerged from a formative understanding of media effects theory, anticipating correlational links between the ways the proposed developments
were reported on, and the eventual decisions as to whether or not they went ahead. Research questions 2, 3 and 4 were case specific with each question based on the progressive timeline of the development’s proposal at the commencement of the research in 2013. At the time of developing the research questions, the proposed Doveton mosque had just been approved, given the withdrawal of opposition from Catch the Fire Ministries. The proposed Islamic school in Camden had been denied four years earlier, after attracting national and international media attention. The Gungahlin mosque development was still being debated, with a decision by the ACT Planning and Land Authority to approve the mosque, being appealed by the Concerned Citizens of Canberra (CCC). During the 2013-2016 research project timeline, the CCC kept the development proposal tied up through legal action, finally announcing in January 2016 that they would not pursue further challenges. As a result of iterative work over the course of the research, new knowledge became available regarding the eventual approval of the Gungahlin mosque, and as such, research question 4 was revised: ‘Can reporting on the Gungahlin mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?’

Research questions 5 and 6 also emerged from the literature review surrounding Orientalist depictions of Islam, (and in regard to local Australian news media), and were designed with a semi-structured interview method in mind. These questions were developed in line with the research’s early aims of understanding the production and reception of news content about Islam and Muslims, from the perspective of journalists and Muslim community leaders. However, relevant parties from the communities under study declined invitations to participate in the project, resulting in a review of the research design. After reviewing the relevant literature, and data collected through a critical discourse framework, it was determined that a CDA approach would still allow conclusions to be drawn about how published news content may have impacted on proposed local Islamic developments.

In its final form, the research therefore addresses the following four crucial questions:

1. Is Orientalism evident in the news items studied?
2. Can reporting on the Doveton mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?
3. Can reporting on the proposed Camden school be deemed to be more negative, accounting for its denial?
4. Can reporting on the Gungahlin mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?

These research questions have allowed the thorough investigation of published news items in order to understand: how local Muslim communities have been represented in news media discourses; and how these news media discourses may have impacted the ways that local communities constructed the potential impacts of proposed Islamic developments in their areas.

3.2. Ontological Approach – Constructionism

Ontologically, this study is underpinned by ideas of constructionism. Weerakkody argues that constructionism “takes the position that there is no objective reality or truth ‘out there’ and that reality is socially constructed” (2009, p. 10), whilst Robson emphasises that “meaning does not exist in its own right; it is constructed by human beings as they interact and engage in interpretation” (2011, p. 24). Similarly, Crotty states:

Constructionism contends that there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world…Meaning is not discovered but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways (2003, p. 8 – 9).

Meaning is therefore dynamic and produced through the interplay between the subject and the object, and cannot exist outside of contextual conditions. It therefore “represents a theoretical shift regarding the concept of reality from realism to relativism” (Brennen 2013, p. 10). In this view there is no absolute truth, because a particular ‘truth’, for example opinions and claims about the suitability of mosque and Islamic school developments in certain locales, relies on multiple interpretations of reality. During the process of constructing knowledge, understanding is discursively negotiated by the individual as a result of their interactions with the environment and context they exist in (Brennen 2013; Saldana 2011). “It acknowledges that ‘all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in
and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context’ (Crotty 1998, p. 42)” (Ainsworth & Hardy 2004, p. 232). People acquire information and make value judgements about the world accordingly through various experiences and interpretive activities.

Constructionist methodologies used to explore complex social issues, (such as how audiences may decode published news items regarding proposed Islamic developments), may be limited in their capacity to account for meaningful ‘realities’, if restricted to quantitative data measurement (Andrews 2012, p. 40). Subsequently, qualitative enquiry, which aims to understand ”the subjective experience of every day [sic] life” (Andrews 2012, p. 40), is most appropriate for this research, as qualitative research places “stresses on the value-laden nature of inquiry and emphasis on questions of how social experiences are created and given meaning” (Sarma 2015, p. 181). Both constructionist and qualitative methodologies therefore allow investigation into the ways that understanding may be deconstructed regarding published news items about mosques and Islamic schools.

Following from the above, constructionism is “concerned with exploring the ways in which people make sense of their social world, rather than to establish [absolute or positivist] claims about cause and effect, or to create generalizable knowledge” (Hesmondhalgh 2006, p. 146). Since this original study has been designed to postulate how people may have reacted to media texts because of the discourses within them, rather than to ‘prove’ direct causal links between local news content and planning permissions, constructionist ideas are clearly applicable. This view is also supported by Coesemans’ claims that “news can never be a truly objective representation of reality, nor can it be neutrally interpreted” (2012, p. 68) so that processes developed to examine news should take these matters into account. With these ideas in mind Denzin and Lincoln argue “terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity” (2000, p. 21) when it comes to assessing the integrity of a qualitative research project such as this. Furthermore, this criteria reflects the subjective nature of constructionist work - such as the dynamic relationships between news producers, news readers and news texts, explored in this study.
3.3. Epistemological Approach – Interpretivism

Aligning with constructivist principles, an epistemological focus based on interpretivist paradigms (Sarma 2015) has also been adopted. Interpretivist research has received some criticism in social science circles due to questions of reliability and generalizability (Guthrie 2010). However, when applying interpretivism to case study research (as this project does) George & Bennett (2005) argue that “seeking representative cases, as a statistical researcher would, is inappropriate and counterproductive” (Koivu & Damman 2014, p. 2626). Interpretivist research instead aims to apply theory to purposefully chosen case studies in order to understand the more nuanced aspects of the phenomenon under study in distinct contexts.

Empirical interpretivism focuses more on understanding rather than ‘deterministic causation’ (Koivu & Damman 2014). It “goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act” and “describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin 1989 in Glesne 2006, p. 27). An interpretivist research stance is interested in how people make meaning from their personal and shared contexts (Weerakkody 2009) and has a focus “on how the social world is interpreted by those involved in it” (Robson 2011, p. 24). For these reasons some critics also believe that interpretivism is flawed due to its subjective analytical aims and methods. But, as Schwandt proposes, “interpretivists argue that it is possible to understand the subjective meaning of action (grasping the actors’ beliefs, desires, and so on) yet do so in an objective manner” (2000, p. 193). These views emphasize that it is vital to be aware of researcher bias and account for that in one’s overarching research design, analyses and explanations. As such, the researcher acknowledges her own position as an Australian of Anglo-Saxon heritage, who has been influenced by ‘Western’ and academic cultures. However, by being aware of these contextual influences, it is possible to mitigate their effects on the research. Additionally, under a constructionist and interpretivist approach there is no ‘correct’ interpretation of the data, only interpretations which can be logically demonstrated as credible.

One important component of an interpretivist approach to research that is pivotal to this project is symbolic interactionism, described by Weerakkody as “the study of structure, functions and meanings of symbol systems (as social life is expressed using symbols such as language)” (2009, p. 29). Symbolic interactionism accounts for the ‘rules’ that exist in relation to any symbol system, (those most relevant for this research being
language and visual symbols), but also acknowledges that the ways in which individuals interact with these symbols is never fixed (Elliott & Lemert 2014, p. 190-191). The interaction between individuals and symbols is influenced by the individual’s context, including previous meanings and knowledge attached to the symbol, and interactions between the individual and their social group (Menzies 2015, p. 26). Subsequently, it can be argued that to construct meaning through published news content, readers interpret certain media discourses with respect to their existing understandings of Islam as a religion, form opinions and act on those interpretations - relative to proposed mosque developments and Islamic private schools.

A second feature of interpretivism highly relevant to this project is hermeneutics which “emphasizes conducting a very close, detailed reading of text to acquire a profound, deep understanding…We conduct ‘a reading’ to discover deeper, richer meanings that are embedded within the text” (Neuman 2011, p. 101). This hermeneutic standpoint is very closely aligned with discourse analysis which has been applied as the predominant analytical method throughout this project. A key element of the theory of hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle, which proposes that “there is a circular relationship between the prior knowledge of a recipient of a text and his or her understanding of the same text” (Stahl 2008, p. 70). In other words, as Schwandt explains, “in order to understand the part (the specific sentence, utterance, or act), the inquirer must grasp the whole (the complex of intentions, beliefs, and desires or the text, institutional context, practice, form of life, language game, and so on), and vice versa” (2000, p. 193). So, to thoroughly analyse the published news items and consider potential effects on readers’ perceptions of proposed Islamic developments in their local areas, it has therefore been essential to adopt a qualitative form of enquiry.

### 3.4. A Qualitative Research Framework

This research project is largely qualitative, with the one quantitative element of content analysis used here as a filtering technique, (rather than as a strictly statistical measurement) to aid in dealing with the complexities of the study (Kohlbacher 2006). Qualitative research involves data that is not expressed in numbers (Flick 2007; Robson 2011; Tesch 2013; Weerakkody 2009) and acknowledges that reality is socially constructed (Brennen 2013; Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Flick 2007). It is
“interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature. Using language to understand concepts based on people’s experience, it attempts to create a sense of the larger realm of human relationships” (Brennen 2013, p. 4). Qualitative research is also interested “in the perspectives of participants in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study” (Flick 2007, p. 2). In qualitative research there is “a focus on meanings. Contexts are seen as important… [and] generalizability of findings is not a major concern” (Robson 2011, p. 19). The socio-cultural contexts in which meaning has been created have been particularly important to the research at hand, for the analysis considers them specifically in connection with how local news content about the Islamic mosque and school developments was generated.

3.4.1. Multiple Ways of Tackling a Real World Research Project

Robson has argued “many real world flexible designs involve the use of two or more data collection methods and it is common to collect at least a small amount of quantitative data” (Robson 2011, p. 6). In this project the combined quantitative data gathering through content analysis, and the qualitative discourse analysis of said content, clearly demonstrates how these techniques “can supplement each other, while the mix of paradigms provide[s] a more holistic view of the event, issue or phenomenon under study” (Weerakkody 2009, p. 34). The mixed methods approach, together with the application of multiple theories including CDA, Orientalism, media effects and literature on identity to understand the data, has provided this research with both depth and breadth of information, and helps to combat concerns of reliability and validity in the work (Robson 2011, p. 158). The combination of multiple methods and theories has allowed a thorough examination of the ways that the published news items may have impacted on readers’ perceptions of proposed mosques and Islamic schools.

3.5. Case Study Research

The research has been conducted as three comparative case studies which include one mosque development proposal in the Melbourne suburb of Doveton that was approved, one Islamic private school proposal in the Sydney suburb of Camden that was denied, and another mosque proposal in the Canberra suburb of Gungahlin which was
eventually approved. The case study method was chosen because “the case study in and of itself is valued as a unit that permits in-depth examination” (Saldana 2011, p. 8), which is consistent with a rigorous qualitative enquiry that seeks to explore connections between published newspaper items and eventual planning decisions around the proposed Islamic developments. Case studies also highlight the importance of context, which is invaluable in terms of the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis chosen for this research project. The comparative case study approach considers the specific socio-cultural and discursive conditions of each distinctive case study. It also provides the opportunity to compare and contrast the cases in order to study them “analytically, holistically, hermeneutically, culturally and by mixed methods” (Stake 2005 in Starman 2013, p. 32). These comparisons enable the commonalities, as well as the distinct differences between the cases to be understood, so as to draw more comprehensive conclusions about the relationships between published news items and various reactions to the proposed mosques and Islamic school.

The case studies are longitudinal, meaning that they “tell us about what has happened to a set of research cases over a series of time points” (Elliott, Holland & Thomson 2008, p. 228). In this project news items from the Berwick Leader, The Canberra Times and the Camden Advertiser were sourced using the timeframes of when articles announcing the proposed developments were first published - to when final decisions were made. Following from the longitudinal approach, the news content was chosen through theoretical sampling wherein the “sampling decisions are emergent, progressive and inductive…to choose a next case in order to progress the development of your emergent conceptual ideas” (Rapley 2014, p. 58). This style of sampling has allowed the purposeful selection and comparison of cases with varying outcomes in order to comprehensively address whether or not different types of news coverage may have actually had an impact on the development proposal outcomes. The number of case studies was limited to three, as the three cases selected gave a full range of outcomes regarding decisions on the developments, and also met requirements regarding timeliness (in that the cases all occurred within the last 10 years) and geographical variety. Weerakkody suggests that, “selecting more than four to six cases for study

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2 As previously explained, the Gungahlin case was in progress at the commencement of the research but an outcome has since been decided.
3 For the Berwick Leader, this timeframe is November 2012 – October 2013. For The Canberra Times, this timeframe is July 2009 – January 2016. For the Camden Advertiser the timeframe is October 2007 – June 2009.
could reduce the level of detail obtained, as the available resources of time, budget and personnel will be stretched by a larger number of cases” (2009, p. 234). This view is also supported by Palmberger & Gingrich who argue that by keeping the number of cases lower analysis can be more complex, and “although it may be tempting to compare larger samples and include more variables, it would not necessarily lead to finer comparison” (2013, p. 95). Consequently, limiting this research project to three specific case studies has established boundaries to “derive a deep understanding of the social conditions being studied” (Yin 2015, p. 227)

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight claim that the strength of case studies lies in their ability to “build on actual practices and experiences, they can be linked to action and their insights contribute to changing practice” (2010, p. 74). Additionally, Robson explains that “case studies have the flexibility of design and approaches, as well as in the use of methods, which encourage their use as a model for action research” (2011, p. 189), that is, research outcomes with the capacity to “influence or change some aspect of whatever is the focus of the research” (2011, p. 188). In this original project the three case studies were chosen to provide insight as to whether or not news items about the proposed developments could indeed be linked to the actual and eventual planning decisions. A case study framework has allowed for a deep level of investigation as to how the proposed developments were covered in the newspapers, how the published items may have been interpreted, and what the consequences of these interactions may have been. Combining and comparing the data from across the three case studies has provided valuable insight into the impact of news content on Islamic development applications in a variety of distinct contexts.

As far as research outcomes are concerned case study methods are occasionally criticised for being ungeneralisable. For example, Guthrie argues that case study methods “offer little beyond the immediate experience of the actors” (2010, p. 43-44). Whilst it may be accurate to suggest that case study results may not be statistically generalizable, nonetheless as Yin states “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions” (2009, p. 15). For instance, if the same theoretical concepts are found to hold up in numerous case studies under numerous contexts then it is likely that the theories are accurate. In these ways a successful case study may provide a basis for other case studies to expand upon, as Tesch explains “One study alone will not provide the whole picture…As qualitative descriptions
accumulate, they will make it possible for us to gradually ‘recognise’ the phenomenon in the sense of a second, fuller knowing. That is the goal of qualitative research” (2013, p. 305). It is the responsibility of the researcher to build the strongest study possible so that it is clear as to “how the case speaks to a broader population or issue” (Saldana 2011, p. 9) and the following discussion outlines how these concerns have been prioritized throughout this project’s case study design and implementation.

3.5.1. Introduction to the Three Cases

The first case centres on news items published in the Berwick Leader regarding the Green Street mosque development in Doveton, Victoria. This development was proposed by the Afghan Mosque Project Committee in November 2012. The main opposition to the mosque came from Catch the Fire Ministries, led by politician Daniel Nalliah from the Rise Up Australia Party. The official line of opposition was that Catch the Fire Ministries planned to build a church on land adjacent to the mosque site. The mosque development was eventually approved by Casey Council in March 2013, but Catch the Fire Ministries launched an appeal with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). However, the appeal was subsequently dropped by Catch the Fire Ministries in October 2013 when the Christian group was offered an alternate site for its church. The Berwick Leader published 23 items regarding the Green Street mosque, including news articles, Letters to the Editor and infographics.

The second case study focuses on an Islamic school development in Camden, New South Wales, which was proposed by the Quranic Society in October 2007. The school, (which was to be called Camden College) was met by immediate and intense opposition from the local community, and a formalized opposition group, the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group, emerged to voice its discontent. Beyond the local reporting by the Camden Advertiser, debates about the school’s proposal also received national and international media attention due to accusations that racism and religious intolerance were driving opposing positions. The development was eventually rejected by Camden Council in May 2008. A challenge mounted to the NSW Land and Environment Court by the Quranic Society was also rejected in June 2009. The school did not go ahead. The Camden Advertiser published 323 items about the issue including news stories, editorials, Letters to the Editor, feature articles, clarification, profiles and infographics.
The final case study centres on a mosque development in Gungahlin, Australian Capital Territory, which was proposed in July 2009 by the Canberra Muslim Community Inc (CMC). The initial site in the suburb of Nicholls was abandoned by the CMC in January 2010, as it was found to be too small. A second site on The Valley Avenue was proposed in September 2010. The ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) approved the Gungahlin mosque in August 2012, but the main opposition group, the Concerned Citizens of Canberra (CCC), took their appeal to the ACT Supreme Court. The ACT Supreme Court ruled against the CCC in July 2014. The CCC then decided to appeal that decision, resulting in the legal battle being drawn out until November 2015 when the appeal was again denied. In January 2016, the CCC announced they would not pursue any further challenges in the High Court and the mosque construction was able to proceed. The Canberra Times published 103 items about the issue including news stories, editorials, Letters to the Editor, and infographics.

3.5.2. Local Newspaper Data Sources

Due to the relentlessly pervasive nature of “Muslim scare stories in our twenty-four hour global media news culture … making some sense of them, constitutes a genuine challenge” (Birt 2010, p. 118). The volume of news media regarding Islam and Islamic developments is expansive which is one logistical reason why this research has been limited to a small sub-section of localised news media. Nielson argues that although current media landscapes enable people to use a variety of media to remain informed, “surveys suggest that local newspapers in most places still represent the most widely used sources and the most important source of independently produced information about local public affairs” (2015, p. 9). Specifically, local newspapers have been selected for this research project due to the especially important role they play in identity and community building (Bowd 2009, 2007; Hindman 1996; Stamm, Emig & Hesse 1997).

Print media was chosen due to accessible archives and because it “can provide an insight into issues on a local scale” (Voyer, Dreher, Gladstone & Goodall 2013, p. 31) that may not be possible through more widely circulated mediums. In addition, “print media has been recognised as the most widely used source of local news in regional areas and has an ‘agenda setting’ function in the wider news media” (van Vuuren cited
in Voyer et al 2013, p. 31) serving what Nielsen refers to as “keystone media” with “systemic importance” (emphasis in original) (2015b, pp.95-99). Local newspapers have a unique connection with their local communities, built through the important role local print news plays in serving the needs of those communities. Local print media are tasked with informing the community of events and issues in their immediate area and providing them with the knowledge they need to understand complex social issues, such as the proposed integration of Islamic developments into specific locales. Kapoor, Testerman & Brehm have stated that “the printed press seizes upon a reading habit among the public and apparently promises to be less evanescent or fleeting than the sound bites and aural stimulation provided by television or radio broadcasts” (2016, p. 48). Coesemans has also argued that “print media have a powerful influence on people’s understandings of, and attitudes to, the social world” (2012, p. 77) and Clarke considers that despite advances in digital technologies, “the introduction of a new medium has never fully supplanted existent or ‘older’ media forms… Newspapers remain a primary and vital component of the newsgathering infrastructure” (2014, p. 8). Therefore, the power of local print newspapers to build connections with and influence their communities, makes them valuable sources for critical analysis.

The newspapers under study are owned by Fairfax Media Limited (The Canberra Times), Fairfax Regional Media (The Camden Advertiser), and News Corp Australia (The Berwick Leader). According to Media Control and Ownership: Policy Background Paper No. 3, (Australian Government Department of Communications 2014), the print media sector has been historically dominated by News Corp, Fairfax and APN News and Media (previously Australian Provincial Newspapers Holdings), meaning “News Corp Australia and Fairfax titles are, on average, read each week by around 60 per cent and 36 per cent respectively of the newspaper reading public in Australia” (Australian Government Department of Communications 2014, p. 21). Therefore, the Camden Advertiser, The Canberra Times, and (especially) the Berwick Leader have a significant quantitative reach according to these readership figures. This reach means these publications have functioned as significant sites for the construction of meaning regarding the proposed Islamic developments selected for this case study.
3.5.3. Locating the Data Sources

The published newspaper content was sourced through various library databases, due to the fact that not all newspapers were accessible through a single database. News items published in the *Berwick Leader* were identified via a database search using the ProQuest Australia and New Zealand Newsstand through the State Library of New South Wales. A search using the term ‘mosque’ returned 26 results. This search was unable to be repeated with the NewsBank database as the *Berwick Leader* was not a listed source. After sourcing the news items, it was found that 23\(^4\) related to the proposed Doveton mosque on Green St.

Newspaper content from *The Canberra Times* was also identified using the ProQuest Australia and New Zealand Newsstand, accessed via the State Library of New South Wales on the 10\(^{th}\) September 2014. Searching for ‘mosque’ within *The Canberra Times* returned over 600 results. The search was refined with the terms ‘mosque’ AND ‘Gungahlin’. This search returned 54 results. As *The Canberra Times* is a Fairfax publication, the Fairfax Digital Collections database was also accessed on the 4\(^{th}\) November 2014 to ensure that all relevant items had been located. This search, again using ‘mosque’ AND ‘Gungahlin’ as search terms, returned an extra 23 results bringing the total number of results to 77. After sourcing the content through the State Library of New South Wales’ microfilm service, 88 items related to the proposed Gungahlin mosque were found. The search of the ProQuest database was repeated via the University of Newcastle Library on the 6\(^{th}\) October 2016, as a final decision had not been made on the mosque beforehand. Searching for ‘mosque’ AND ‘Gungahlin’ returned an additional 16 results, 15 of which were found to be relevant to the Gungahlin mosque, bringing the total number of items to 103\(^5\).

The *Camden Advertiser* was not accessible through the ProQuest Australia and New Zealand Newsstand database (for the specified timeframe), so instead the NewsBank database was accessed via the University of Newcastle Library on the 15\(^{th}\) September 2014. Within the *Camden Advertiser*, a search using the terms ‘Islamic’ AND ‘school’ returned 216 results. This search was repeated using the Fairfax Digital Collections

\(^{4}\) The 23 items published by the *Berwick Leader* consisted of nine news articles, 13 Letters to the Editor, and one infographic.

\(^{5}\) The 103 items published by *The Canberra Times* consisted of 56 news articles, 11 editorials, 35 Letters to the Editor and one infographic.
database, however only the most recent article from the 14th November 2012 was returned through that database. Using the list from the NewsBank database, the researcher visited the Camden Council Library, and used their archives to locate the identified news items, and some additional items. After viewing the content, it was found that 323\textsuperscript{6} published news items related to the proposed Camden Islamic school.

### 3.5.4. Local Newspaper Data Sets

The newspaper items predominantly consisted of news reports, editorials and Letters to the Editor, presenting the opportunity to explore some of the dynamic relationships between these distinctive data sets. Each category could have been studied in isolation, however by analysing how the editorials have been informed by the news reports, and how the Letters to the Editor responded to both editorials and reports, valuable discursive connections could be observed. It has been important to analyse the coverage holistically, in order to understand the cumulative effects each type of content may have had on the communities’ understandings of the proposed Islamic developments.

According to van Dijk, editorials can be categorised to serve three functions:

...firstly, opinion statements may define the situation, that is, give a summarising description of ‘what happened’...Secondly, opinion statements may explain the situation, that is, account for causes of events and reasons of action: why did it happen?...Thirdly, many editorials feature a category of Prediction or Recommendation, which we may subsume under the broader category of a Conclusion or Moral, and which focuses on the future: what will happen?, or what should or should not be done? (emphasis in original) (1991, p. 125).

These notions support the view that editorials are “more openly opinionated than other forms of journalism” (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery 2013, p. 10) revealing much about the important role editorials can serve when it comes to influencing public opinion on contentious local issues. In this research project editorial content from the three newspapers in question has yielded valuable analytical results. Baker, Gabrielatos

\textsuperscript{6} The 323 items published by the Camden Advertiser consisted of 104 news articles, 21 editorials, 190 Letters to the Editor, two feature articles, one ‘clarification’, three profiles, and two infographics.
& McEnery point out that it is important to note editorials “may or may not be representative of the newspaper’s general stance” (2013, p. 10) and although most editorials do convey a variety of subjective accounts, nonetheless the ‘editorial voice’ (Fowler 2013, p.211) does command an authoritative position.

Letters to the Editor “serve an important function in giving members of the public a voice, particularly in local media where it is common for newspapers to publish the overwhelming majority of the letters they receive (Wahl-Jorgensen 2006)” (Voyer et al 2013, p. 30). In addition “‘Letters to the Editor’ provide a site for examining how the media inform public knowledge and the ways in which this knowledge is responded to and reproduced in public discourse” (Saxton 2003, p. 111). In this project, the Letters to the Editor provide insight into local communities’ reactions to news reports on the proposed Islamic developments, and “represent an important site for the (re)production and/or resistance of discourse on and around notions of ‘we-dom’ and ‘they-dom’” (Hartley cited in Richardson 2001, p. 144). Additionally, as Richardson points out, paying attention to the editing of the Letters to the Editor considers how “the newspaper not only constructs debates within and between letters, but also contiguously signals the pertinence to the ‘debate’ of the included letters, thereby legitimating their contents” (Richardson 2001, p. 148). These layered power relationships have been explored through analysis of each newspaper’s Letters to the Editor, editorials and news reports about the proposed Islamic developments.

3.6. Critical Discourse Analysis

The primary analysis undertaken is a critical discourse analysis (CDA), which examines “how a given topic or subject gets ‘talked about’ in media messages or in everyday language” (Weerakkody 2009, p. 9). Discourse is defined in the literature as “an approach to the analysis of language that looks at patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur” (Paltridge 2006, p. 1). Critical discourse analysis allows investigation into what types of knowledge are being presented to an audience and consideration of who constructs these discourses. It asks questions such as “How do people use language to present themselves in a certain (favourable) way to others, for example? How is discourse constrained by the presence of a person in power?” (Tesch 2013, p. 61). Critical discourse analysis is a particularly
useful method for the analysis of power relations (Weerakkody 2009), because “what critical discourse analysis does, like any approach which is suspicious of the ways in which power is embedded in media texts, is to ‘unveil’ the hidden subtexts of media…these forms of analysis demonstrate the extent to which a particular, partisan view of the world is presented” (Toynbee and Gillespie 2006, p. 187). This view is especially relevant to the current research project, for as Chapters 4, 5 and 6 demonstrate, CDA applied to the news data sources has allowed for a thorough investigation of whether Orientalist undertones are indeed evident in the newspaper items under study.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) “postulates that discourse is not only a container and carrier of ideologies – whereby ideology is represented in discourse – but also an action in itself, which contributes to or constitutes ideologies” (emphasis in original) (KhosraviNik 2015, p. 47). As such, CDA explores how discourses are shaped by the society around them and also work to shape that society in turn. A CDA approach allows analysis of “the opaque ways in which power is legitimised in language” (KhosraviNik 2015, p. 47), and has a strong focus on the context in which language is being used (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery 2013). For these reasons, discourse analysis has also been described as “unashamedly political. Our aim in analysing discourse and therefore power and ideology, is to contribute to the challenge to dominant (and often oppressive) discourses – thereby opening up spaces for resistance” (Lynn & Lea 2003, p. 431). The identification of complex power relationships enacted through language is a key strength of CDA, as it “provid[es] ‘insight into the forms and mechanisms of human communication and verbal interaction’ (van Dijk 1985, p. 4)” (Tesch 2013, p. 28) along with understanding about the potential effects of such language uses. These qualities of CDA are important to keep in mind when explaining the preliminary stages of how the researcher identified dominant discourses within the newspapers under study.

Reisigl and Wodak explain that:

the question of delimiting the borders of a ‘discourse’ and of differentiating it from other ‘discourses’ is intricate…As analytical construct, a ‘discourse’ always depends on the discourse analyst’s perspective. As object of investigation, a discourse is not a closed unit,
but a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation (2009, p. 89).

In keeping with Reisigl & Wodak’s ideas and in the interests of avoiding researcher bias, the amount of newspaper data sourced needed an effective coding system to sufficiently convey its complexity. The coding system was pre-set but was developed to be “open to discovering unknown possibilities” (Brennen 2013, p. 207). The open research plan followed Robson’s (2011, p. 476; 482) guidelines for thematic coding, and involved generating initial codes after familiarisation with the data set, and allowed for new themes to emerge through the data. Two distinctive discursive codes (common to all three case studies) included the discourses of the ‘Other’ and discourses of inclusion. These were deductive themes (Hodgetts & Chamberlain 2013, p. 389) which emerged from engagement with the academic literature and because of the aims of the research – to investigate Orientalist depictions of Islam in local print news. A discourse of power was originally considered a vital deductive theme due to the nature of CDA. However, it was found that in both the Camden and Doveton cases that the discourse of power was strongly aligned with the political sphere, so the coding theme for these two cases became political discourses. Inductive themes then emerged from within each case study’s data (Hodgetts & Chamberlain 2013, p. 389), allowing for resonant discourses particular to the case to be identified. Weerrakkody (2009) terms such themes as emergent coding categories. In the Doveton case, a discourse of local community inclusion/involvement and also the need to account for the lack of visual discourses became apparent. In the Camden case, there was a very strong focus on rural discourses, as well as a unique self-referential discourse of the Camden Advertiser. And finally, in Gungahlin there was a discourse of concerns and a minor discourse of Westernisation within the discourse of the ‘Other’.

Once these discourses were identified a socio-semiotic (Renkema 2004) interrogation of the newspaper items was conducted. A socio-semiotic approach to analysing discourse highlights three key features for examination: field, tenor and mode (Renkema 2004, p. 46 – 48). Field refers to what is happening in the text; tenor refers to whose voice is being heard; and mode involves analysing how the information is presented, the language and function of the text and what the text achieves. Tenor has particularly been emphasized throughout the analysis to discern which voices were being presented
to the various community/ies and to reveal important information about the power relationships involved in the Islamic development debates.

By focusing especially on language selection and use, CDA also takes into account “choice, the selection of options from systems constituting meaning potentials (and lexicogrammatical potentials and phonic potentials)” (Fairclough 1992, p. 212). This project uses CDA to examine sources used in the news reports, the angle of various news items and the relationships between headlines and stories. This type of analysis is therefore not only interested in what is said, but more specifically “the styles and strategies of the language users – how they say things” (Robson 2011, p. 372), because “language is seen as the medium which actually brings particular versions of events and experiences into being by constructing them in a particular way, for particular purposes, in particular social contexts” (Willig 2013, p. 144).

During the multi-layered discourse analysis particular focus has been paid to lexicalisation. This is because “when there are options of lexicalisation, choosing one word rather than another often has contextual reasons, such as the opinions of the speaker about a person, a group or their actions” (van Dijk 2000 p. 39 – 40). Such choices are relevant not only in the main text of news articles, but also in headlines, as van Dijk argues they “not only globally define or summarise an event, they also evaluate it. Hence, the lexical style of headlines has ideological implications” (1991, p. 53 in Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 105). So to comprehensively understand preliminary news meanings it is important to analyse the “headlinese” (Bednarek & Caple 2012a, p. 103), which is the specific language of headlines. These significant word choices reveal important subtexts to the newspaper articles analysed here, and include Orientalist depictions of Islam and/or Muslims.

3.7. Content Analysis

Content analysis has been described as “one of the most efficient and most widely used research methods for the systematic and quantitative analysis of media output/content” (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 85). The initial content analysis for this project involved “break[ing] down the components of a text into units [for counting]” (McKee 2003, p. 27), and started with locating published news items from each local newspaper text. In qualitative content analysis text units can also be words, themes, names or visual
elements, but whatever the component parts, “the basic procedure in content analysis is to design categories that are relevant to the research purpose and to sort all occurrences of relevant words or other recording units into these categories” (Tesch 2013, p. 79)\(^7\).

For this research, content analysis was used as a categorising, selection and filtering system, which allowed the researcher to analyse “the language used in the individual newspaper reports on a micro-level” (Coesemans 2012, p. 75), whilst also identifying emerging patterns within the larger data set. The purpose of this content analysis was to explore both manifest and latent meaning within the various texts. “A manifest meaning is one that is surface and apparent…A latent meaning is one that is suggestive, connotative and subtextual” (emphasis in original) (Saldana 2011, p. 10). This selection process allowed preliminary examination of “how different issues or people are portrayed in media messages” (Weerakkody 2009, p. 9). A key coding category used during these stages was frequency. Schreier explains that “frequency has often been considered to convey information about importance” (2012, p. 155). For example, the more times a word is used or the more times a person is mentioned, the more important they are likely to be. By extension then, in this project it has been equally important to consider infrequency as a form of exclusion, or symbolic annihilation – “completely excluding certain groups from media representations as if they do not exist, leading to their invisibility” (Weerakkody 2009, p. 160).

Related to the study of frequency are issues of coverage bias. Checking for coverage bias involves measuring the physical amount of coverage each side of an issue receives. “It is reasonable to assume that half the coverage should be accorded to one side and half to the other, and that deviations from this pattern are consistent with a coverage bias of some kind” (D’Alessio and Allen 2000, p. 136). The identification of coverage bias through the content analysis has been very relevant to the research at hand, because:

Studies working broadly within a hegemony framework have successfully used content analysis techniques to show that public issues are defined in the mass media and for public consumption overwhelmingly by representatives of powerful institutions, agencies and interests in society, and that ‘alternative’ voices, critical of the status

\(^7\) A copy of the coding mechanism is attached as Appendix A.
quo, are much less likely to gain access to the mainstream media (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 100).

The analysis presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 has therefore examined if coverage bias is evident in the local newspapers under study, which could be representative of the power relationships between the Islamic development proponents and opponents. The Australian Press Council (APC) warns, however, that “fairness in relation to the kind and amount of publicity that should be given by a paper to a particular point of view is not a matter that can be measured by column-centimetres or by other objective criterion” (APC 2011a, n.p.). The APC also suggests that beyond these simple measurements, tone and context are also important considerations, and these categories for evaluating the news have been addressed through the project’s critical discourse analytical framework.

3.8. Visual Discourse Analysis

When conducting textual analysis it is important to not only consider the written text but also visual texts that accompany them. As such, the current research is multimodal, recognising that “texts and images are increasingly coming together” (Martinec & Salway 2005, p. 337) and that the visual elements of the text also have the capacity to “communicate complex ideas and attitudes” (Machin 2013, p. 348). Context is extremely important to the analysis of images, as it may impact our expectations of the image (Lister & Wells 2001, p. 65). Due to the photographs and pictorials in this research having been published in the context of local newspaper reporting, there are general expectations of truth and reliability in regard to them. Appearing in news discourses, it is reasonable to assume that readers may have been less critical of the images and more likely to accept what they depicted as accurate representations of reality. The Berwick Leader published only one image during its coverage of the Doveton mosque development, the Camden Advertiser published 79 images regarding the proposed Islamic school, and The Canberra Times published 36 images related to the Gungahlin mosque proposal.

Visual analysis can be initially undertaken as a content analysis, and “the researcher can then interpret the images or the imagery in qualitative ways” (Bell 2001, p. 27). Questions addressed by this type of content analysis include “how visible (how
frequently, how large, in what order…) different kinds of images, stories, events are represented?” (Bell 2001, p. 14) and also take into consideration how “some content values are not represented…these may be very significant as absence” (Bell 2001, p. 20). Analysis of the visual representation (or absence) of various local Doveton, Camden, or Gungahlin community members has therefore been addressed by identifying salience – the element that is foregrounded in the image (Hansen & Machin 2013). Salience in this context means “a more important item tends to be of a greater size than a less important one” (Martinec & Salway 2005, p. 365). Also relevant is the positioning of the photo in the newspaper’s layout, as this can be a statement about relationships between the people in the image and the readers. For example, a vertical photo angle can suggest “power and the association of height and superiority/inferiority or…strength/vulnerability” (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 190). If a photograph is taken to look down at the person depicted from a high camera angle, it could suggest the person is powerless or vulnerable, whereas if a photo looks up at the subject from a low camera angle, it could suggest that person is powerful and to be admired. “If someone is depicted at the same level in a photograph then equality is implied” (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 190). Analysing the local news images in these ways aligns with the CDA approach, potentially revealing power relations and inequalities in the coverage, which could be evidence of Orientalist depictions of Muslim people.

One critical element of visual analysis is the composition of the participants in the image. A photo of an individual is personalised and humanising, whilst photos of groups or collectives can be homogenising if the focus is on “the generic features of a group of people so that they are turned into types” (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 193). One way this homogenisation can be achieved is through cultural categorisation according to dress, constructing “familiar news frames for audiences” (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 194). Machin has written about cultural categorisation as it specifically applies to representations of Islam:

If we see a news item about a particular issue in a Muslim community and we find an image of a woman in a full Burhka [sic] to represent ‘Muslimness’, it would not be possible to write ‘all Muslims look like this’ or ‘this is representative of all Muslims’. Yet, the image does tend to suggest this and certainly places the story into a particular news frame of traditional values, difference and threat. As many theorists on the
visual have observed, images do not have such specific denotative meaning as language and therefore it is a less easy matter to pin down precisely what meanings they convey; images too do not specify relations in the same precise way as there are no verbs to indicate ‘this is the woman in the story’ (2013, p. 350).

Machin refers to denotation “what an image depicts. Literally, what do we see?” (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 175), as the basis for visual analysis. Arguably of greater significance, particularly in CDA, is the connotation “what ideas and values are communicated through what is represented, and through the way in which it is represented?” (Hansen & Machin 2013, p. 176). Critique of the visual examples selected for this project evaluates if news images have been used in a stereotypical fashion and what impact these (potentially) Orientalist depictions may have had on a readership constructing knowledge about proposed Islamic developments.

Visual analysis has been criticised by some for being “a rather messy field, lacking precise boundaries and unconstrained by any single set of disciplinary protocols” (Lister & Wells 2001, p. 90). However, “its ability to articulate a range of systematic methods of analysis in order to completely address questions of form, production, reception and meaning while taking account of political issues, institutions and ideological discourses makes it comprehensive, significant and fascinating as a field of operation” (Lister & Wells 2001, p. 90). The tendency towards a variety of methods means that the visual analysis can be conducted through a combination of content analysis and critical discourse analysis based on the key features of salience and positioning as discussed above. This kind of flexible research design aligns with the analytical frameworks applied to the project’s written textual elements, providing a cohesive and consistent methodology.

3.9. Concluding Remarks

The qualitative case study design of this original research has allowed the in-depth examination of many nuanced factors within local newspaper reporting, which may have contributed to readers’ understanding of proposed Islamic developments in specific locales. The combination of content analysis with critical discourse analysis of both written and visual elements of news texts has provided a strong framework for the
investigation of Orientalist discourses with the texts under study. This open analytical approach has also uncovered more inclusive discourses, as well as unique discourses particular to each case study, as seen in the proceeding data analysis chapters.
4. Doveton, the *Berwick Leader*, and the Green Street Mosque

4.1. Doveton and the *Berwick Leader*: the Place and its Newspaper

Doveton, which is 31 kilometers south-east of Melbourne in the Casey City Council Local Government Area (LGA), is described by Keating as “an agricultural area until the 1950’s” when various textile, car manufacturing and food processing companies were established (2008). As working-class industries developed “the [State] Housing Commission bought up land…and built a large estate” and the former predominantly “pastoral run area” was also “subdivided into residential blocks” (Keating 2008). The most recent Census figures available at the time of writing from 2011 reveal that Doveton had a population of 8,404 in the State Suburb (SS) (ABS 2011f), and its LGA of Casey had a population of 252,382 (ABS 2011e). The dominant religion in Doveton was reported as being Christianity, with 4,604 adherents (54.8%) (2011f), and it was the same in Casey, with Christianity having 148,233 adherents (58.7%) (ABS 2011e). Islam was reported as having 801 adherents (9.5%) (ABS 2011f) in Doveton, and 13,857 adherents (5.5%) (ABS 2011e) in the Casey LGA. However, it must be noted that 825 residents in Doveton (ABS 2011f) and 17,911 residents in Casey (ABS 2011e) did not state their religion, so these figures could be inaccurate.

The *Berwick Leader* is a local weekly newspaper servicing the Casey LGA with a readership of 53,000, and distribution of over 54,000 in Berwick and surrounding areas (News Corp Australia 2015, p. 1). The *Berwick Leader* is part of the larger ‘Leader’ group which is “Melbourne’s largest and most influential community newspaper publisher” (News Corp Australia 2016, no page). News Corp Australia states that the *Berwick Leader* “rises to the challenge to provide readers with a paper that contains all the news and information a local paper should…*Berwick Leader* is the paper for unbiased and trustworthy local detail” (2015, p. 1).

This case study is focused on the local newspaper reporting by the *Berwick Leader* on the proposed Green Street mosque, in Doveton. The Green Street mosque development was instigated by the Afghan Mosque Project Committee in November 2012. The main opposition to the mosque came from Catch the Fire Ministries, led by politician Daniel  

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8 These statistics represent more than four and more than two times the national report of Muslims in Australia of 2.2% (ABS 2011a) respectively.
Nalliah from the Rise Up Australia Party. The official line of the opposition was that Catch the Fire Ministries was going to build a church on land adjacent to the Afghan Mosque Project Committee’s proposed mosque site. The Doveton mosque was approved by Casey Council in March 2013, but Catch the Fire Ministries launched an appeal with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). The case was dropped by Catch the Fire Ministries in October 2013 when the group was offered an alternate site for its church. Between November 19, 2012 and October 7, 2013 the Berwick Leader published 23 items regarding the Green Street mosque, including news articles, Letters to the Editor and an infographic.

The critical discourse analysis of the Berwick Leader’s coverage of Doveton’s mosque proposal reveals a number of unique discourses. The political discourses highlight the role of politicians in the mosque debate, and also demonstrate how the planning regulations were used as a framework for discussing the development proposal. The analysis of discursive voices and power roles reveals that speaking opportunities were granted to Catch the Fire Ministries while the Afghan Mosque Project Committee were simultaneously denied such chances. Discourses of local community inclusion/involvement demonstrate the high level of engagement between the Berwick Leader and the people it serves. Anti-Islamic sentiments were evident in the discourses of the ‘Other’, although there were also more inclusive discourses identified in the newspaper coverage. Finally, the visual discourses are discussed to demonstrate how they too had the potential to ‘Other’ the Doveton Muslim community.

4.2. Political Discourses

There are very strong political discourses that emerge in relation to the role of politicians in the debate, and the use of planning regulations as a framework for the issue. The most quoted authority figures within the coverage are politicians or members of the local Casey Council. These political figures were able to draw on the authority granted to them because of their social positions, in order to make their voices heard in the debate (Finlayson 2013). These power relationships show evidence of a socio-

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9 The Rise Up Australia Party is a far-right wing political party in Australia. The Rise Up Australia Party was launched in 2010, and is based on nationalist and conservative Christian values. The party’s leader Daniel Nalliah released a book in 2014 titled ‘The 21st Century Culture War in the West’ which “explains the dangers of Islam to the West” (Rise Up Australia 2015, n.p.).
semiotic model of discourse proposed by Renkema, who explains that to effectively analyse a discourse, the field, tenor and mode must be considered (2004, p. 46). The field refers to what is happening in the discourse; in this situation, a local media debate about a proposed mosque development. The tenor is whose voices are being heard and also includes ideas about social relationships and power roles; in this case, the politicians were able to dominate the tenor in order to make themselves the most heard and therefore potentially the most powerful. These elements of discursive context and participant expression are also very closely connected to the mode or how of the discourse, which includes what the discourse was trying to achieve through its form.

The different forms of discourse examined regarding the Green Street mosque are news articles, Letters to the Editor and an infographic, all news genres produced for different purposes. While Letters to the Editor allow community members to feel heard on contentious local issues, infographics and news articles are seen to offer true and objective information and may therefore be less susceptible to oppositional decodings.

Throughout the debate, local councillors were very careful to continually link the deliberations and eventual decision regarding the proposed mosque back to planning regulations and formal procedures. For example, in a report headlined, ‘Storm Grows over Green St Mosque’, Councillor Wayne Smith stated that ‘when it came time to vote he would be guided by the planning officer’s recommendations’ (no author 14 January 2013, p. 7). After the mosque was actually approved, he confirmed, “We’ve made our decision on planning grounds” (Smith in Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3). One Letter to the Editor also included references to development applications and mentioned multi-faith discourses, with the author explaining “churches, mosques and synagogues apply for the same permit called a ‘place of assembly permit’. You don’t apply for a permit based on the religion” (Nick 1 April 2013, p. 14). This contributor clearly attempted to negate any suggestions that a decision would not be based on planning permissions, as Cr Wayne Smith had done. Nick’s letter appears to be about equity specifically in regard to formal planning processes, as demonstrated by the letter’s caption ‘Planning laws clear’, whilst other Letters to the Editor appeared to be more about inclusivity and equity. Letters were captioned ‘So why not a mosque?’ (Abdul 30 September 2013, p. 15), ‘Temple is no different’ (Oaks 1 April 2013, p. 14) and ‘Same as churches’ (Brown 1 April 2013, p. 14). However, these latter letters did not include the official discourse of planning regulations, instead drawing primarily on
relational discourses which may be perceived as communicating less authority in terms of institutionalized arguments.

The authoritative power of local government planning regulations was also emphasized by the fact that the last word on the proposed mosque development was political in nature. Once the opposing group (Catch the Fire Ministries) dropped their case against the proposal, the final report published in the Berwick Leader ended with a quote from Nick Moore, Casey Council’s acting planning manager. Moore stated “The decision for Planning Application … now reverts back to the decision made by council at the Planning Committee meeting held on the 12 March 2013 approving the application” (in Allaoul 7 October 2013, p. 3). By making this ‘commanding’ statement Moore showed his “higher social position” as a more “authoritative role in the communicative event” (Zhang and Pan, 2015, p, 393). His formal comment appeared to be a deliberate attempt to re-situate any future discussions about the mosque within the context of legitimate planning grounds, rather than perceived racial or religious tensions.

4.3. Discursive Voices and Power Roles

Interestingly attribution and influence are represented throughout the published news items in ways that function to deny power to the Afghan Mosque Project Committee, and simultaneously, attribute power and authority to Catch the Fire Ministries. The Afghan Mosque Project Committee was denied power by having no direct representation in the coverage. For example no spokesperson was identified for the group or indeed quoted in any of the news items. As such, the Committee remained a silent group spoken about, which as Schröter (2013) claims, is much harder for a reader to identify with. Being spoken about instead of having a speaking position is an identifying quality of Said’s theory of Orientalism, as he argues “They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented” (2003, p. 335). One instance when it could be argued that a semblance of power may have been attributed to the local Doveton Muslim community was when a representative of The Islamic Association of Australia was quoted. In the report headlined ‘Reputations under Fire’, the person mentioned and directly quoted was referred to as ‘association member Muhammad Wahid’ (no author 23 September 2013, p. 10). In this news story, it was reported that Mr. Wahid ‘says Catch the Fire Ministries has demonized Muslims’ (no author 23 September 2013, p.
10). However, because Mr. Wahid did not have or was not given an official title, and only had an indirect connection to the Doveton Muslim community as a member of a broader organisation, it may be argued that the effects of his words had limited authority in this instance. If a representative with direct connections to the local Muslim community had been quoted instead, then their statement may have been more impactful on local Leader readers due to increased proximity.

The power balance between mosque proponents and opponents was also influenced by the various parties and individuals who spoke, and were spoken of, in the published news content. The various ways that sources within published items were named/not-named could be seen as a subtle example of advocacy in which some sources are promoted over others (Fisher 2016, p. 714) and some actors are drawn into the community and others are left out (Pan 2015, p. 301). Such subtle inclusions and exclusions may have had some bearing on the way the various arguments were received by the Berwick Leader’s readers. For example, in December 2012, it was reported that ‘Cr Sam Aziz called for a council-run debate between the Rev Dr Mark Durie and an Islamic representative’ (Sultanle 10 December 2012a, p. 5). In this article headlined ‘Call for Religious Debate’, the Christian representative, Rev Dr Mark Durie was clearly named and afforded his relevant titles, whereas the generic ‘Islamic representative’ identifier was used to refer to the Muslim person. Admittedly, this omission could have been because Cr Aziz (the Berwick Leader’s source) simply did not know which Islamic representative would be suited or selected to contribute to the debate. However, a seemingly logical (and perhaps) more suitable choice of debate participant could have been a member of the actual Afghan Mosque Project Committee. In not being named here by either Cr Aziz or the Berwick Leader, the Afghan Mosque Project Committee were again denied recognition, and thus power in the development proposal debate. The symbolic annihilation (Weerakkody 2009, p. 160) that was achieved of the mosque proponents could have had a significant effect on the way the controversy was understood by readers due to the ‘Othering’ of the Doveton Muslim community.
4.3.1. Oppositional Voices

The main opposition group to the Doveton mosque was Catch the Fire Ministries\(^{10}\), headed by Daniel Nalliah. Interestingly, Catch the Fire Ministries were mentioned eight times across the entire data set, whereas the Afghan Mosque Project Committee was mentioned only three times. Quantitatively, this ratio gave more attention and awareness to Catch the Fire Ministries as a local community religious organization, and a powerful ‘voice’ as a communicative entity. This inequality may be interpreted as a coverage bias whereby one side of an issue appears to be favoured in the published news content (Boudana 2016; Fisher 2016). Additionally, the leader of Catch the Fire Ministries, Daniel Nalliah became involved in the debate and was also recognized as being the party president of the Rise Up Australia Party (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5). Mr. Nalliah’s political identity may have therefore granted him an additional voice of authority and position of power to promote his beliefs. The nationalist, non-inclusive, conservative Christian background of the Rise Up Australia Party would have also helped to contextualize Mr Nalliah, due to his existing public profile. However, the representative dominance of Catch the Fire Ministries in the Leader’s coverage did not necessarily equate to increased levels of anti-Muslim sentiments and collective ‘Othering’ amongst the local Doveton community.

It was apparent that there were some attempts by the Berwick Leader to contextualize and perhaps emphasize, Mr. Nalliah’s personal and political affiliations. References were made to ‘his strong views against Islam’ (Sultanle 10 December 2012a, p. 5); and his ‘controversial party’ (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5) as having ‘controversial policies on Islam [which] openly opposes Australia’s multicultural policy’ (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5). By including these statements about Mr. Nalliah’s stance on Islam and multiculturalism in its reports, the Berwick Leader called into question whether Catch the Fire Ministries’ opposition to the mosque was actually based solely on the location of the mosque next to the Ministries’ proposed church. Additionally, questions about the integrity of the religious Pastor’s personal character were posed, when it was reported that ‘Mr Nalliah is famous for claiming to have raised a person from the dead and blaming the Black Saturday bushfires on Victoria’s abortion laws’ (Kennedy 1

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\(^{10}\) Catch the Fire Ministries was established in 1997 by Daniel Nalliah “following an encounter he had with Jesus on 21st July 1997 (from 3.40am to 6.00am)” (Catch the Fire Ministries n.d.). Mr Nalliah says the church promotes the need to “stand up for our Christian heritage” (Catch the Fire Ministries n.d.).
April 2013, p. 5). On the same day as this news report, a Letter to the Editor was published with the caption ‘Temple is No Different’ which named the mosque opponents “moronic” (Oaks 1 April 2013, p. 14), providing a contrasting opinion to those expressed by Mr Nalliah in the news report. The combination of the news report by Kennedy and the Letter to the Editor by Oaks works to potentially undermine Mr. Nalliah’s authority in the debate, by conveying negative ideas about his character and worth as an ‘authoritative’ voice to the Berwick Leader’s readership. In the same news article, it was reported that Cr Rosalie Crestani was joining the Rise Up Australia Party as a candidate for the Senate, and her responses to claims of Nalliah’s questionable authority were paraphrased. She ‘said Mr Nalliah was misrepresented over the issue of abortion laws and Black Saturday, and she believes he did raise a person from the dead and had been spoken to by Jesus’ (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5). The inclusion of these statements by Kennedy is highly effective in framing both Mr Nalliah and Cr Crestani in relation to these controversial views. By associating Cr Crestani with the provocative politician and pastor, Kennedy seemed to suggest that Cr Crestani’s authority should also be questioned.

During the debate over the mosque proposal, the Berwick Leader reported that ‘Mr Nalliah has been at the forefront of opposition to the $2.5 million mosque planned for Green St’ (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5). While it was accurate that Catch the Fire Ministries (with Mr Nalliah as its pastor) represented the main opposition to the development, interestingly, Mr. Nalliah was only directly quoted once throughout the published news items. This limiting strategy could have worked in favour of Mr Nalliah, by portraying him as an important, busy and powerful local figurehead (Hannson 2015, p. 184) whose public comments (both direct and indirect) were worth listening to. Wodak describes this discursive strategy as “performing swiftness” (2011, p. 115 – 116). When direct comments by Mr Nalliah were included in news reports by the Berwick Leader the content came across as face-saving (Isaacson 2006) and disempowered him. The single quote from Daniel Nalliah appeared in a report headlined ‘Church drops mosque case’, when Catch the Fire Ministries dropped its Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) case after procuring new land on which to build their church:

We were all completely focused on taking the case forward and taking it all the way to the Supreme Court if that’s what it took. (But) we figured
if we’re going to buy this [new] place, there would be no need for us to take action against the mosque because we won’t be next door anymore

(Nalliah in Allaoul 7 October 2013, p. 3).

The lackluster voice granted to Mr Nalliah and the questionable authority attributed to him and other political figures is contrasted with the powerful and effective voice of the Berwick Leader, particularly in the newspaper’s strategic use of puns.

4.3.2. The Berwick Leader’s Voice

The Berwick Leader effectively used puns in headlines such as ‘Reputations under fire’ (no author 23 September 2013, p. 10), to play on the name of Catch the Fire Ministries, when the group was accused of being racist by the Islamic Association of Australia, and again in ‘All Rise Up for Rosalie’ (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5) when Casey City Councillor Rosalie Crestani announced she was joining the Rise Up Australia Political Party. Lennon argues that puns in newspaper headlines are often riddle-like, in that the language is tampered with to indirectly refer to the subject matter of the article, so that readers are compelled to read on to the lead of the report (2004, p. 87). This was certainly the case in the first example, as the lead paragraph read ‘The Islamic Association of Australia says Catch the Fire Ministries has demonized Muslims’ (no author 23 September 2013, p. 10). Although from first glance the message of the headline could appear to relate to either group (the Islamic Association of Australia or Catch the Fire Ministries), the content of the article and the subheading ‘group “demonizing Muslims”’ (no author 23 September 2013, p. 10) clearly portrayed the Christian group as behaving discriminately, calling its ‘reputable’ character into question. In the second example, the pun in the headline plays on both religious and political symbols. In a religious sense, ‘rise-up’ alludes to the Christian resurrection theme and also connotes devotion and worship. In a political sense, ‘rise-up’ may evoke ideas of ardent support and a successful campaign. In this instance, the pun was likely to function ironically, diminishing the authority of Councillor Crestani’s statements, decreasing her political power, and therefore any of her attempts to ‘Other’ Doveton’s Muslim community.
4.4. Discourses of Local Community Inclusion/Involvement

The community involvement with the *Berwick Leader* in relation to its coverage of the proposed Doveton mosque was extremely high. The thirteen Letters to the Editor published in the ‘Conversations’ section of the paper actually outnumbered the nine news stories. The naming of the Letters to the Editor page as ‘Conversations’ implied a relational discourse, a strong dialogic connection between the newspaper and the local Doveton community. This lexical choice indicated that the *Berwick Leader* did not simply publish material to disseminate to its community, rather its readership was encouraged to actively respond to the newspaper, by getting involved in the stories covered in the news reports. This inclusive strategy was stylistically supported by calls for reader responses placed at the end of important news articles. For example, “Will the mosque affect you? Tell us at berwickleader.com.au” (Flaherty 19 November 2012, p. 3); “Should the mosque be built? Have your say at berwickleader.com.au” (Flaherty 26 November 2012, p. 5); and “Does religious debate belong in local government? Tell us at berwickleader.com.au” (Sultanle 10 December 2012a, p. 5). These questions were used to promote participatory discourses amongst the local community in regard to the mosque development proposal. These encodings encouraged contributions and demonstrated that “news is dialectically related to society in the sense that it varies with major public events…and enhances such events as news events that require special attention” (van Dijk 2014, p. 156). Judging by the ratio of news reports to Letters to the Editor on the topic of the Green Street mosque, this was a very effective inclusive strategy on the part of the *Berwick Leader’s* editorial staff, to promote community engagement with the development issue.

This type and level of involvement was especially interesting because there was no grass roots community opposition group that emerged in response to the Doveton mosque proposal. The lack of a definitive oppositional collective could suggest that while local residents were interested in getting involved in the mosque debate, they were not necessarily opposed to the development. This support was evident in one Letter to the Editor which stated, “As a resident of Doveton, I support the proposal to build a new mosque here” (Oostwoud 3 December 2012, p. 22). Another letter called for equal rights in terms of socially inclusive principles by stating “I am not part of the Afghan Muslim community, but I am part of the Casey community” (Choudhry 18 March 2013, p. 23). These samples invited the community to come together and
celebrate diversity and multiculturalism. This is not to suggest however, that all Letters to the Editor supported the mosque development. Indeed reported ‘evidence’ of strong opposition to it was included in a news report headlined ‘Mosque Poll Rejected’. In this report journalists Kennedy & Strachan stated that ‘Leader’s online stories have attracted almost 200 comments, three quarters of which were unpublishable’ (25 March 2013, p. 3). This relatively simple and objective statement communicated a high level of community interest in response to the issue. Importantly, by publishing it, the Berwick Leader explained that statistically and qualitatively, many inappropriate comments against the mosque had been expressed. These hostile and inappropriate online readers’ comments were also reflective of dominant negative discourses of ‘Othering’ that were present in many of the news articles.

4.5. Discourses of the ‘Other’

There was clear evidence of ‘Othering’ in the published news content, whereby the local Muslim community was portrayed as strange, different and threatening to Western society (McGregor 2014). Anti-Muslim sentiments were expressed through direct sources quoted in the reports, and through paraphrasing by journalists. For example, resident Margaret Monssen called the proposed mosque “a monstrosity of a thing” (in Flaherty 19 November 2012, p. 3) and ‘Ms Monssen said the petitioners were worried the value of houses would fall’ (Flaherty 19 November 2012, p. 3). Here the resident’s latter comment can be equated to a moral panic of sorts, which as Denham explains, evolves through “a process in which the response to an alleged social problem appears exaggerated, that is, disproportionate to the actual threat posed” (2013, p. 320). Perceived risks could also be seen in assertions that the mosque would cause “problems at all hours” (Dean 1 April 2013, p. 14), that “property prices [would] fall overnight” (Dean 1 April 2013, p. 14), and that there were already a “large number of Muslims residing there” (Wilczewski 30 September 2013, p. 15). In moral panic theory, the more the ‘folk devil’ (in this case, the Doveton Muslim community) appears to deviate from the cultural norm, the greater the perceived risk to ‘Others’. This problematizing was also manifest in the news story headlined ‘Mosque crime wave fear’ (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3) where it was reported that the mosque’s presence was likely to have real, violent consequences for the Doveton community. In this report the journalists wrote that ‘Cr Rosalie Crestani said a friend had told her the area around
Lakemba mosque in western Sydney was beset by shootings and drug dealing’ (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3) she ‘says she just wants to avoid the mistakes of western Sydney’ (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3). Cr Crestani was further quoted as saying “I just want to protect the community” (in Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3), justifying her previous contentious statements with what Hansson refers to as an “overcommunication…a strategy of positive self-presentation” (2015, p.175). Additionally, by drawing on the idea of the ‘dreaded Lakemba’ (McGregor 2016) as an exemplar of what not to be, Cr Crestani effectively issued a warning. She clearly emphasized Lakemba’s undesirability as a locale because of its sizeable Muslim population. The implication here was that wherever a mosque was built, problematic behavior and detrimental effects on the local area would logically follow. Therefore, according to Rosalie Crestani’s view (and anyone else who aligned themselves with it) Doveton needed to be ‘protected’ from these ‘Others’.

Interestingly, one week after publishing Cr Crestani’s controversial statements about the mosque development proposal and Lakemba, the *Berwick Leader* reported that she would run for the Senate as a candidate for the Rise Up Australia Party, run by Daniel Nalliah -head of Catch the Fire Ministries. The *Berwick Leader* appeared to link the councillor’s political aspirations to the mosque proposal debate, when in the same news article about her nomination, Kennedy reported she ‘was the only councillor to vote against the development…She said she wasn’t opposed to Islam by itself, but was opposed to anything that restricted freedom’ (1 April 2013, p. 5). These statements combined could suggest that Cr Crestani voted against the mosque because of her connections with Mr Nalliah, the Rise Up Australia Party, and because of her personal convictions that Islam is oppressive. Cr Crestani was clearly aligned with Mr Nalliah’s objections, so the pair’s claims against the mosque were underpinned by political motivations. However, both of these political actors also used religious prejudice to express (and to try to garner support for) their opinions in very public forums.

The ‘Othering’ of the local Muslim community was also perpetuated through terminology used by the newspaper itself. For example, one article was published with the headline: ‘Poser on $2.5m mosque’ (Flaherty 19 November 2012, p. 3). A poser is defined as “a problem or question that is difficult to solve or answer” (Cambridge Dictionary Online 2015). So it may be argued that the *Berwick Leader* used the term to evoke questions about the mosque’s validity in terms of its expense, and complex issues
it could, potentially generate. There are connotations of the word ‘poser’ that also link to a lack of authenticity or subterfuge, i.e. being a poser. The inference that the local Muslim community supporting the mosque might be inauthentic, fake, or have some ulterior motive, could have functioned here to perpetuate negative views about the mosque and its users.

In addition, the newspaper fuelled the moral panic around the mosque development by referring to it on two separate occasions as a ‘super-sized’ mosque. In November 2012 it was reported that ‘Plans to build a super-sized mosque in Doveton are upsetting neighbours’ (emphasis added) (Flaherty 19 November 2012, p. 3) and in January 2013 that ‘More than 1600 signatures and 30 supporting letters have been sent to Casey Council opposing a super-size mosque in Doveton’ (emphasis added) (no author 14 January 2013, p. 7). It could be argued that the *Berwick Leader* exaggerated the potential mosque ‘threat’ by reporting on the scale of the building and the volume of opposition to it. The newspaper mentioned in seven articles that the cost of the mosque would be $2.5 million, and listed expected mosque attendance numbers in three reports.

One published infographic stated that ‘the maximum number of people to enter the mosque will be 600, which is estimated to happen two to three times a year’ (emphasis added) (Sultanle 10 December 2012b, p. 5), and two other news articles reported that the mosque was for 600 people (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3; no author 23 September 2013, p. 10). These latter two reports could be considered misleading, as the mosque would not usually draw such a large crowd of attendees on a regular basis. Although the *Berwick Leader* was simply fulfilling one of its functions by reporting these statistical facts and figures, the inferences that could have been applied to the interpretation of them could have led to negative perceptions of Doveton’s Muslim community. Consequently, although the journalists were simply constructing an ‘objective’ report on the mosque, their attempts at impartiality may have functioned as “overcompleteness” which could have “evoked group polarisations, that is, Us vs. Them oppositions” (emphasis in original) (van Dijk in Hannsson 2015, p. 175).

### 4.5.1. ‘Othering’ by Omission

Paradoxically, one way of explaining how the ‘Othering’ discourse was manifest in the news items is by acknowledging that the local Muslim community, (the community the
Doveton mosque would actually serve), did not have a strong ‘voice’ in the Leader’s representations. As discussed earlier, this issue arose through the absence of direct quotes from any Afghan Mosque Project Committee members. It could be argued that this lack of stakeholder dialogue, what Ehrnström-Fuentes refers to as the ‘production of absence’ (2015), contributed to the ‘Othering’ of Muslim persons.

In a contrasting example, Deborah Young, a resident with a Muslim husband, was directly quoted in support of Muslims and the Islamic faith. Mrs Young stated: “My husband is Muslim and he’s gentle, sweet and kind. I know many more and they are all integrating into the Australian way of life and respect all other religions” (in Flaherty 26 November 2012, p. 5). Whilst Mrs Young spoke personally and positively of Muslim Australians, a question remains as to why the Berwick Leader did not speak to her husband, or indeed another local Muslim person specifically? Here, for reasons unknown, Leader readers heard ‘another’ voice (albeit speaking in support of Doveton’s local Muslim community), which spoke of Muslims rather than as a Muslim.

The closest source to the Afghan Mosque Project Committee (who was indirectly referenced in the news coverage) was Louie Asiaee, the director of Archivision, who ‘filed the application on behalf of the Afghan Mosque Project Committee’ (Flaherty 19 November 2012, p. 3). There was also a direct quote from a man identified by reporters as ‘Mohammad Mostafa, who has worshipped at the Lysterfield and Hallam mosques’ (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3. Mr Mostafa affirmed that “Hallam has been a very successful example in my opinion. You go there in the month of Ramadan and there are a lot of people but they are well organised…The mosque is also next door to a very large church and there is no conflict” (Mostafa in Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3). By including this supportive statement from an experienced ‘insider’ of the Muslim community, Kennedy and Strachan provided an opportunity for readers of the Leader to access a more inclusive and positive perspective relative to Doveton’s mosque proposal. However, it’s likely the wider (possibly unintentional) exclusion of more Muslim voices from the coverage marginalized the Doveton Muslim community. This marginalization could have added to perceptions that a mosque’s presence in Doveton was inconsequential, at least in regard to justifying the needs of Islamic ‘Others’.

The minimization of Muslim voices and their positioning as ‘Others’ becomes even more apparent when contrasted with the voices of Doveton residents as spokespersons.
For example, in a report headlined ‘Poser on $2.5m mosque’ journalist Rachel Flaherty reported that ‘Margaret Monssen, a resident of 42 years, said she had submitted a petition of more than 80 signatures and letters of objections’ (19 November 2012, p. 3). In this news article, Ms Monssen’s long-standing residency was highlighted, together with the use of statistical facts and figures, presumably in an attempt to reinforce her ‘belonging’ in Doveton. The use of facts and figures in this report may have contributed to the formation of an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ attitude in the Doveton community, whilst also establishing Ms Monssen’s ‘right’ to speak about the issue with a strong degree of credibility. However, any mention of similar claims regarding the amount or volume of support for the Muslim community was omitted. These omissions could have implied that petitions favouring the mosque development did not exist, that the Afghan Muslim community was too new or recently established in Doveton for their views to be substantiated, and/or since they were not cited with any semblance of direct authoritative voice, that their presence in Doveton was minimal.

Some Letters to the Editor furthered the Othering of the local Muslim community, by appearing to place responsibility for the “conflict of faiths” (Ferguson 1 April 2013, p. 14) occurring in Doveton with the Afghan Mosque Project Committee. Ferguson wrote: “I have to question why anyone from a completely different faith would consider building next door to a church… I think it is extremely inflammatory” (1 April 2013, p. 14). Other letter writers argued that “there is no place in a Christian society like Australia to have such a huge mosque built” (John 1 April 2013, p. 14). Here ‘John’ explicitly expressed the view that Islam is incompatible with Australian society, casting the local Doveton Muslim community, and by extension ‘Others’ across Australia, as different and not belonging in Australian contexts. Edgar’s letter did not take such a strong stance as to argue incompatibility, but he did caution that “integration is the answer, however it will need the moderate Muslim community to publicly condemn the actions of the terrorist organisations” (1 April 2013, p. 15). This letter is a very interesting one because in the first instance, Edgar seemed to be advocating for an inclusive approach to assimilation for Doveton’s Muslims into Australian society. However, a need for integration and assimilation presumed that local Muslims were not Australian in the first place. As such, Edgar automatically interpellated Doveton’s Muslims as ‘Other’, and as needing to change in order to fit in with the wider local community. Additionally, by alluding to the need for ‘moderates’ to take responsibility
for condemning the actions of the minority of Muslim extremists, Edgar conflated and stereotyped Muslims and Islam with terrorism, demonstrating the presence of Orientalism in the coverage of the mosque proposal.

4.6. Discourses of Inclusion

Throughout the coverage of the proposed mosque, the *Berwick Leader* did make publishing decisions to include voices that were specifically in support of the mosque. In this regard the newspaper incorporated inclusive ideals of multiculturalism and diversity. Two Letters to the Editor that supported the mosque directly were captioned ‘New mosque support’ (Oostwoud 3 December 2012, p. 22), and ‘Equality for mosque’ (Choudhry 18 March 2013, p. 23). The latter letter was written by Naureen Choudhry who described herself as “a practicing Muslim, a reader of the Quran and a student of religious studies” (18 March 2013, p. 23). Choudhry’s contribution identified her as a Casey community resident with an intimate knowledge of Islamic faith who could speak of misconceptions about Islam from an insider’s perspective. Choudhry’s Letter to the Editor encouraged an acceptance of cultural pluralism in the local area. She implored: “Let’s try to understand each another [sic] and take steps to unite ourselves” (Choudhry 18 March 2013, p. 23). The same sentiment was found in other letters, which promoted tolerance and understanding. Oaks wrote “I don’t see any opposition to churches, synagogues or Hindu temples, so why do these people oppose the mosque? That is American levels of xenophobia being exhibited” (Oaks 1 April 2013, p. 14). Brown proclaimed “if the church is or has been approved, then so too must the mosque” (1 April 2013, p. 14), whilst another letter took aim at the “fundamentalist Christian church” (Reiher 15 April 2013, p. 21) that opposed the mosque; Catch the Fire Ministries. The letter writer Jim Reiher challenged the exclusionary tactics of what he called “hostile Christians” by citing directly from the bible’s teachings about tolerance and respectful treatment of ‘Others’. The use of religious language and principles to emphasize a message of equity in opposition to a Christian group (Catch the Fire Ministries) was particularly powerful. These Letters to the Editor therefore offered support to the local Muslim community and the Green Street mosque, while simultaneously undermining and critiquing the dominant opposition group, Catch the Fire Ministries. It could be argued that these letter writers were aligning themselves with the local Muslim community over the mosque opponents, by unknowingly
employing van Dijk’s ideological square; emphasizing the Muslim community’s good qualities and the Christian group’s negative ones (van Dijk 2006, p. 374).

Significantly, the decision by the *Berwick Leader* to not publish highly derogatory statements about the mosque and the local Muslim community could be seen to contribute to a more inclusive discourse. Kennedy & Strachan reported that ‘Leader’s online stories have attracted almost 200 comments, three quarters of which were unpublishable’ (25 March 2013, p. 3). The evaluation of what is or is not ‘unpublishable’ is a subjective decision, which could be aligned with the newspaper’s editorial stance on an issue. Yet by reporting that such a large amount of inappropriate comments did actually exist, the *Berwick Leader* maintained its journalistic integrity.

4.7. Visual Discourses – Stylistic Potential for ‘Othering’

In visual terms, it could be considered that the *Berwick Leader*’s professional team offered a limited perspective of the mosque proposal story as only one image was used across the entire coverage. This graphic image of an artist’s impression of what the proposed mosque would look like (see Figure 1) appeared on 1 April 2013, in the ‘Conversations’ section of the newspaper on page 14.

![Figure 1: The Berwick Leader, 1 April 2013, p. 14](image1)

The caption accompanying the image was ‘*Plans to build a mosque in Doveton continue to divide readers*’, which was entirely relevant to the seven Letters to the Editor selected for publication, each of them expressing various opinions in relation to the issue. An ‘imagined’ visual representation of the proposed mosque as an illustrative depiction of
Doveton’s Muslim community was problematic, because this singular artificial image was another indirect style of ‘picturing’ the local issue. The choice to use an artist’s impression of the mosque could have been due to professional constraints, in that the Berwick Leader may not have had a photographer available, the newspaper’s layout design may not have accommodated an alternative image space, or the editor may have simply decided that an ‘artist’s impression’ was an adequate adjunct to the written contributions. However, it may be argued that the potential effect of this pictorial objectification meant that “the text…[was] less capable of depicting ‘plurals’…and as a consequence it [tended] to reduce large social groups to one stereotype image” (El Refaie cited in Wang 2014, p. 279). Either way, this visual limitation emphasizes further how Doveton’s Muslim community was portrayed as a generalized ‘Other’ throughout the Leader’s coverage.

Throughout the coverage of the proposed Doveton mosque development only one story was published on the front page of the Berwick Leader. Yet despite its front-page inclusion, this particular content consisted only of the headline ‘Mosque poll rejected’ (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 1) followed by four lines of text (see Figure 2). The piece did not have an accompanying image.

![Figure 2: The Berwick Leader, 25 March 2013, p. 1](image)

The minimal treatment of the issue through stylistic framing seemed to be in direct contrast to the actual language used within the front page item. For example, it was
stated that ‘the Doveton Mosque controversy continues to rage’ (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 1). It could be argued that by this stage of proceedings (the 25th March 2013) the debate over the proposed mosque was not considered to be the most important and timely issue facing the Doveton community. This lack of attention was also reflected in the structural positioning of each of the published items in the newspaper’s layout. For instance, the most common page numbers for published content whether news report, infographic or Letter to the Editor, were pages 5 (four news reports) and 14 (seven Letters to the Editor) respectively. It could be argued that the stylistic choices made by the Leader’s production staff about where to locate news reports, enabled them to “realise, articulate and disseminate discourses as ideological positions” (Kress 2005, p. 14). The visual layout of the newspaper may therefore have had an effect on how important and/or threatening Doveton residents viewed the proposed mosque to be. There was only a total of 23 news items published in the Berwick Leader regarding the Green Street mosque across the entire twelve month period. The majority of this content (56.5%) consisted of Letters to the Editor. Overall, the amount of published content generated could suggest that attention paid to the issue by the newspaper and its readership was not extraordinary and that publicized perceptions of disquiet were sensationalised and underpinned by Orientalist depictions that reproduced “restrictive representations of diversity” (DeFoster 2015, p. 67).

4.8. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, critical discourse analysis of the Berwick Leader’s coverage of the Green Street mosque in Doveton has revealed a number of anticipated and unique discourses. The use of political discourses was expected, due to the nature of the debate surrounding a development application before the local Casey City Council and the official frameworks in place for assessing such projects. The power roles attributed to specific discursive voices were also expected. However, the various ways in which local political actors drew on their existing public profiles and attempted to enhance their authoritative voices were distinctive and rich sources for analysis. The fact that the Letters to the Editor constituted the majority of published content demonstrated the extensive level of local community inclusion/involvement in the Berwick Leader’s coverage of the Doveton mosque. The lower amount of published news articles also revealed the lack of journalist attention paid to the Islamic development proposal. The
analysis uncovered the ‘Othering’ of the local Muslim community, predominantly through the omission of authoritative Muslim voices, although there was still evidence of more inclusive discourses. The inclusive sentiment was most evident through decisions to publish Letters to the Editor that incorporated ideals of multiculturalism and diversity. Finally, visual discourses revealed the ways in which stylistic design and layout decisions can also contribute to ‘Othering’ through limited and generalized visualisations of the mosque debate.

The critical discourse analysis revealed that Orientalism is evident in the Berwick Leader’s coverage of the proposed Doveton mosque, most prominently through the exclusion of the voices of the Afghan Mosque Project Committee and the minimization of local Doveton Muslim voices. Other contributing factors to this Orientalist depiction included anti-Muslim sentiments expressed through direct sources quoted in the reports, and through paraphrasing by journalists, particularly regarding ‘the dreaded Lakemba’ and moral panics about ‘Others’. Some Letters to the Editor also spoke of conflicts between Islam and Christianity, and incompatibility between Islam and Australian society, contributing to the representation of Islam as ‘Other’ in Doveton.

Although the Berwick Leader made inclusive publishing decisions regarding Letters to the Editor which promoted understanding and tolerance of the local Muslim community, and also appeared to critique the mosque opponents (Catch the Fire Ministries) in news reports and headlines, the newspaper’s symbolic annihilation (Weerakkody 2009) of the Afghan Mosque Project Committee denied them a voice or presence in the debate and this meant the coverage was hugely problematic.
5. Camden, the *Camden Advertiser*, and Camden College

5.1. Camden and the *Camden Advertiser*: the Place and its Newspaper

Camden, which is approximately 60 kilometers South-West from the Sydney CBD, prides itself on its heritage identity. According to the Camden Historical Society (CHS) (2012), “Since the early days of settlement in Australia the Camden District was the first destination for hundreds of pioneering families starting a new life”. The township also traces its rural history back to the late 1700s, when John Macarthur founded a sheep stud in the area which would become Camden (CHS 2012). The most recent Census figures available at the time of writing from 2011 show that Camden, as a State Suburb (SS), had a population of 3,244 (ABS 2011c) and as a Local Government Area (LGA), 56,720 (ABS 2011d). The dominant religion in Camden was reported as being Christianity, with 2,549 adherents (78.6%) in the SS (ABS 2011c) or 44,533 adherents (78.5%) in the LGA (ABS 2011d), whilst Islam was reported as having just 6 adherents (1.8%) in the SS (ABS 2011c) or 601 adherents (1.1%) in the overall LGA (ABS 2011d)11. However, it must be noted that 180 residents in the SS (ABS 2011c) and 2,983 residents in the LGA (ABS 2011d) did not state their religion when surveyed, so the accuracy of these figures could be questionable.

The *Camden Advertiser* is a local newspaper servicing the area, published weekly by Fairfax Regional Media. On its website, the *Advertiser* also highlights Camden’s rural heritage, claiming that “Today Camden still remains the birthplace of the Australian wool, wheat and wine industries” (Fairfax Media 2016a). The *Advertiser* has a total readership of 110,000 (Fairfax Media 2016c, no page) and “is part of Fairfax Community Newspapers (FCN) NSW; designed to provide local residents with specialized local news” (Fairfax Media 2016c, no page). The *Camden Advertiser* team describe themselves as “committed to providing readers with accurate editorial and comment on issues that directly affect them” (Fairfax Media 2016a).

In 2007 the local newspaper began reporting on and publishing items about an Islamic school development proposal for Camden. The Islamic school, to be called Camden College, was instigated by the Quranic Society12 in October 2007. The proposal was

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11 These statistics represent figures just under the national total of Muslims in Australia of 2.2% (ABS 2011a).
12 The Quranic Society is a religious organisation based in Lakemba, New South Wales, approximately 48km north-east of Camden. “The Quranic Society are not fundamentalists… the Society has ties to the Tablighi Jamaat, a reclusive, non-violent, non-controversial missionary group” (McDonald 2010, n.p.).
met by immediate and intense opposition from the local community and a formalized opposition group, the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group emerged, to voice their discontent. The school debate received national and international news media attention due to accusations that racism and religious intolerance were driving the opposition. The school was rejected by Camden Council\textsuperscript{13} in May 2008, and a challenge mounted to the NSW Land and Environment Court by the Quranic Society was also rejected in June 2009. Between September 26, 2007 and July 1, 2009 the *Camden Advertiser* published 323 items on the debate, including news stories, editorials and Letters to the Editor.

The critical discourse analysis of the *Advertiser*’s coverage of the proposed Islamic school for Camden reveals a number of distinct discourses which may have impacted on how the issue was constructed and understood by the local community. The identified political discourses demonstrate the use of authoritative voices and official discourses to influence power relations in the debate. The rural discourses represent a distinct characteristic of Camden’s constructed identity and are used most convincingly to oppose the Islamic school. Discourses of ‘Othering’ and discourses of inclusion demonstrate the two sides of the school debate and highlight the tensions represented in the local community news. Finally, a self-referential discourse shows evidence of the *Camden Advertiser*’s awareness of its professional practices, its relationship with the local community, and the interconnected nature of these dynamics.

5.2. Political Discourses

5.2.1. Politicians as Voices of Authority

Camden Mayor, Chris Patterson used a mixture of vernacular and formal language (Gee 2014) in order to relate to his constituents, while simultaneously denigrating a particular group of school opponents. The anonymous opponents sent a mass text message in opposition to the school, which stated that 600 written objections were needed to stop its development. Councillor Patterson was directly quoted in the report, saying “I don’t know where they got the 600 figure from - it has no significance to the council. I would

\textsuperscript{13} Camden Council is a local government entity which serves the Camden LGA. The Camden LGA covers an area of “200 square kilometres and is bounded by Liverpool City Council in the north, Campbelltown City Council in the east, and Wollondilly Shire Council in the south and west” (Camden Council 2016a, n.p.)
like to say to people that there is a process and that process has to be followed” (in Kinsella 31 October 2007, p. 1). In this statement, Mayor Patterson seemed dismissive of the text message, suggesting the authors of the message were uninformed and therefore unreliable sources of information. The text message writers were further disparaged when Mayor Patterson explained that the school development application was on display at both Camden and Narellan libraries “for people who do want to write a submission I would suggest it might help them write a more informed one” (Patterson in Kinsella 31 October 2007, p. 1). Although his language use was fairly casual, Mayor Patterson continued to relate the issue back to the local government protocol that was to be followed perpetuating a political discourse.

The Macarthur Greens\(^\text{14}\) also made a public statement in regard to the proposed Islamic school. They raised some environmental concerns including potential run-off from the site, and emissions from school transport services, and also referred to their political policy favouring public education over private education (Bowie 23 January 2008a). Apart from these concerns however, ‘the group said there was nothing in the plans to justify refusal of the school’ (Bowie 23 January 2008a, p. 11). Interestingly, despite basing initial comments on official Greens party policy and planning regulations, the Macarthur Greens member Allen Powell, also deviated from the official local political discourse, introducing religious aspects relating to the proposed school development, “We think had [the school] been sensibly discussed in the first place without the prejudice and the input from external forces such as the Australia First Party and the Fred Nile group, there would have been a constructive and creative outcome…Religion should have been kept out of it” (in Bowie 23 January 2008a, p. 11). Significantly, despite explicitly stating “religion should have been kept out of it” the photo accompanying the report showed Mr Powell standing on the site of the proposed school holding a sign with the message ‘Welcome Aussie Muslims’ (see Appendix B). Pointing out Powell’s individual stance, the photo caption makes it clear that ‘The sign is his, not the Macarthur Greens’ (Bowie 23 January 2008a, p. 11) The juxtaposition between Mr Powell’s reported statement and the photographic image left him open to public criticism. A Letter to the Editor published the following week stated “’Religion should have been kept out of it’. So that isn’t you holding the ‘Welcome Aussie

\(^{14}\) The Macarthur Greens are an affiliated group of the Greens NSW which cover Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly (Macarthur Greens 2008, n.p.). The Greens are considered a left-wing political party who are particularly interested in environmental sustainability.
Muslims’ sign in that picture there, Allen?” (Watson 30 January 2008, p. 2). It could be argued that whilst Mr Powell was operating within a specific political discourse, the contrast between the written content and the image constructed by Advertiser staff, had the potential to undermine his position of being objective about Muslim community developments.

Emil Sremchevich, the President of the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group also utilized his public profile (sustained throughout the reporting) to try and influence the political discourse. He argued that the Camden public should vote on the school proposal, and called for a referendum on the issue (Bowie 23 January 2008b). However, the Camden Advertiser was quick to report that according to the Local Government Act ‘referendums can only be held to abolish wards, or to change the number of councillors or the method of electing the mayor’ (Bowie 23 January 2008b, p. 11). Camden Mayor, Chris Patterson also disregarded Sremchevich’s ideas, stating “The process is you elect representatives at the three levels of government. If you’re not happy with any decisions, you have the ability at the next election to not elect those people or to elect people you feel support your view. That’s democracy” (in Bowie 23 January 2008b, p. 11). It could be argued that Mr Sremchevich was trying to manipulate the political process by acting outside of it. His actions also paralleled with the previous statements by Mayor Patterson regarding ill-informed individuals, (that is text messangers - in Kinsella 31 October 2007, p. 1), displaying their lack of knowledge about political protocols and formalities.

5.2.2. Decision Pending

In May 2008 in a news report headlined, ‘Different views in focus’ (published just before a decision was due to be made by Camden Council), the Advertiser drew on the authority of state and federal politicians who had previously commented on the controversy. The Advertiser stated the politicians were contacted ‘to see if they stood by their [earlier] comments, and to ask how they would vote if they were in the councilor’s shoes’ (Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9). Previously, in November of 2007, NSW Premier Morris Iemma had:

…strongly condemned [a] stunt in which two pigs’ heads were left staked on the school site with an Australian flag draped between them.
He later said there was no room for opposing a school on racial grounds. This week, Mr Iemma stood by his comments but would not comment on a hypothetical when asked how he would vote if the school application was in his hands. Asked if Mr Iemma hoped the council would make its decision on planning grounds alone rather than community backlash, his spokeswoman said “yes”. (Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9)

It was evident in the earlier reporting that the State Premier appeared to have very clear and strong opinions about wrong reactions (based on racial prejudice) to the school proposal. However, at the crucial time when the Council decision was pending Mr Iemma appeared less interested and perhaps less authoritative, especially since his spokeswoman was briefly quoted in the report and not himself.

Similarly to Mr Iemma, as the decision loomed Camden state MP Geoff Corrigan’s views were very clearly aligned with an objective deferral to institutionalized process. In his follow up with the Camden Advertiser he ‘reiterated…that he neither opposed nor supported [the school]…He said the decision on the school was to him “very easy” [and] “If I was on council I would follow the officer’s recommendation above all; they are the professional people engaged by council to evaluate this on its planning merits”’ (in Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9). As such, Mr Corrigan continued to affirm the political discourses through explicit reference and allegiance to policy and procedure.

Macarthur MP Pat Farmer had previously refused to remark on the school development to the Camden Advertiser, but did make ‘comments about the school to Sydney media following his attendance at a protest rally in November [which] outlined his support for Camden’s “unique rural lifestyle” and his belief that people were suspicious of council decisions’ (Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9). Mr Farmer also declined to comment to the Advertiser for the follow-up article, with a spokeswoman stating that “Mr Farmer would not like to pre-empt the outcome of the council’s decision” (unnamed spokeswoman in Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9). The Advertiser reported that Mr Farmer did not want to take an official stance at this time because he didn’t wish to speculate on what the final decision would be. One reading of this could suggest that Mr Farmer did not want to side with the ‘wrong’ side which could have undermined his authority and credibility. Another interpretation could be that in waiting for the council’s decision, following the outcome Mr Farmer could provide comment, and align himself with that decision. Mr Iemma’s and Mr Farmer’s spokeswoman demonstrate the key role of spokespeople in
political discourses who, as ratified participants in ‘follow-ups’, provide confirmatory or dissenting statements about previous communicative acts (Fetzer & Weizman 2015, p. xi).

Other politicians who had previously commented on the scandal included Kevin Rudd\(^\text{15}\), who at the time was the federal Opposition leader, former federal MP Pauline Hanson\(^\text{16}\), and Member of the NSW Legislative Council Fred Nile\(^\text{17}\). Rudd, Hanson and Nile had all openly opposed the school development (Bowie 21 May 2008c). When contacted again at decision-time, ‘Prime Minister [Kevin Rudd]’s office did not respond to the Advertiser’s inquiries’ (Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9), ‘Ms Hanson’s mobile phone was turned off this week and her office number was not answered. NSW MLC Fred Nile…was in Korea and unreachable’ (Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9). Although none of the politicians were contactable to reaffirm or alter their original positions, it represented good journalistic practice by the Camden Advertiser team, to still account for them in Bowie’s article. This coverage demonstrated that Bowie had objectively reported on the situation regarding the unavailability of these political actors or any of their spokespersons. Interestingly it also conveyed a lack of interest by the three politicians once the decision-making process had been finalized. It is also relevant to note here that in contrast to Mr Iemma, Mr Corrigan, and Mr Farmer, the federal politicians Mr Rudd, Ms Hanson, and Mr Nile, had formally been very explicit in articulating their opposition to the school (Bowie 21 May 2008c). As such, at final decision (formal disapproval) time, the views of the federal politicians had already been vehemently expressed. So it could be argued that follow up comment from them may not have been as necessary as it was for the local, regional and state politicians, who had a closer relationship to the local Camden Council and wider Camden community.

\(^{15}\) At the time of his original comments, Kevin Rudd was the federal Opposition leader. At the time of the current comments in May 2008, Kevin Rudd was the Prime Minister of Australia. Mr Rudd is a member of the Australian Labor Party, which is considered to be centre-left on the political spectrum.

\(^{16}\) Pauline Hanson is the leader of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party, which is a right-wing political party. Ms Hanson is well-known for making controversial statements about race, immigration, and specifically Islam in Australia.

\(^{17}\) Fred Nile is the leader of the Christian Democratic Party, a conservative right-wing political party. As well as being a high-profile politician, Fred Nile is an ordained minister and has been outspoken about Islam in Australia.
5.2.3. Decision Made

The strong, authoritative voice granted to various politicians and councillors during the Islamic school debate was further embellished once the Camden Council had made its decision to reject the proposed school. For example, it was reported that councillors ‘relied heavily on external advice when deciding the school should be rejected’ (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2). In the news reports about the decision, journalists named a number of important organisations that had made submissions to council, in order to draw on their authority. Naming institutions can work to manipulate power relations because as van Dijk suggests political discourses are “attached to political actors – individuals (politicians, citizens), political institutions and organisations, engaged in political processes and events” (emphasis in original) (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, p. 17). For example:

‘In its submission, Camden police said the development had a ‘high’ traffic risk assessment rating’ (emphasis in original) (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2).

‘The RTA said it reviewed the school application and “raises no objections to the proposed development”. But the fax included 18 ‘comments’ for the council to consider when making a decision’ (emphasis in original) (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2).

‘Busways was invited to comment on the school plans and said the bus rank length was too short meaning the last bus could block access to the school grounds’ (emphasis in original) (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2).

‘The Department of Primary Industries submission, seen by the Advertiser, said the proposal encroached on rural resource lands contrary to the State Government’s Metropolitan Strategy’ (emphasis in original) (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2).

Stylistically, the use of bold type to add emphasis to those organisations named demonstrated the significance that the Camden Advertiser journalists attributed to these authoritative parties, although, the journalists did appear to ask for clarification as to why the Department of Primary Industries had made a submission:
‘Sue Morris, the council’s director of development and environment, said it was normal to refer development applications “for an activity in rural land” to the department for comment. “The Metropolitan Strategy and Draft South West Subregional Strategy identified the importance of those rural lands [in the Cawdor Valley] given that we’re losing a lot of our market gardens [in the South West Growth Centre]” she said’ (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2).

Technical language and reference to policy documents here could be interpreted as an attempt to exercise power through institutional language and terminology particular to formal protocols, so that ordinary readers of the Advertiser would not question the validity of the decision being made. This notion is supported by Buttny’s study of a Wal-Mart development application in the United States where he claimed “technical and legalistic discourses [were used] to circumvent public criticisms” (2009, p. 236) and to “create a divide between experts and the lay citizenry” (Buttny 2009, p. 238).

The Advertiser’s reporting also raised questions about equity by referring to the existing Camden High School’s location just 800 metres from the proposed Islamic school’s site. One of the main reasons stated for refusing the new Islamic school proposal was the rural zoning, yet ‘In a 1998 report, obtained by the Advertiser, council staff said the Camden High School development satisfied the objectives of the rural zoning’ (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2). Again, it fell to Sue Morris, Camden Council’s director of development and environment to defend the decision, she explained “that was before all these later policies [the Metropolitan Strategy and Draft South West Subregional Strategy]…Whilst I accept there are some similarities, the Camden High School site is a better site in terms of access and vision” (in Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2). Through this line of questioning, the Advertiser’s journalists appeared to challenge the council’s decision and to promote their investigative journalism practice. The phrase ‘obtained by the Advertiser’ emphasizes the uncovering of a hidden or hard to access report, and reads as an ‘exclusive’ or ‘gotcha’ moment. This tactic serves to promote the power of the Camden Advertiser as a trusted source within the community, with the potential to undermine the council’s objective decision-making by implying institutional concealment.
\subsection*{5.2.4. Objections to the Islamic School on Planning Grounds}

In addition to the authority granted to politicians in the \textit{Camden Advertiser}’s reporting, there was a noticeable focus on opposition to the school being related to ‘planning grounds’. This attempt to frame the opposition in socially and legally acceptable terms was used by many different actors throughout the news reporting, and in Letters to the Editor. This framing occurred in articles written before and after the Camden Council’s decision and again, during and following the proceedings in the NSW Land and Environment Court.

The focus on planning grounds and procedural process was evident in the articles from the first month of reporting on the proposal. In the first reference to procedure, ‘Camden Mayor Chris Patterson said a strict process had to be followed when assessing the development application for the school’ (Bowie 17 October 2007, p. 3). Mayor Patterson was also intent on ensuring that the Camden community:

\begin{quote}
…understood what Camden Council did and did not consider when a development application came before it. “We look at factors such as zoning, at what the traffic effect will be, the impact on the environment, what amenities are available in the area, any safety concerns, at community reports from the police and the RTA, and on the school application our heritage manager will probably be involved as well… Council cannot make a decision based on an applicant’s religion, race or marital status” (Patterson in Kinsella 7 November 2007b, p. 9).
\end{quote}

In clearly outlining what was and was not part of the decision making process, Mayor Patterson framed discussion about the proposal, and sought to “limit the range and relevance of the comments” (Buttny 2009, p. 265) from the community. This was a strategy to attempt to contain the discourse surrounding the Islamic school proposal. Mayor Patterson reiterated this point later, when he stated “it’s not always helpful to the process to have people who clearly know nothing about the development application comment on the application” (in Kinsella 28 November 2007, p. 9).
Other politicians who spoke on the importance of ‘planning grounds’ included Liberal Member of the Legislative Council\(^{18}\) (MLC) Charlie Lynn who ‘said he would be speaking “purely on issues of planning” such as traffic, infrastructure, the location of the site on a flood plain and heritage values’ (Bowie 12 December 2007a, p. 1), and Camden state MP Geoff Corrigan who said “I would like to remind everyone that this is an application for a school and it has to be judged by that application and not by people’s opinion of the faith involved” (in Kinsella 7 November 2007b, p. 9). Mayor Chris Patterson’s responses to these comments appeared to challenge the political motivations behind them. He said, “If our federal politicians and candidates are so concerned about this issue, I look forward to reading their submissions” (Patterson in Kinsella 28 November 2007, p. 9). Kinsella’s report demonstrated that Mayor Patterson viewed the federal political players’ attempts to weigh into the local debate as displays of macro politics, rather than genuine interest in the micro community issue at hand. Mayor Patterson also demonstrated his knowledge of proper local council planning procedures and therefore positioned himself as more of an authority in this regard.

5.2.5. Decision-Makers

The Advertiser reported that a strict process was in force for the council meeting when the fate of the school proposal was to be decided. In a report headlined ‘Crowd should be on best behaviour’ the newspaper relayed these rules to the public, stating:

…placards and banners are banned from the meeting and residents will not be able to speak from the floor…The number of people allowed into the meeting would be about 550, in accordance with the license limit. “That’s not about us trying to stunt the crowd” [general manager, Greg Wright] said. “It’s about the legal capacity for fire safety and other issues with the hall”. (no author 21 May 2008c, p. 7)

Mr Wright also emphasized legislative support for these rules explaining that “under the Local Government Act 1993, only councillors were entitled to speak during the meeting, and council staff if they were asked a question” (no author 21 May 2008c, p.

\(^{18}\) The New South Wales Legislative Council is one of two chambers of NSW state parliament. Members of the Legislative Council are referred to as MLC. The other chamber is the Legislative Assembly, and members of this chamber are referred to as MP.
Residents of Camden were urged to ‘act with “appropriate decorum”’ (Wright in no author 21 May 2008c, p. 7) and “respect the process” (Wright in no author 21 May 2008c, p. 7). The reinforcement of correct and acceptable behaviour, combined with the reference to Local Government legislation could have been seen as an “attempt to limit the range and relevance of the comments for the public hearing” (Buttny 2009, p. 240) especially since the speaker quoted in this report was Camden Council’s general manager.

One particularly interesting article was published on 21 May, 2008, when a decision about the school development was due to be made within the week. The article consisted of quotes from all nine Camden councillors ‘about whether they were feeling any extra pressure’ (Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7) heading into the vote. The headline ‘This debate has many facets, but planner’s advice reigns’ (Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7) indicated the vast majority of the councillors discussed ‘planning issues’ as their focus. Chris Patterson said “It’s not a religious issue and it’s not a national issue. It’s a local issue that will be decided by the council on its planning parameters” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7). Similarly, Peter Johnson stated “We are going to assess this application absolutely on planning grounds” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7). Other councillors also stressed the importance of planning legislation, but also let their personal opinions, or those of the community, colour their statements. For instance Debby Dewbery said “we’re bound by legislation but that doesn’t mean we don’t have the right to say ‘no we don’t want it’ or ‘we do want it’” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7), while Rob Elliott explained that in making his decision he would “look at the impact the development, that is the physical building form, has on the environment and traffic and the effect it has on the community first and foremost” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7) as a priority. Fred Anderson and Eva Campbell mentioned similar objective aims, with Mr Anderson expressing “the community at large wants to focus on the emotive issues when we as councillors are required to consider the planning laws” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7), and Ms Campbell stating “I’m elected to make a decision in the interests of the community. But I’m also bound by the Local Government Act and all of the planning instruments” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7). It appeared that both councillors were attempting to balance their responsibilities regarding official procedure against the emotional pleas of the Camden community. This was also the case for Fred Whiteman, who offered “We certainly have very strict guidelines that we have to base our
assessment on. I will stick to the planning grounds. Whilst saying that, councillors are human and therefore we listen to people” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7).

In a more blatant example of the potential for personal and community opinion to have impacted on the decision, David Funnell stated, “If we get a report that accepts it, I’m sorry I’ll probably have to accept it. Alternatively, if it’s a rejection, fair enough. There’s probably good reason such as pollution or traffic” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7). This was a provocative statement because although he spoke of following the recommendations of council advisors, Mr Funnell also pre-empted an apology to community opponents if the school was approved. However, such an apology did not seem to be warranted in the event of the development proposal being rejected, in fact Mr Funnell said it would be ‘fair enough’. He therefore appeared to be recognising and responding to the significant community dissent regarding the school’s proposal.

Councillor Cindy Cagney was the only councillor who did not refer to planning laws in her statement to the *Camden Advertiser*. Instead, she focused entirely on the opinions of the Camden community, stating “I sincerely believe that 80 per cent of people don’t have a problem with the school development…Ten per cent are really against it and 10 per cent aren’t quite sure” (in Bowie 21 May 2008b, p. 7). It could be argued that by not referring directly to planning laws and protocols, Councillor Cagney’s statistical accounts regarding those for and against the school development may have been conceived as less authoritative by *Advertiser* readers.

Following the council decision to reject the school proposal, accusations arose that the school had been refused because of the religious affiliation of the school proponents. Many politicians spoke in defence of their decision. Mayor Chris Patterson said “Camden Council has not made this decision on religion or multiculturalism, it’s made it in relation to planning and it is site specific” (in Bowie and Senescall 28 May 2008, p. 1). Patterson also stated he was “bitterly disappointed” (in Bowie 4 June 2008b, p. 8) with some community members: “the minority brought in elements that clearly had nothing to do with the issues, such as race and religion, and I personally find that abhorrent” (Patterson in Bowie 4 June 2008b, p. 8). By mentioning the fact that some Camden community members had expressed grievances unrelated to planning laws the Mayor again framed the council’s decision as strictly a matter of planning law systems in operation.
The loudest voice in defending the council’s process was Camden council general manager Greg Wright, who:

…hit back at suggestions councillors or his staff succumbed to political pressure when making their decision on the proposed Islamic school. “Religion or race did not form part of the assessment of the development application,” he said. “The site has environmental, heritage, health and planning implications and is simply not suitable for a school of any description or religious denomination. Camden Council believe choice in education is important and we would encourage the applicant to resubmit its proposal once they have established a more suitable location”. He said council staff did a thorough and professional job in their assessment of the application. “Recent and widespread commentary that Camden Council has rejected an Islamic school is simply not true. The council refused an application for a school on a particular site, the nature of the school philosophy and its proponents was completely immaterial to its assessment of the project. The council staff have conducted their assessment of the application based on their professional principles and the prevailing laws, policies and codes. Any suggestion that the staff recommendation was based on any other grounds is a slur on the professionalism of these capable people.” (no author 4 June 2008b, p. 8)

The word ‘professional’ featured twice and ‘professionalism’ once in this article, demonstrating the focus of Mr Wright’s justification. He was obviously very passionate about these facts, and wanted to defend the council’s decision, which was also apparent in the explicit summarizing and framing (Bednarek & Caple 2012a, p. 100) in the news headline ‘Decision Defended’. A large amount of publication space was dedicated to the General Manager’s opinion, which could also suggest the Advertiser was sympathetic to the point of view he promoted.

Following the Council’s rejection of the school proposal, the Quranic Society spokesman Jeremy Bingham stated the society would act on legal advice to appeal its decision (Bowie 25 June 2008, p. 7). Implying that the Council had been unjust in their decision-making, ‘Mr Bingham said the council had had to “try to come up with any planning grounds they can. They know the court will not refuse the appeal simply because the people are prejudiced”’ (Bowie 25 June 2008, p. 7). In response, Camden
Mayor Chris Patterson said he was “very surprised” that Mr Bingham would “attempt to blacken the credibility of [the] professional planning team” (in Bowie 25 June 2008, p. 7) and Advertiser journalist Alicia Bowie supported this theme of professional integrity by reporting that ‘Cr Patterson said the planning staff had made their recommendation to refuse the application independently of councillors and based on information from external agencies such as the RTA, police and the Department of Primary Industries’ (Bowie 25 June 2008, p. 7). The direct quotes from the Mayor and the reporting style of the journalist constructed a layered, consistent and potentially convincing message. By using direct quotes, Bowie employed “a powerful strategy…to avoid the constraints on impersonality, opinions, point of view and formality” (van Dijk 2013, p. 76), and recirculated news about the council’s decision as being grounded in planning protocol.

5.2.6. Letters to the Editor

Throughout the debate, many residents wrote Letters to the Editor which also prioritized the need to focus on planning legislation. For example Ryan wrote:

Crikey, can’t the debate about the Islamic school be conducted without being led by extremists? One week we had the acerbic Mark Latham, who practically accused every white person in Camden of being racist or at the very least xenophobic. Last week, we had my former colleague Charlie Lynn, who uses the term “Muslim” and “terrorism” as if they were interchangeable terms and accuses anyone with a learned opinion as “the commentariat”. There is a middle ground. Camden Council should make a legal and professional decision based on the law and the facts. (23 April 2008, p. 2).

In this letter, Ryan highlighted his view that some of the arguments that had been made by politicians in editorials published by the Advertiser, had been unacceptable. He proceeded to argue that “the law and the facts” should be prioritized (Ryan 23 April 2008, p. 2). The council were praised for having done exactly that by Gunn, who wrote “against all odds…the school issue was researched and debated on and resulted in decisive action being declared based on the council planners’ recommendations” (11 June 2008, p. 21). Many Camdenites wrote letters which thanked the council “for thorough investigation and research” (Bond 4 June 2008, p. 12), “for rightfully carrying
out [their] duty of care” (Gunn 11 June 2008, p. 21), and commended the decision as “a good example of democracy and government process in action” which had come “to the correct conclusion” (Jennkins 3 June 2009, p. 4). The letters of thanks and support were further reinforced by the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group president’s Letter to the Editor. He stated:

We support Camden Mayor Chris Patterson regarding the council’s decision to reject the Islamic school. He has had a difficult job and he has maintained neutrality throughout the process in the face of outrageous claims against the town. The school’s sometimes spokesman, Jeremy Bingham, has attacked the council and the community on many occasions. He said that the school should only be judged on planning and development grounds, even though he provocatively was always talking about bringing Muslims to Camden. (Sremchevich 2 July 2008, p. 15)

Other Camden residents also criticized people who they implied had made ‘outrageous claims’ against the town. Following the Council’s original decision to reject the school Dunshea asked “those who said it was all about religion and planning issues were a smokescreen, go and read the whole report. I will then await your apologies” (4 June 2008, p. 13). After the Land and Environment Court had rejected the Quranic Society’s appeal, the same letter writer offered: “To those who said the objectors to the Islamic school were racist xenophobes: I await your apology. The serious among us were always concerned with planning issues’ (Dunshea 10 June 2009, p. 2). Other residents berated Camdenites who they suggested had disregarded the formalities of official planning procedures. Youdale told the “nasty little minds” to “crawl back into [their] holes and let the democratic process…put in place in local and state governments do the job they were created for” (12 December 2007, p. 20). Marasco was critical of those who “were keen to interrupt due process and influence authorities who were trying to sensibly assess the matter” (11 June 2008, p. 20), and Marland reiterated:

Fortunately, the Camden planning authorities have specific guidelines to follow when considering a planning application. These include, for instance, aesthetics and traffic access to and from the site. Again, fortunately, they do not include bigoted and racist opinions from the local community. (7 January 2009, p. 2)
Harlor emphasized that it was a “debate that should have been about community needs, traffic problems, infrastructure, etc.” (9 January 2008, p. 2). Using the word ‘should’ in this instance implied that there were many (unnecessary distractions) from the main property development issues.

Interestingly, several residents wrote Letters to the Editor arguing the local council’s focus on planning legislation and official protocols was only one significant part of due process. In a letter captioned ‘Entitled to speak out’ Cracknell referred to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, outlining the need for an assessment of “public interest and social impact” and asking: “are the councillors saying religion is not a public interest?” (6 May 2009, p. 2). In another letter Varlow also referenced planning legislation and public interest:

It is lamentable that Camden Council on the face of it has taken a tendentious and unrealistic posture that only ‘bricks and mortar’ concerns should be expressed by the people and considered by council in its decision making on the Islamic school site at Camden. An eminent environmental barrister has advised that under the Environmental Planning Act of 1997, the council must consider the likely impacts of the development, social and economic, in the locality, suitability of the site for development; and public interest factors. Council in its role as representatives of the community is morally obliged to consider ‘public interest’ issues in its final decision. (13 February 2008, p. 8)

These letters seemed to suggest that a broader interpretation of the planning procedures was needed in order for the local council to adequately address all relevant aspects of the development proposal. Critically, they also challenged the idea that the Council had been thorough and bureaucratically sound in its evaluation of the Islamic school proposal.

The captioning of the Letters to the Editor was also significant. In terms of news discourse these mini-headlines functioned to also shape readers’ opinions. Raeymaeckers (2005) argues that editors of newspapers are likely to “insert controversial statements and clauses into letters, [and] to give letters incendiary titles” (in Young 2013, p. 445) in order to attract more readers and increase the circulation of the newspaper. Apart from these functionalist goals, emotive lexical choices in captions,
such as ‘Entitled to speak out’ (Cracknell 6 May 2009, p. 2) and ‘Brick Bias Blasted’ (Varlow 13 February 2008, p. 8) were used strategically by the Advertiser’s editorial staff to impact community views.

5.2.7. Editorials

During the controversy the official discourse of planning protocols was further reinforced in editorials written by the Camden Advertiser’s main editor Rebecca Senescall. From as early as November 2007, Senescall was reminding readers that ‘in the end, whether or not the school goes ahead is down to basic planning standards’ (7 November 2007, p. 6). She also explained that although protestors were:

…calling on Camden Council to obey the majority and reject the proposal – because, they say, that is a politician’s role in a democracy...the councillors are bound by planning law. There may be good reasons to reject the school, if it will have an unacceptable impact on traffic conditions in the area, for example. If, however, the councillors decide to do what is most popular without regard to planning law, they may end up with a costly battle in the Land and Environment Court on their hands. (Senescall 7 November 2007, p. 6)

In this editorial, Senescall not only outlined the proper procedure to be followed, she also proposed a serious consequence if procedure was not correctly followed – subsequent legal action. Interestingly, after the Camden Council refused the original school development application, legal proceedings were enacted when the Quranic Society lodged an appeal through the NSW Land and Environment Court. Significantly, once the formal appeal began the Advertiser’s coverage became less emotive and much more official. There were also fewer articles published, which would likely have been due to the drawn out nature of the formal legal process. On October 1, 2008, the newspaper reported that representatives of the Quranic Society and Camden Council had been ordered by the Land and Environment Court to compare their views, and report back to the court (within a month). On October 29, 2008, the Advertiser revealed that the school plans had been amended so that new features included ‘a 15-metre vegetation buffer, student numbers reduced from 1200 to 900, one building deleted, some buildings reduced in size, saw-tooth parking bay for buses, [and] smaller sports
The report focused on explaining in detail the appeal process:

The Quranic Society has until November 27 to give Camden Council the amended architectural drawings and planning reports. All 3042 people who wrote submissions in response to the original proposal will be sent a letter advising them of the new plans. The plans will be on public exhibition from December 10 to 24, in accordance with the court orders…It is now up to the court to decide how substantial the changes are and whether the amended plans should be considered an entirely new development application…If it is considered a new development application, the process will have to start again from the beginning. The school plans would go on public exhibition and would then be decided by Camden Council. If it isn’t, it will be up to the Land and Environment Court to decide whether to approve the school based on the amended plans. (Bowie 29 October 2008, p. 1)

The highly descriptive focus on procedural stages meant this report was a combination of both ‘contextual’ and ‘functional’ styles of news discourse (van Dijk 2013) rather than an emotion charged account of the controversy.

In contrast to this functional reporting style which positioned the Quranic Society as being required to operate in an institutional framework (irrespective of its constitution as a religious representative group) when making amendments, a report published the following April stated that in defending their decision to the Land and Environment Court, Camden Council had concentrated on ‘topics of religion and culture’ (no author 29 April 2009b, p. 5. This action was met with much criticism from the public and within the Council itself. For example, ‘Mayor Chris Patterson told the Advertiser the council did not endorse submissions presented to the court that raised religious or cultural concerns’ (no author 29 April 2009b, p. 5) and further explained “however, the barrister believed the court had the right to hear what the community thought: that’s why they were brought up I would imagine” (Patterson in no author 29 April 2009b, p. 5). Additionally, six of the councillors and former councillors who had made the original decision to reject the proposed school were reported as being ‘disappointed that religion had become part of the council’s court case. Cr Anderson said it was “disturbing” and “very alarming”’ (no author 29 April 2009b, p. 5). These reported
diversions from the NSW Land and Environment Court’s mandate to specifically address official planning criteria were highly controversial. When the court upheld the Camden City Council’s vote and rejected the proposed Islamic school in June 2009, this decision too was reported as being based on planning legislation. ‘In his judgment, Mr Brown [Commissioner] said the school did not meet two objectives of the land’s rural zoning so the school application had to be refused’ (Bowie 3 June 2009, p. 1). Commenting after the fact, Camden MP Geoff Corrigan announced “the community should be perfectly clear that this decision was made only on planning grounds and not for any other reason” (in Bowie 3 June 2009, p. 4), while Mayor Patterson denounced the “extreme minority of half a dozen people – the majority of which don’t live in the LGA – who tried to make it a nationalistic or religious issue but it’s never been that”, calling those persons “pelicans” (in Bowie 3 June 2009, p. 4). The denunciation of people who deviated from official planning grounds when opposing the Islamic school, was a strong final stance on the political discourses in the debate.

5.3. Rural Discourses

5.3.1. Rural Discourses and Politicians

Rural discourses were utilised by politicians to both support and oppose the development. For example, Camden Labor MP Geoff Corrigan used previous approvals of Christian and state schools in rural zones to endorse the Islamic school proposal. He said:

I’m sure the majority of Camden residents will welcome additional educational facilities in our area as they welcomed all other schools in rural areas…As I’m sure everyone knows, the establishment of schools in rural zones is allowable and that was shown by Macarthur Anglican School and Camden High School. (in Bowie 10 October 2007, p. 3).

In this example, Corrigan referred to precedent to demonstrate that educational facilities and rural land divisions could be compatible. The language appeared to have been carefully selected, with the MP avoiding the term ‘Islamic school’ to de-emphasize the religious group backing the proposal, substituting it with ‘educational facilities’, a more generic and possibly inclusive description. This omission may have also occurred as a result of the journalist’s moderation of content, for as Cotter argues, “reporters are co-
responsible – along with the speaker being quoted – for the content they produce, including their choice of what they include within quoted material” (2010, p. 184). In either case, the resulting more mainstream (and perhaps less provocative) identifier ‘educational facilities’ positioned the Islamic school proposal more equitably.

Other politicians, such as Macarthur Labor candidate Nick Bleasdale did not agree with Mr Corrigan’s view. Mr Bleasdale was quoted as saying:

Let me make it clear. I’m totally opposed to the development of the new Islamic school and the community has my full support on the issue. Make no mistake, this issue has nothing to do with race. It’s based on the fact that such a large development will undoubtedly have an impact on our semi-rural way of life, especially without the local infrastructure to support it. (in Kinsella 14 November 2007a, p. 10).

Contrary to Mr Corrigan, Mr Bleasdale did specifically name the school as being ‘Islamic’, highlighting this point of difference from other schools in the area, and further implying that the school would negatively affect Camden’s rustic identity.

Another example where Camden’s identity was mentioned, although without direct reference to the ‘rural’ was in an article headlined ‘Australia First fields candidates’ (no author 5 December 2007, p. 11). Jim Saleem, Party Chairman of the Australia First Party spoke about the need to protect Camden’s character and called ‘on “local activists” to “fight to preserve the identity of Camden” but did not specify what that was’ (no author 5 December 2007, p. 11). Despite the ambiguity the fact that Saleem’s statement was made during the highly controversial debate about the Islamic school, could suggest that efforts to retain Camden’s identity equated to a rejection of the development proposal.

The rural discourse was also apparent whilst politicians were reinforcing the official procedures of the planning development process. Both Camden Mayor Chris Patterson and Liberal MP Charlie Lynn stressed the importance of focusing on planning issues, with Patterson adding that “on the school application our heritage manager will probably be involved as well” (in Kinsella 7 November 2007b, p. 9) and Lynn concentrating “…purely on issues of planning” such as traffic, infrastructure, the location of the site on a flood plain and heritage values’ (Bowie 12 December 2007a, p. 11). It is interesting that the two politicians both articulated heritage as an important
consideration in regard to the planning issues. As politicians are usually seen to speak on behalf of their communities, and reflect their concerns, it is therefore very likely that the community of Camden also considered their rural heritage to be an integral component of their town’s identity throughout the school development debate.

5.3.2. Rural Discourses in Official Documents

The idea of Camden as a rural locality was also referenced in official communications and documents that were eventually used to deny the school application in the NSW Land and Environment Court. When the Camden Council rejected the school development in May 2008, a submission made by the Department of Primary Industries stated that ‘the proposal encroached on rural resource lands contrary to the State Government’s Metropolitan Strategy’ (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2). The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is an institution which issues officially endorsed and privileged statements, so the fact that the submission came from the DPI – an authoritative government department – made for a powerful level of authoritative ‘voice’ in this report. The reference to the State Government’s Metropolitan Strategy also expressed a high level of government policy and documented process, which could be interpreted as legitimizing Camden Council’s decision to reject the school proposal.

The State Government’s Metropolitan Strategy was referenced another time, by the council’s director of development and environment (Sue Morris) who defended the Department of Primary Industries involvement in the discussion. She explained ‘it was normal to refer development applications “for an activity in rural land” to the department for comment’ (Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2). Again, the rural nature of Camden was drawn on as the reason for various government authorities to become involved in the school application, seemingly raising the importance of the debate. Additionally, when discussed by Sue Morris, the NSW Government’s Metropolitan Strategy was linked with another officially documented plan – The Draft South West Subregional Strategy. The naming of both of these policies as ‘strategy’ suggested careful planning and foresight by tiered government systems which again implied elevated levels of political and institutional authority, and conveyed trust in the plan. Sue Morris was quoted as saying “The Metropolitan Strategy and Draft South West Subregional Strategy identified the importance of those rural lands [in the Cawdor
Valley] given that we’re losing a lot of our market gardens [in the South West Growth Centre)” (in Bowie 28 May 2008, p. 2). Importantly, Morris’ statement could be seen to demonstrate that concerns about the loss of rural land were not simply local community concerns, but salient issues raised by government, and cemented in policy.

In April 2009, one week after the NSW Land and Environment Court hearing on the proposed school and while a final judgement had yet to be made, the Camden Advertiser ran the following headline: ‘Islamic school hinges on rural traits’ (Bowie 29 April 2009b, p. 4-5). This headline demonstrated the integral role that the rural nature of Camden played in the debate. The article explained that while Camden’s rural heritage was prominent in the broader public discourse, it was also firmly embedded in the relevant legislation:

The land [the Quranic Society] has chosen for the school is zoned rural 1(a) under the council’s local environment plan (LEP), which governs what can and can’t be built in the area. Last week’s four day battle in the Land and Environment Court focused on three objectives that a development in that zone must meet to be approved. The objectives are ‘to provide suitable land for agricultural use’, ‘to enable compatible forms of development…in keeping with the rural character of the locality and carried out in an environmentally sensitive manner’, and ‘to ensure that development does not detract from the existing rural character of the area or create unreasonable or uneconomic demands for provision or extension of public amenities or services’. (Bowie 29 April 2009b, p. 4).

This report directly referenced the policy documents of the Local Environment Plan to emphasize the official planning policy and the authority associated with it. Journalist Alicia Bowie quoted the objectives of the LEP, highlighting their importance to the Land and Environment Court’s considerations, and also bringing details of these official discourses to the attention of Camden Advertiser readers, who may not have engaged with the policy themselves.

The rural zoning of the land the Quranic Society had purchased was the reason why Land and Environment Court Commissioner Graham Brown eventually denied the school proposal. ‘In his judgment, Mr Brown said the school did not meet two objectives of the land’s rural zoning so the school application had to be refused’ (Bowie
3 June 2009, p. 1). In a summary of the Commissioner’s statement, it was reported that, ‘The size and design of the school did not fit with the rural character of the area surrounding the school site’ (no author 3 June 2009b, p. 4). It could be argued that the judgment from the Land and Environment Court demonstrated the prevalence of Camden’s rural identity in official planning discourses, as well as in the dominant public discourse. The ubiquity of the rural discourses across multiple contexts, especially in the Camden Advertiser’s news coverage demonstrates the importance of this discourse in the eventual rejection of the Islamic school application.

5.3.3. Rural Discourses and ‘Othering’

Some residents of Camden formed a group in direct opposition to the proposed Islamic school, called the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group (CMRG). This group was formed after a protest meeting about the development in 2007. The formalisation of this group with authoritative actors – most notably president, Emil Sremchevich, and media spokesman, Andrew Wannet – allowed the CMRG to build and maintain a strong voice in the news media discourse. In one 2008 article, Mr Sremchevich said: “[Camden] is a beautiful little town and I’ll support any place in this country which wants to save some of its character” (in Bowie 23 January 2008b, p. 11). Repeated here was the suggestion made by other residents and politicians; that Camden’s rural identity needed to be protected from the negative effects an Islamic school would have on the area.

The CMRG’s rural discourse was also frequently mixed with discourses of the ‘Other’ whereby the Muslim community was portrayed as different and threatening to the Camden community. For example, ‘media spokesman Andrew Wannet said the group would object to the school on environmental, heritage, planning and “cultural and lifestyle” grounds’ (Bowie 5 December 2007b, p. 11). In this report the issue of ‘heritage’ was raised again, but so too were ambiguous ‘cultural and lifestyle’ referents. This was despite numerous assertions by CMRG that their objections were based on planning issues, and their opposition was not related to the religion of the school proponents. At one point Mr Wannet wrote a Letter to the Editor, in which he said: “Camden people (those living in and outside of Camden) have fought long and hard on issues that affect the town whether they are Muslim issues or not. You only have to see Camden’s enviable ensemble of country town architecture and rural landscapes” (19
December 2007, p. 8). By stating that it didn’t matter whether the school proposal was a ‘Muslim issue’ or not, inadvertently, and perhaps in an effort to convey a sense of equity, Mr Wannet’s comment brought religious difference back into the debate. The letter emphatically relayed that ‘Camden people’ had battled change before in order to maintain their rural identity, had succeeded in the past, and would do so again in this case. The metaphor of the fight was continued in early 2008 when the CMRG ‘sent out a leaflet to Camden households urging residents to “join the fight to keep Camden rural”’ (Bowie 2 April 2008, p. 16). The phrase ‘the fight to keep Camden rural’ suggested that Camden’s rural identity was something the Quranic Society was trying to take away from the town. In actuality, the Quranic Society expressed that the rural nature of the area was precisely one of the main reasons it had selected the location for the school site.

Camden residents’ were given a strong voice in the *Camden Advertiser* through the Letters to the Editor and website comments¹⁹ published about the proposed school. It is important to note here that whilst Letters to the Editor are often viewed as being the individual letter writer’s own words, and a more direct reflection of community sentiment, they are nonetheless selected, moderated and positioned by editors, meaning they may not be accurate accounts of actual events and/or public expressions of majority opinions. For as Young states, “what appears in the letters section is a ‘constructed public’ that is assembled using raw materials provided by non-journalists but molded by editorial staff” (2013, p. 446). In the *Advertiser*’s published letters, many residents highlighted Camden’s rural character and identity when opposing the school, suggesting that the development would detrimentally change the rustic nature of the town. One such letter stated:

> Watch out, people of Camden. Once the school is approved the face of Camden will change forever. First a school, then a mosque, then shops with signs you cannot read. For those who remember, Lakemba, Greenacre and Bankstown did not always look as they do now. They were once a population of everyday Australians who remembered the days the land was paddocks and fields. (Girona 24 October 2007, p. 2)

¹⁹ The website comments were not independently sourced as part of the data collection process; instead the website comments discussed were re-published in the print newspaper. They are analysed as mediated community contributions, similar to the Letters to the Editor.
To support the idea that Camden would be irrevocably changed Girona perpetuated the common fear of ‘the dreaded Lakemba’ (McGregor 2016). Other Letters to the Editor also drew on the example of Lakemba, which had become widely associated with the large Muslim Lebanese community settled in the larger Bankstown area. Dunn, Klocker and Salabay have argued that “the media depiction of Lakemba has been part of a racialization process identified elsewhere, in which Muslims are constructed as fanatical, intolerant, militant, fundamentalist, misogynist and alien (Dunn 2001)” (2007, p. 576). Therefore, Girona’s direct mention of Lakemba, coupled with the nostalgic comments linking ordinary Australians with pastoral living suggested there was an incompatibility between rural Camden and the Muslim ‘Other’.

Many other community members also suggested that the school would lead to negative effects for Camden’s community. Narellan resident Preston Rowles was quoted as saying, “Camden is still a country town but it won’t be for long” (in McCowen 21 May 2008, p. 9), while in a Letter to the Editor Cawood asked, “What will happen to our sleepy township? What will happen to the traditional country feel that the main street of Camden brings?” (2 April 2008, p. 24). Both of these statements anguished over assumed changes that the Islamic school would bring to Camden’s identity, which is also what Bray feared in a letter specifically addressed to “State MP Geoff Corrigan and Camden councillors” (Bray 5 March 2008, p. 4) suggesting:

…in not too many years from now, if Camden does have an Islamic school for more than 1200 students built on prime rural land and Camden township is no longer identifiable as a town with history and rural character, and traffic congestion and the resultant pollution is intolerable, you may feel the need to say “I’m sorry” to your residents and votees. (Bray 5 March 2008, p. 4)

Bray directly pinpointed a changing identity for Camden as an area of grave concern, and pitched this as a reason to deny the school proposal to the political figures making the decision.

Some residents’ letters focused on the idea that the school would not improve Camden. O’Brien asked “How does permitting a large school with 1200 students primarily drawn

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20 Greenacre, as referenced in the Letter to the Editor (Girona 24 October 2007, p. 2) is a suburb of the Canterbury-Bankstown Council. Bankstown is approximately 45km north-east of Camden.

21 Narellan is a suburb in the Camden Local Government Area
from suburbs up to an hour away enhance Camden’s rural heritage and benefit the local community?” (31 October 2007, p. 10). One week later the same resident wrote: “Is it an asset to the rural area it is situated in? No. There is no reason for this school to be in this location. Why would anyone build such an expensive facility so remotely from the majority of people who would use it?” (O’Brien 7 November 2007, p. 4). Importantly, these letters not only bemoaned the potential loss of a rural identity, they also strongly implied that an established Muslim community in the Camden area did not already exist. By suggesting that the Islamic school would be ‘so remote’ from the Muslim community who would use it, these letters could have potentially worked to further create unnecessary barriers between a Camden ‘us’ and a Muslim ‘them’.

Later in the school debate, after the council had made the initial decision to reject the proposed development, residents began to write letters that reflected on the negative attention Camden was getting in national and international news media. Even the Advertiser journalists acknowledged that ‘Camden [was] no longer known only for its quiet country town atmosphere’ (no author 4 June 2008a, p. 1). However, some residents did not respond well to such criticism. A resident stated in a web comment: “I bet you don’t even come from this area and you all should be ashamed of yourselves for calling a rural Aussie town racist” (Get over your selves 25 June 2008, p. 4). This contribution was interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it played off the idea of belonging, suggesting that if you weren’t from the area, if you weren’t a ‘true Camdenite’, then you weren’t entitled to have an opinion on the debate. Here the letter-writer tried to limit the voices who were authorised to participate in the discourse. Secondly, the idea of being ashamed of ‘calling a rural Aussie town racist’ implied that it was a complete misconception for ‘real’ Australian rural communities to be considered racist. This contributor conflated general stereotypes of Australians as inclusive and fair-minded with positive ideas about rural residents who belong.

5.3.4. Rural Discourses and Inclusiveness

Not all residents who wrote Letters to the Editor shared these fears about the effect of the proposed Islamic school on Camden’s rural identity. Some were more concerned about other negative identities Camden was being labelled with as a result of the widespread news media coverage of the debate. Lysaught wrote: “If people are so
concerned about maintaining Camden’s image, why are they trying so hard to base that image on racist ideologies?” (14 November 2007, p. 18). This letter also hinted at some of the other reasons being used to oppose the school, including the alleged absence of an existing local Muslim community, the idea that the Muslim community should ‘fit in’ with the already established local schools, and that Islam was incompatible with the Australian way of life. In light of such prejudicial ideas being spread through the Letters to the Editor, Brumby asked those who wanted to maintain Camden’s identity, “What exactly is it you want to preserve? Parochialism, fear and prejudice?” (14 November 2007, p. 18). These letters did not discount or challenge the credibility of Camden’s rural heritage, they did however, suggest there were other more negative identities being constructed that required critical attention.

This idea of other, less flattering identities being aligned with Camden was raised by one Camden resident in a letter captioned ‘Don’t shame us all’ (Youdale 12 December 2007, p. 20). Youdale wrote neither for nor against the school proposal, but specifically addressed ideas related to Camden’s rural heritage: “Am I in favour of the Islamic school? Not particularly. Am I against it? Not particularly. Am I for or against preserving some idyllic notion of a rural Arcadia that we call Camden? Neither. Change is inevitable” (12 December 2007, p. 20). Here the letter writer pragmatically suggested that although a rural discourse would remain part Camden’s history, that community identities continue to evolve over time. The implication was that heritage should not be considered a good enough reason in and of itself to reject the Islamic school proposal.

This idea of changing identity was supported in June 2008 by two powerful Letters to the Editor in favour of the Islamic school proposal. The first of these was published on 11 June 2008, and was written by 40 Camden residents in collaboration. In the letter captioned ‘Embarrassed by intolerance’, community members acknowledged the rural aspects of Camden’s identity, but also highlighted the need to progress that identity. They wrote: “We are proud of Camden’s rural colonial heritage. It was once a country town but there has been significant change and this is part of a continuum” (B. Shipp, et al. 11 June 2008, p. 21). This view and its expression in letter form was also reiterated one week later, when another group of 22 Camden residents stated they wanted to support the sentiments of the citizens who had written the previous week. In a very similar statement, they proclaimed: “We are proud of Camden’s rural colonial heritage, but recognize that it is becoming part of greater Sydney, as a result of state and local
government’s planning” (Roberts-Everett at al. 18 June 2008, p. 4). It could be argued that similarly to Youdale’s contribution, these two subsequent Letters to the Editor and the 62 residents involved, argued for a more modern identity for Camden, one that would acknowledge its rural past, yet also integrate the changing nature of the town to recognise and include the growing Muslim community.

This growing community, was formally represented by the Quranic Society which had a limited voice in the *Camden Advertiser*’s coverage of the Islamic school debate. Quranic Society Spokesman Jeremy Bingham attempted to address community concerns, and promoted the rural identity of Camden as a reason why the school should be supported. He was quoted as saying: “They want their school to be in a rural area because it is the best kind of place to have a school. It’s best for the children and also best in terms of low impact on neighbours” (in Bowie 17 October 2007, p. 3). In this way, Mr Bingham did not dispute or indeed challenge the rural identity that Camden residents and politicians had foregrounded in connection with their town. Instead, Mr Bingham used this rural discourse as a point of commonality, suggesting that the reasons Camdenites loved their town were the same reasons the Quranic Society wanted to build their school there. As such, it could be argued that Mr Bingham attempted to break down perceived differences between the local community and the Muslim community, through their mutual appreciation of the semi-rural life.

In addition to the Quranic Society’s inclusive rural discourse Alicia Bowie, journalist and occasional guest editor of the *Camden Advertiser*, also drew on the heritage argument, in order to call for unity and understanding. In her editorial piece she referred to Letters to the Editor claiming the Islamic school and the Muslim community would be incompatible with an Australian (and/or Christian) way of life. Bowie, however, suggested that maintaining an Australian community identity was all about inclusion. She explained:

> Within discussion I’m hearing a lot about maintaining our Australian heritage. I always thought a big chunk of that heritage was the Aussie spirit of a fair go for all and mateship. But going off what has been said on our website and in letters, that mateship and fair go only applies to people with the same religion or race as ours. (9 January 2008b, p. 4)
In this editorial, Bowie challenged some of the dominant Australian identity-rural/heritage discourses used to oppose the Islamic school development, and potentially exposed them as ‘smokescreens’ for racist and discriminatory ‘Othering’.

It’s clear that the controversial proposed Islamic school development was debated with frequent reference to the rural nature of the township. Some Camden politicians, and residents, as well as members of the Quranic Society and Camden Advertiser journalists appropriated rural discourses to challenge ill-conceived ideas about identity politics and belonging to Camden. However, other politicians, many residents and the main school opposition group, the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group, were able to more effectively and more frequently draw on Camden’s identity as a rural community to justify rejecting the Islamic school proposal. This ‘justification’ was apparent in the final decision made by the Land and Environment Court in June 2009.

5.4. Discourses of the ‘Other’

5.4.1. Ideas that a Muslim Community Did Not Exist in Camden

One of the major reasons given to justify people’s opposition to the proposed Islamic school was the argument that there was not already an established Muslim community in Camden. This argument was most frequently expressed through published Letters to the Editor and comments from the newspaper’s website. For example, “By all means build a new school, just one that the Camden community can use, and not in that location. If you want an Islamic school, build one where there is a need” (Mel 24 October 2007, p. 6); “Why do we have to let a Muslim school come to Camden when there are not enough Muslims to fill it?” (Priscilla 24 October 2007, p. 6), “If practicing Muslims want to build a place of teaching and worship, please do it in your own backyard, not Camden” (Cawood 2 April 2008, p. 24), and “The Muslims should build where they are already living” (Martin 31 October 2007, p. 6). These letters clearly claimed there was no justifiable demand for an Islamic school in the area because a Muslim population was not already part of Camden’s community. A similar view was expressed in a letter written by Poyntz which was captioned ‘No Islamic school in my backyard’:

I am one of the majority of Camden’s residents who are neither racist nor narrow-minded. I would not like to see an Islamic school built as
proposed. The reason for this is that it does not serve our community’s
education needs. It will not serve my children’s needs, or the needs of the
majority of Camden’s children. To the council, why is there such a need
for this school if the Islamic community in this area is so small that they
have to recruit students from as far as Auburn and Parramatta? (17
October 2007, p. 2).

In this letter, Poyntz’s language communicated divisions between a Camden ‘us’ and an
Islamic ‘them’. Ironically, by using inclusive phrases such as ‘our community’ and
‘Camden’s children’, Poyntz marginalized the Muslim community’s educational
requirements. This divisive language was particularly ironic, considering that in this
letter Poyntz also called on the Camden Council to “Do what is best for the community,
not divide it” (Poyntz 17 October 2007, p. 2). Similar divisive language was used in a
flyer distributed by the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group, which included a
template letter for people to send their objections to the Land and Environment Court.
The *Advertiser* reported that ‘the form letter was in a tick-a-box format with objections
such as “Camden’s infrastructure will not tolerate the added and unnecessary traffic
burden” and “there is no evidence this facility is needed by Camden (local) residents”’
(Bowie 21 January 2009, p. 12). By including the word ‘local’ in brackets, it could be
argued that the CMRG’s flyer implied that Muslim students would come from outside
and not from within the Camden community.

Other Camden community members wrote website comments which denied the
existence of the Muslim community altogether. Priscilla posted: “I am so sad that
Camden Council is not standing up against the building of a moslem [sic] school, where
there are no muslims [sic] in Camden to use it, certainly not enough to warrant a school
for 1800 students” (24 October 2007, p. 6). Tellingly, this comment included a number
of errors. For example, the proposed school was for 1200 students, not 1800, plus
‘Priscilla’ referred to the school as ‘moslem’ instead of ‘Muslim’. According to Baker,
Gabrielatos & McEnery, in 2002 the Media Committee of the Muslim Council of
Britain requested that newspapers use the term Muslim instead of ‘moslem’ as “it can
be pronounced ‘mawzlem’, which is similar to the Arabic word for oppressor” (2013, p.
78). These researchers also suggested that “the trajectory of Moslem in the British press
[was] evidence of a subtle form of hostility” (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery 2013, p.
78). There’s no suggestion here that the *Advertiser*’s staff chose to publish the resident’s
comment to deliberately misrepresent Muslim people. In fact, it could be argued that by publishing these inaccuracies the Advertiser actually displayed the local resident’s level of ignorance regarding Muslims.

Early in the debate, Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group president, Emil Sremchevich wrote a Letter to the Editor that asked “Why Camden? We have a very few Muslims around here [sic] – the majority live around Auburn, Lidcombe, Bankstown and Punchbowl” (24 October 2007, p. 6). Other letter writers also highlighted areas of south-west Sydney, that included “Prestons, Liverpool, Auburn, Bankstown and many other locations” (Stewart 24 October 2007, p. 6) as having large Muslim populations, suggesting therefore, these were more suitable locations for a new school, making a new one in Camden unnecessary. Even when the suburbs were not mentioned by name, letter writers asked:

How does permitting a large school with 1200 students primarily drawn from suburbs up to an hour away enhance Camden’s rural heritage and benefit the local community? There must be a more suitable location, central to the suburbs these students would come from. (O’Brien 31 October 2007, p. 10).

Clearly these letter writers insinuated that a sizeable Muslim community did not exist in Camden, but was present in other Western Sydney suburbs, which should therefore host the new school. Kevin Dunn’s ideas about a discourse of cultural absence are applicable here, he argues “the silencing of cultural groups is potentially the most oppressive method of ‘Othering’. Groups of people can be constructed as non-existent, and in these circumstances their claims to belonging and citizenship are fundamentally injured” (2004, p. 334). By refuting the existence of a Muslim community in Camden unsubstantiated claims could be made about insider identities and belonging in Camden.

In response to some residents who wrote comments offering alternative views supporting the school proposal and Camden’s Muslim community James wrote: “Shame on your for turning your back on your own culture and standing against your existing neighbours’ wishes…Maybe you’d be more at home relocating to Lakemba” (13 May 2009, p. 4). Once again, the reference to a suburb with a ‘known’ sizeable Muslim population was contrasted with suggestions of Camden’s ‘irrelevant’ Muslim community to oppose the school development.
One highly relevant Letter to the Editor was written in response to an editorial about the growing Muslim population in Camden. Stewart wrote:

I read Rebecca Senescall’s Editor’s View (It’s time we embraced openness, October 17), where she stated that the number of people of Islamic faith had risen by 227 per cent. These statistics sound impressive until you look at the real figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In 1996 there were 124 people of Islamic faith in the Camden Local Government Area and in 2007 there are 397” (24 October 2007, p. 6).

This letter clearly accused the Advertiser’s Editor of misrepresenting increases in the Camden community’s Muslim profile. Yet despite the statistical validity of these increases, Stewart still questioned “the agenda behind such a huge school” (24 October 2007, p. 6). The idea of secrecy relative to the Muslim community and/or the Quranic Society’s motives implied that the Quranic Society should not be trusted and perpetuated negative connotations regarding the school proposal. In a similar vein, O’Brien asked “Why would anyone build such an expensive facility so remotely from the majority of people who would use it?” (7 November 2007, p. 4), whilst Lyn queried the backgrounds of the school proponents: “They might have a right to build an Islamic school. But only if we know where the funding is coming from, and only if they are teaching a peaceful brand of Islam” (7 May 2008, p. 2). This last statement granted conditional (neighborhood) approval to the school, based on criteria likely gleaned from media stereotypes about Islamic organizations. Again it raised questions about the legitimacy of a local Muslim community and suggested that ‘they’ were not to be trusted on face value.

The denial of Camden’s existing Muslim population led Stewart and others to fear “a huge influx of Muslim people. After all, some, but not the majority of Muslims hate our way of life and would like to change it” (24 October 2007, p. 6). The use of the word influx here could be likened to an invasion, something threatening and unwanted. The idea of the threat, in particular, can be linked to Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism in which Muslims are portrayed as strange and threatening to Western society (2003, 1997, 1994). Along similar lines, one resident wrote that the school would lead to “thousands of unsociable families and their beliefs moving into Camden” (Wendy 10 June 2009, p. 2). While another explicitly stated that the Camden community needed to resist the “Muslim takeover” (Wannet 19 December 2007, p. 8), as the school would
“inevitably lead to an increased local Muslim population with the inevitable requirement for a mosque in Camden as well. Migrant/non-Australian groups like to live near their educational and religious institutions” (Wannet 19 December 2007, p. 8). The suggestion that a mosque would also be problematic for Camden compounded views that Muslims would be at the core of any problems. In addition, the singling out of ‘migrant/non-Australians’ as preferring to live near ‘their’ schools was a contentious and divisive statement, as surely many (multicultural) Australians share the same desires. Pointedly, the letter’s terminology explicitly discounted the possibility that members of the Muslim community might already be Australian. The idea of the ‘Muslim takeover’ (Wannet 19 December 2007, p. 8) was also reinforced by Michael, who wrote: “Come on, Camden, we can’t let them in” (2 July 2008, p. 2), and Bond, who speculated about “having Muslims infiltrate the area” (10 December 2008, p. 10).

One submission that was made to Camden Council in opposition to the proposed school was re-published in part in the *Camden Advertiser*, and this unnamed author worried that:

> Having the Islamic school here will cause the Islamic community to move here and cause problems within the community such as racism. For example Islamic backgrounds and those associated have no respect for other cultures. We don’t want to feel like we can’t go out in Camden at night just in case there are fights at the pubs, muggings, rapes, robberies and drive-bys (in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3).

This letter writer speculated about absurd and extreme consequences that they saw stemming from a Muslim culture being attracted to the area. These alleged social threats of an emerging Muslim community represented some of the most negative opinions that were shared. Many Camden residents also wrote letters which expressed the need for any Muslim community in Camden to change, in order to fit in with Australian society.

### 5.4.2. Muslims Should Fit in With ‘Us’

Many residents wrote letters where they promoted the need for the Muslim community to integrate into Australian society. It was suggested that the existing schools in Camden should be good enough for the Muslim community, and that they should not ‘isolate’ themselves by building their own facilities. For example, Bennett wrote: “If
Islamic people wish to live in Camden, we welcome them and they are welcome in our local schools. They do not need a special Islamic school” (24 October 2007, p. 2). Bennett’s letter went on to suggest that by having Muslim students attend existing schools, “we can learn more about Islam and your culture and you can learn more about Australians and how we live” (24 October 2007, p. 2). This idea of learning with and from each other was also put forward by Cullen:

While I am not opposed to people celebrating their own religions and cultures, they are also Australian citizens and should also celebrate the culture of the people who make up this nation and therefore in schools which house us all. This not only educates the Islamic community about the people that make up the many faces of their community, but it also helps educate the wider community in understanding the Islamic way of life and helping us all live in greater harmony and appreciation of each other’s differences (14 November 2007, p. 18).

Whilst both of these letters seemed to suggest that it would be possible for the Muslim community to exist peacefully within the Camden community, they also implied that this was only likely to happen if the Muslim students integrated into the existing schools. This was a particularly interesting point because it was stated from very early on in the Advertiser’s reports that ‘being Muslim would not be a prerequisite to attend the [proposed Islamic] school’ (Bowie 17 October 2007, p. 3). Therefore it could be argued that these letters supported integration, but only if the Muslim community was prepared to take action by assimilating.

This idea of existing local schools being ‘good enough’ was also evident in news articles. Bowie reported that it first featured on a flyer from a protest organiser, which read: ‘What’s wrong with the schools that are already established in the local area. It is ABOUT TIME Aussies stand together whatever religion or race of people’ (emphasis in original) (12 December 2007b, p. 11). Similarly, this view was also demonstrated in a reported quote from Kate McCulloch, ‘The woman who’s been dubbed the next Pauline Hanson’ (Bowie 10 June 2009a, p. 9). McCulloch proclaimed “What I have always been for is that I want the children to be able to go to our schools and give their children the chance to live our way of life like every other Australian” (in Bowie 10 June 2009a, p. 9). Although these examples flagged Muslim community changes as prerequisites for
assimilation into the existing Camden community, it could also be argued that they expressed a more empathetic view of shared learning through education.

Other letter writers however, were not so inclusive. Many wanted to place conditions on the acceptance of a Muslim community in Camden, for example, “If Muslims want to live in harmony with all Australians, maybe they should demonstrate this by cutting ties with the world’s troublemakers” (Doyle 2 April 2008, p. 4) or “Yes you are welcome in Australia but please leave your narrow-minded religion at the door and get on with the new life you came here to start” (Lawton 16 January 2008, p. 2). These letters both offered a direct course of action that members of the Muslim community should take in order to ‘fit in’ with Australian society.

Part of the changes that were suggested for the Muslim community to better adapt were strongly linked to identity. Priscilla opined:

> We want to love the Muslims – but their love and friendship only goes so far. The majority, when the crunch comes – would stick by their Muslim ‘brothers’ as opposed to standing up for their next door Christian or non-Christian neighbours. Let the Muslims that have already infiltrated greater parts of the Sydney area, prove their love and acceptance of Australian culture and way of life there. Let them start doing something about their Muslim ‘brothers’ who plan terrorist attacks and carry them out. Let them expose the terrorists that are living in our country. When they have proven that they are Australians first then maybe a school in this area could be justified (24 October 2007, p. 6).

This letter has a number of powerful nuances to be explored. Firstly, the initial statement was prefaced with the disclaimer, “We want to love the Muslims – but” (Priscilla 24 October 2007, p. 6), after which followed a number of ‘problems’ with the Muslim community, and ways ‘they’ should change in order for them to prove themselves to ‘us’. This letter content presents strong evidence of van Dijk’s ideas about the justification of inequality, which involves “the positive representation of the own group, and the negative representation of the Others” (1993, p. 263). Firstly, Priscilla showed herself (and by extension an unidentified ‘we’) as desiring to be inclusive, therefore as trying to do the right thing, while positioning the Muslim community as being at fault and needing to change. Secondly, there were many negative
and generalized stereotypes about Muslim people embedded in this letter, including the claim that they’d ‘infiltrated’ parts of Western Sydney, and somehow had knowledge of terrorists living in Australia. Finally, Priscilla argued that the Muslim community members should set aside their Muslim identity and instead prove that they were ‘Australians first’. The kind of ignorance demonstrated through this letter-writer’s ill-informed statements was in contrast to what more adequately informed individuals understand about the complexities of identity formation (Wodak 2012; De Fina 2011). The comments are also representative of Said’s view that Orientalism has become such a strong focal point of identity for people from the West to apply to Arab and Muslim people, that “the attribute of being oriental [overrides] any countervailing instance” (Said 2003, p. 231). In this regard, it could be argued that Priscilla advocated for a stereotypically problematized Muslim community to change, so as to have any chance of being accepted or able to identify as Australians.

5.4.3. **Incompatibility**

Some Camdenites wrote Letters to the Editor which went far beyond asking the Muslim community to change some aspects of themselves and assimilate into Australian culture; instead they argued that Islam and Australia were simply incompatible. An anonymous resident offered: “It all looks good in theory, having a multi-cultural peaceful town and I wish it worked that way, I do. But be realistic: it hasn’t worked in other towns so what makes Camden any different?” (Anon 24 October 2007, p. 6). In this letter the idea of problematic Muslim communities in other suburbs and towns was repeated. Lugano suggested that if the school development was approved “they [would] take over the Macarthur district in the years to come. Look at Lakemba, Auburn, Lidcombe and Bankstown” (30 January 2008, p. 10). These same suburbs were also mentioned by Cawood, who warned that, “Lakemba, Punchbowl, Bankstown, Auburn, Cabramatta, Villawood, Marrickville and Campsie once had an Australian feel to them. Now do you think they have the same feel? Certain parts of these suburbs have become no-go zones, residents are afraid to walk the streets because of the risk of being abused or attacked” (2 April 2008, p. 24). Other suburbs generically labeled “Muslim suburbs” were also deemed to be “dangerous and discriminatory to non-Muslims” (It’s our town 2 July 2008, p. 2). Combined, these letters promoted a warning of what would potentially
happen if the Muslim community of Camden was allowed to build a school and continued to grow. They also strongly suggested that the consequences of this would be extremely negative. Expanding on these notions of risk Gunn suggested that community opponents to the school were “being treated as a ‘soft touch’ and that’s why the Quranic Society pursues extending its tentacles into our country” (29 April 2009, p. 6). The metaphor of the tentacles here framed Islam as a monster or an alien, attempting to invade or infiltrate Australian society at a national and local level. Significantly, the contradiction exposed here between the alleged large numbers of Muslim ‘invaders’ and the previously discussed alleged lack of Muslims in Camden demonstrated Bhabha’s idea of “the minority subject somewhere between the too visible and the not visible enough” (emphasis in original) (1996, p. 56). As such it could be argued that any presumed ‘Other’ would never able to appease the dominant community.

Some contributions argued that the problem with the Muslim community was based on their wishes to “segregate themselves and their children from all Australian values and try to build a new world in one that has already been established for over 200 years” (Butterfly 16 January 2008, p. 2). This web comment suggested the Muslim community in Camden would try to change the existing way of life in the township. Cawood also warned against this, writing: “I am not racist, but don’t come into town and try to change the face of it. Tolerance works both ways. If I wanted to go to the country that you emigrated from and open a Hooters restaurant or Ettamogah Pub, what would your leader say?” (2 April 2008, p. 24). These hyper-localised Western values were sarcastically used here as extreme examples, however the idea of a lack of reciprocal demands was also found in other letters, which similarly asked: “if you and I were allowed to settle within an Islamic country, do you think for one minute we would also be given permission to build churches and schools to promote our religion?” (Gunn 23 January 2008, p. 27).

The word ‘incompatible’ itself was used by a number of voices in the debate, including Pauline Hanson, who was campaigning for a Queensland seat in the Senate at the time, she called “for a moratorium on any further Muslim immigration because they are incompatible with our way of life and Camden is the hot spot for this at the moment” (Hanson in Kinsella 21 November 2007, p. 9). According to the Camden Advertiser, the Camden Council’s case in the NSW Land and Environment Court also argued that ‘the world view of the Quranic Society is “not compatible” with the Australian egalitarian
The term ‘incompatible’ being used repetitively by authoritative sources such as Pauline Hanson (individually) and the Local Council (institutionally), both very strong voices in the political arena, may have increased the attention given to their claims.

Another word that appeared frequently in Letters to the Editor in reference to the Islamic school, was ‘impose/d’. Emil Sremchevich, president of the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group, wrote a letter which argued that “In the case of the Muslim school for Camden, the minority wants to impose itself over the existing community which does not want the school here, as it is totally out of character with this township and its heritage” (7 November 2007, p. 4). In the complete letter Mr Sremchevich used the term ‘impose/d’ four times. The same term was also used by Lynn, when she argued, “the influx of such a large number of Muslims into Camden will create conflict because it is being imposed on the local community against their will” (16 January 2008, p. 12). The term impose/d was applied with obvious negative connotations of forced and unwarranted actions.

The argument of incompatibility was also made extremely clear through the republication of selected public submissions to Camden Council, opposing the Islamic school. The submissions were republished as part of a special report headlined ‘The fury’ following the decision to deny the Islamic school. Many of the chosen submissions were extremely blunt and derogatory in their language against the Muslim community. For example: “What is the point of a Muslim school in Camden? We hate them all and they hate us” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3); “by encouraging Muslims to live in Camden you will bring trouble and increased crime to our peaceful and beautiful neighbourhood” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3); “Muslims are not welcome here or anywhere else in Australia” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3); and “No Muslim school or anything else related to Muslims. Send them home” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3). Many of the submissions specifically identified the religion of the school proponents as the reason that the school should be denied, and argued “By all means build another school, just not a Muslim one” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3). Other submission writers suggested consequential social problems such as “constant bashings/stabbings...
and murders to take place in the beloved Camden” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3), and warned of more Islamic developments to follow:

Is this going to be the way ahead for Muslims in the Camden community? Firstly a Muslim school, then the mosque, followed by a Muslim hospital, a Muslim shopping complex and not forgetting a Muslim local MP. We have no objection to a non-Muslim school being built on Burragorang Road (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3).

Again, this submission writer explicitly objected to the religion of the school proponents, but did not appear to be concerned about planning issues. One of the more provocative and extreme submissions stated: “Do the Muslims come to Australia to be Australians? No. They come to Australia as forward troops of an eventual occupation” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3). This contribution went beyond accusations of incompatibility or a suspected unwillingness to integrate, and used military terminology to propose an invasion and takeover. It could be argued that this statement was so outrageous, that it was published by the Advertiser in order to display the extreme lengths that some of the submission writers went to in order to oppose the school22.

5.4.4. Christianity vs. Islam

Part of the argument around issues of ‘incompatibility’ was extended to the idea of a ‘battle’ between Christianity and Islam. The first instance where this occurred was when school opponents put a small wooden cross with writing on it on the actual site of the proposed school. The Camden Advertiser reported that:

On the front of the cross someone wrote: ‘David and Goliath. The battle is won. This is the King of Kings’ Land. Prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare (Eph 6:18).’ On the back of the cross were the words:

22 It is important to note that whilst residents who write submissions to Camden Council are required to include their full name and address, they can also request to have any identifying information withheld in the event of their submission being released to the public (Camden Council 2016b, n.p.). As such, it is not possible to determine if the Camden Advertiser made a decision to not publish the names of residents who had written these highly inflammatory submissions against the school proposal, or whether this information was simply not available to the journalists for attribution to be made.
‘When the enemy comes in like a flood the spirit of the Lord will lift up like a flag in victory (Ish 59:19)’ (Kinsella 14 November 2007b, p. 19).

The choice of Bible passages was very telling here, particularly with them consisting of war metaphors, and ideas about winning and losing and enemies. As these passages from the Bible were written on a cross (a very potent material symbol of Christianity) placed at the land site for the proposed school, it could be extrapolated that the ‘war’ or ‘battle’ to be had was between Islam and Christianity. The physical placement of the cross could also be interpreted as an attempt to claim territory, akin to ‘throwing down the gauntlet’ in readiness for the battle ahead.

Attempts were also made to ground a perception of Islam/Christianity incompatibility in Australia’s “Christian heritage that has stood us well for over 200 years” (Bond 19 December 2007, p. 8). This notion was explicit in Letters to the Editor as well as in news articles. For example, Pauline Hanson was quoted as saying “Every school in Australia is Christian apart from the Islamic schools… I have no understanding of what they teach in an Islamic school. Do you? If they’re teaching kids the Koran, then they’re teaching the kids to oppose us, because they think that Christians are infidels” (in Kinsella 21 November 2007, p. 9). Although it was later clarified by the vice-president of the Quranic Society, Issam Obeid, that “the school is going to go through the normal Board of Studies curriculum” (in Bowie 4 June 2008c, p. 9), Hanson continued to cite an irreconcilable difference between Muslims and Christians as a basis for denying the school. Along similar lines, Camden resident Bond wrote that Muslims were “not wanted here” (2 July 2008, p. 15), because “Australian laws, morals, values, culture and traditions do not support having more than one wife… If you want more than one wife, go back to your own country” (2 July 2008, p. 15). By referencing the very broad pool of ‘Australian laws, morals, values, culture and traditions’ against one seemingly randomly selected stereotype of Islam, it could be argued that Bond attempted to reinforce the incompatibility of Islamic and Australian customs.

During the debate, Quranic Society spokesman, Jeremy Bingham, spoke about the commonalities between the Abrahamic traditions, and tried to emphasize these similarities, rather than differences. However, one website contributor who called themselves, ‘The Rev’ did not agree with Mr Bingham’s stance. They exclaimed:
I must admit that I am concerned about a Muslim school in the Camden area. I am concerned on a larger scale about the misinformation that is spread by people like [Quranic Society spokesman] Mr Bingley. He suggests that Christianity, Islam and Judaism operate on similar beliefs. If he had actually read the Bible and the Quran, he would realise that the two faith systems are not only vastly different but actually contradictory. (The Rev 24 October 2007, p. 6)

There is some irony here in regard to The Rev accusing ‘Mr Bingley’ of spreading misinformation, when the spokesman of the Quranic Society had been incorrectly named. However, in a wider sense, highlighting the differences between Islamic and Christian faiths could only serve to perpetuate divisions within the community, whereas the Quranic Society’s Mr Bingham’s efforts were about creating mutual understanding.

When a decision on the proposed Islamic school was looming, the leaders of local Camden churches including ‘St John’s Anglican, Camden Presbyterian and Camden Baptist churches and the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary’ (Bowie 22 April 2009, p. 1) signed a letter which argued ‘the school should be refused on the grounds of public interest and social impact’ (Bowie 22 April 2009, p. 1). This combined resistance was authorized by the joining together of the various denominations of Christianity, and by their representative clergy signing their churches’ names to the letter. However, some in the Camden community felt that this action was inappropriate. Ryan, who identified himself as a former politician, committed Christian and attendee of one of the churches signed to the letter wrote: “The Christian Church has no business making this kind of political representation…It is hypocrisy to accuse Muslims of using their religion to dominate Australia while at the same time using the secular law to snuff out their right to move around Sydney wherever they please” (29 April 2009, p. 6). Ryan appeared to be arguing that the battle being set up between Christianity and Islam, in part by the Christian churches themselves, was inappropriate and certainly unethical in the current debate about the school proposal.
5.5. Discourses of Inclusion

5.5.1. Welcoming the Muslim Community and/or School to Camden

Despite all of the examples of ‘Othering’ that occurred in the Camden Advertiser’s reporting of the Islamic school proposal, there were also many examples of a more inclusive discourse. Part of this discourse was perpetuated by politicians, in particular Camden MP Geoff Corrigan, who was quoted as saying: “I’m sure the majority of Camden residents will welcome additional educational facilities in our area as they have welcomed all other schools in rural areas” (in Bowie 10 October 2007, p. 3). In this statement Mr Corrigan attempted to detract from the school’s religious basis, to simply promote it as an educational facility. He also likened it to other schools in the area, reminding people that a precedent had been set by the other schools that should also be followed in this case, regardless of who was proposing the new school.

The editorial staff of the Camden Advertiser also took an inclusive stance on the issue of the school proposal. One editorial which was published in the same month that the school proposal was announced, was titled ‘It’s time we embraced openness’ (Senescall 17 October 2007, p. 4). In this piece, Rebecca Senescall wrote about the growing population of the Camden area and the Muslim community within Camden, and used figures and percentages to support her argument: “In the past decade, the population of the Camden area has grown by about 54 per cent…at the same time, Camden’s Islamic population grew 227 per cent” (17 October 2007, p. 4). Similarly to Mr Corrigan above, Ms Senescall also related the new school proposal to the existing private and public schools in Camden and asked:

the last time a new Catholic or Anglican or other Christian school was on the drawing board for Camden, were people writing letters full of rage, saying our area was the wrong place for such a thing? So why the fuss now? (17 October 2007, p. 4).

The final note of this editorial was very inclusive and welcoming of the Muslim community, stating, “diversity of opinion and cultures is a great thing” and warning of the pitfalls of discrimination:

If instead we decided to pretend there’s a big fence around Camden and that it’s our job to sit at the gates and control who comes in or goes out,
we’d be getting ourselves into dangerous territory. We might just find we’ve built ourselves a prison (Senescall 17 October 2007, p. 4).

The reference to ‘building ourselves a prison’, could be understood to imply that Camdenites would only be punishing themselves by not accepting people with different cultures and backgrounds, and learning from them. This view was expressed in a subsequent editorial, where she reminded readers about “what’s really important in Camden: the community spirit and unity of which we are so proud” (Senescall 7 November 2007, p. 6). Through her editorial contributions Senescall promoted unity and the benefits of inclusiveness, rather than focusing on any differences between the Muslim community and the broader Camden community.

Similar ideas of inclusivity were also evident in news reports regarding the local government process, with people such as St John’s Anglican Church minister Tony Galea being quoted as saying “A Muslim Australian has the same rights as any other Australian to put forward development plans…all Australians have the democratic right to object to developments in an appropriate manner” (in no author 21 November 2007b, p. 14). The idea of holistic community effect was also demonstrated by Quranic Society vice-president, Issam Obeid, when he spoke of the decision to reject the school as “a loss for the whole community” (in Bowie 3 June 2009, p. 1). In this statement Mr Obeid alluded to the benefits for the wider community that the Islamic school could have generated, thereby situating the Muslim community as a positive part of Camden’s community profile. Camden Councillor Fred Anderson was also concerned about negative impacts that the decision against the Islamic school might have, particularly in terms of community coherence:

Unfortunately, while this is a win, I don’t see it as a win for our community. We have a community that is very very [sic] deeply divided on an issue such as this. And what it means is that we will have to work doubly hard to make certain that if this sort of issue raises its head again, we will not have a group of people who have been marginalised as much as the Muslim community has been (Anderson in Bowie 17 June 2009, p. 16).
In a similar vein to the Quaranic Society’s vice-president, Cr Anderson lamented the marginalization of the Muslim community which had occurred during the school debate, and expressed concerns about irrevocable damage to the whole community.

Two Letters to the Editor were particularly powerful in demonstrating their support for the Muslim community and the proposed school development. The first letter captioned ‘Embarrassed by intolerance’ was a collaborative effort and was signed by 40 Camden residents (B. Shipp, Wright, E. Shipp, C. Shipp, J. Woodward, R. Woodward, S McGarrity, R. McGarrity, C. Berry, R. Berry, Bryant, Hewitt, Cullen, L. Vickery, P. Vickery, McKenzie, Russell, I.B. Turner, M. Turner, Glynn, Lee, M. McRae, C. McRae, S. McRae, Gibson, Taylor, P. Vale, G. Vale, M. Vale, K. McIlveen, A. McIlveen, J. Vale, J. Edgar, H. Edgar, E. Vale, Halgh, Teal, Simpson, Mosbey & Turner 11 June 2008, p. 21). The residents wrote:

We, the undersigned residents of Camden and surrounding suburbs, deplore and dissociate ourselves from the recent intolerant and xenophobic comments made by others. We support and welcome the settlement in Camden of people from any racial and religious background. We embrace the opportunity to share our varying cultures and customs, to be enriched by the differences rather than fear them and to discover our similarities. We recognize and celebrate the many and varied contributions that have been brought to Australia by those who were born elsewhere. We endorse the focus on inclusiveness, not exclusion reflected in the community development objectives of Camden Council’s Camden 2025 Strategic Plan. We are proud of Camden’s rural colonial heritage. It was once a country town but there has been significant change and this is part of a continuum. The projected increase in population of 200,000 in Camden in the next 20 years means there will be a greater mix of races and religions which we should welcome and for which we should be prepared. We have and will continue to fight for and support a sustainable environment as a foundation for this growth. The key to a successful and cohesive community is the extent to which we can overcome intolerance and counter stereotypical views. This is the sort of community in which we want to live (B. Shipp et al. 11 June 2008, p. 21).
This formal communal ‘pledge’ in support of a diverse and multicultural Camden was an extremely powerful statement. It combined official planning discourses (through direct reference to the ‘Camden 2025 Strategic Plan’), with rural discourses to communicate direct opposition to the ‘Othering’ that had occurred elsewhere in the Advertiser’s coverage. One week after this letter’s publication another letter captioned ‘Intolerant comments deplored’ which was co-authored by 22 additional Camden residents, stated emphatically:

With the authors of last week’s letter [‘Embarrassed by intolerance’], we deplore the intolerant and xenophobic comments made by some people who suggest they speak on behalf of all residents. They do not. We welcome the settlement in Camden of people from any racial or religious backgrounds and embrace the opportunity to share our varying cultures and customs, to be enriched by the differences rather than fear them, and to celebrate the commonalities. We are proud of Camden’s rural colonial heritage, but recognize that it is becoming part of greater Sydney, as a result of state and local government’s planning. The projected increase in Camden municipality’s population in the next 20 years of 200,000 means that growth is an irreversible trend. The inevitable result will be a greater mix of races and religions, which we welcome. We have, and will continue to fight for and support a sustainable environment as the foundation for this growth. We believe the key to a successful and cohesive community is the extent to which we can overcome intolerance and counter stereotypical views. This is the sort of community in which we want to live (Roberts-Everett, Ace, Wood, C. Gerloff, J. Gerloff, S. Gerloff, P. Gerloff, M. Gerloff, Powell, Vasquez, McCausland, Mehdi, Kathem, Hutchins, Tracey, Lamberton, Smithson, Tedeski, Kelly, James, Roberts & Kelly 18 June 2008, p. 4).

The similarities between these two letters were significant. The second directly references (‘With the authors of last week’s letter [‘Embarrassed by intolerance’]’) and borrows phrases from the first, to reiterate salient points of view. For example, both demonstrated that residents ‘deplore[d]…intolerant and xenophobic comments’, and supported or welcomed people to Camden from ‘any racial and/or religious background’. Both letters conveyed that these residents ‘embrace[d] the opportunity to
share…varying cultures and customs, to be enriched by the differences rather than fear them’ and to discover and celebrate similarities. Both showed that community members were ‘proud of Camden’s rural colonial heritage’ and acknowledged that change was inevitable. Both letters featured statistics to demonstrate the expected 20 year population growth that would result in ‘a greater mix of races and religions’ to be experienced. The extensive use of terms with positive connotations including ‘support’, ‘welcome’, ‘embrace’, ‘opportunity’, ‘share’, ‘enriched’, ‘similarities’, ‘commonalities’ and ‘cohesive’, clearly enhanced the inclusive discourse that was communicated. Both of these letters may be considered strong examples of Public Political Thought (PPT), which relates to “public beliefs about appropriate political acts, actors and structures” (Abulof 2016, p. 375) and “is built by moral agents constructing and construing socio-moral order” (emphasis in original) (Abulof 2016, p. 373). Furthermore, it may be argued that the duplications enhanced their effectiveness, whereby “repetition of statements of fact or opinion, either exactly or with some variation, automatically increases the perceived validity of these statements” (Hansson 2015, p. 174).

5.5.2. Similarities Between Islam and Christianity

Although Islam and Christianity were contrasted, and seemingly pitched against each other by some residents, others chose instead to emphasize similarities between the two religions. One such example was from the Quranic Society’s spokesman, Jeremy Bingham, who ‘pointed out that Christianity, Judaism and the Muslim faith had similar beliefs and common ancestry’ (Bowie 17 October 2007, p. 3). This point was expanded on in a Letter to the Editor which stated:

Islam and Christianity come from the same root religion, Judaism. Both Islam and Christianity acknowledge Jesus Christ as a major figure – Islam as a prophet and Christ as the son of God. Both religions have version [sic] of paradise and eternal damnation. Both religions teach brotherhood and to love they neighbour, something that seems to be lacking these days. Both have had periods in history where fanatics have cause periods of terror and done untold acts. This is the Crusades under Christianity and in the present for Islam. If people wish to fear a religion and an entire group of people based on the horrible acts of a few, then
Christians too should be feared for what has been done in the name of their God (Miner 2 July 2008, p. 15).

It could be argued that by highlighting five distinct commonalities between Islam and Christianity, Miner aimed to educate readers about Islam, by including similarities between Muslims, Christians and the broader Australian community.

Many residents drew on the examples of the existing Christian schools in the area and asked: “We have Catholic schools, we have Anglican schools, we have Presbyterian schools and Greek schools and Jewish schools. Why then can we expect our Muslim population to accept a denial to their request for their own schools?” (Jen 9 January 2008, p. 2), or “I am a Catholic and went to a local Catholic high school. Were you opposed to that too?” (Szynal 24 October 2007, p. 6). Similar sentiments were also expressed by Graham (30 January 2008, p. 10), and Kelaita (19 March 2008, p. 25) in their Letters to the Editor. These writers seemed to suggest that if one treatment had been allowed for Christian schools, then the same rules should be applied for Muslim schools. A clear collective message of equity and fairness (supported by the editorials and communal letters discussed earlier) can also be identified in these individual contributions.

One particularly prominent voice in this inclusive discourse was that of Jameela Ahmed, a Camden resident who explained she had been a Muslim for 25 years, since converting from Christianity. Ms Ahmed said “our Muslim children went to local Christian schools where the same values and virtues are respected and shared…Both religions have much to offer each other once we break down the barriers” (24 October 2007, p. 6). Following this statement, Ms Ahmed tried to do exactly that, by providing a short education on some of the key Islamic beliefs:

The majority of Muslims are law abiding, God-fearing citizens who believe in the biblical prophets from Prophet Noah to Prophet Jesus and the Prophet Mohamed. Muslims have more than 10 major commandments to observe, eat the same Kosher/Halal food as Jews, and dress modestly as enjoined by all three Abrahamic faiths. Practising Muslims pray to one God – Allah – five times a day, observe the Koran’s teachings and look forward to the triumphant return of Jesus at the end of the world (Ahmed 24 October 2007, p. 6).
Through this letter, Ms Ahmed attempted to improve Camden’s community’s knowledge of Islam, by demonstrating similarities with Christian religious traditions. She continued to do so, arguing that “Muslims are happy to attend Christian schools and have other denominations attend the Muslim schools as many do in Sydney and other city areas” (Ahmed 31 October 2007, p. 10). She also offered to facilitate “an open meeting…where the issues of concern could be discussed” (Ahmed 31 October 2007, p. 10).

Jameela Ahmed’s voice was heard through Letters to the Editor, and as a source in news articles. Significantly, she was also given the opportunity to write an editorial piece for the Advertiser. In this piece, she wrote about her own conversion to Islam and what she liked about its teachings:

I love its precepts on being a good neighbour, preserving nature, kindness to animals, honesty in personal and business life, paying debts promptly – and it gives women more rights, respect and power than any other religion. I can see that Muslims and Christians have so much in common (Ahmed 7 November 2007, p. 8).

In this editorial, Ms Ahmed attempted to use her dual ‘insider’ status as a former Christian and current Muslim, to speak of the positive aspects of Islam. She also defended the school against some of its critiques, including the alleged lack of Muslim people in Camden, “There are many Muslims in the area, unfortunately many do not put their religion on census forms for fear of recrimination” (Ahmed 7 November 2007, p. 8), and the students who would come from outside of Camden: “Students will be drawn from Goulburn to Liverpool as these areas are lacking a Muslim school of this size” (Ahmed 7 November 2007, p. 8). Her final message to Camden residents was: “Talk to a Muslim you see on the street. Break down the artificial barriers and you will find they are the same as you” (Ahmed 7 November 2007, p. 8).

Following the decision by Camden Council to reject the school proposal, Jameela Ahmed was positioned as a voice of authority on Islam, in a news article titled ‘Muslims seek way forward’ (Bowie 21 May 2008a, p. 6). In this article, Ms Ahmed again spoke of the similarities between Muslims and Christians and advised that ‘time, patience and communication is what is needed to heal relations between Camden’s Anglo-Saxon and Muslim populations’ (Bowie 21 May 2008a, p. 6). She also spoke of future plans to
continue to educate non-Muslims about Islam, and ‘suggested a “peace meeting” so “we could all just work together for the common gain”’ (Ahmed in Stillitano and Bowie 4 June 2008, p. 10).

Other prominent voices which promoted inclusion came from within the Christian clergy. Father Chris Riley, a Catholic Priest well known for his work with his charity Youth Off the Streets, became involved in the debate when he was invited to speak at the Camden Australia Day celebrations in 2008. Bowie reported ‘Father Chris Riley used his Australia Day address to challenge Camden residents to accept everyone as their brother or sister and to forget notions of race’ (30 January 2008, p. 3).

Interestingly, despite Fr Riley’s positive Australia Day message, the message conveyed through the report’s headline ‘Riley slams Nile’ (Bowie 30 January 2008, p. 3) seemed incongruent with the priest’s theme of inclusivity. The headline was in reference to Fr Riley’s statement that he was “outraged that Fred Nile would dare to come into this community and…outraged that any minister of religion [could] use the Bible to divide anything” (in Bowie 30 January 2008, p. 3) Prior to Father Riley’s exclamations there were many Letters to the Editor which also disagreed with the ideas and actions of Reverend Fred Nile, of the Christian Democratic Party, and some of these letters were again from within the Christian clergy. For example, Pearson addressed Rev Nile directly “as a colleague of yours in ministry” (19 December 2007, p. 2), and offered “to dialogue with [him] about how [his] faith may be enriched rather than threatened by faithful Islamic people” (19 December 2007, p. 2).

Another such letter was written by Anne Fairbairn, a member of the Order of Australia23. She wrote: “I feel it is imperative to ask if the Christian Democratic Party is truly Christian” (9 January 2008, p. 16), as “The Christian Democratic Party leader, the Rev Fred Nile, the key speaker at the Camden meetings, argued that he opposed the school not because it would cause traffic problems but because in his view Islam opposes Christianity” (9 January 2008, p. 16). Here Ms Fairbairn juxtaposed an acceptable critique of the school proposal with the personal vendetta of Rev Nile. She made another juxtaposition, when she stated “Mother Teresa, with whom I spent time in Baghdad in 1991, just after the First Gulf War, always espoused truly Christian ideals”

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23 The Order of Australia is the most prestigious national recognition of outstanding Australians. Anne Fairbairn became a member of the Order of Australia in 1998 “for service to Australian literature as a poet and to international relations, particularly between Australia and the Middle East through translations of poetry and cultural exchanges” (AusInfo 1998, p. 3).
(Fairbairn AM 9 January 2008, p. 16). This statement, considered within the larger context of the letter, clearly implied that Mother Teresa was a person of genuine Christian ideals, and that in comparison Fred Nile’s Christian values were severely lacking. A direct comparison was then made between the two figures, when Ms Fairbairn reflected:

She [Mother Teresa] was extremely happy to care for children of many different faiths, including Muslim (both Shi’ites and Sunnis)…She would always say ‘We are all God’s children so we must strive together to serve one another with love, forgiveness and compassion’. Surely her views and beliefs are more to be respected than those of the Rev Fred Nile (9 January 2008, p. 16).

Anne Fairbairn’s personal experiences with Mother Teresa, (a high-profile Christian nun who had first hand experiences with diverse Muslim groups and many other persons of faith), combined with her membership of the Order of Australia (because of her work in literature and international relations), validated her negative opinions about Reverend Nile.

5.5.3. Projects to Facilitate Inclusion/ Multiculturalism

Following the decision by Camden Council to reject the Islamic school proposal, there were a number of projects suggested for and implemented in Camden in reaction to the controversy that the development application had generated. One such program was initiated by the Federal Government, which gave ‘Camden Council $192,000 to use to promote “community cohesion”. The council applied for the funding during the height of debate over the Islamic school proposal’ (Bowie 10 December 2008a, p. 8). An earlier 2006 government funded program of this type was ‘Carmony’ which had been designed to promote ‘awareness of different cultures in the Camden area’ (Bowie 11 June 2008, p. 8) and provided a precedent for such initiatives. One of the people involved in instigating the 2006 Carmony program, Ruth Lesmana emphasized, “we’ve got to try and understand the differences as well as similarities that we have” (in Bowie 11 June 2008, p. 8). These ideas of mutual understanding and acceptance emerged as strong themes in the Camden Advertiser’s reporting after the school’s refusal, and, following the announcement of the Federal Government grant, the Advertiser also ran a

There were also follow up news stories about how the government grant was being used, for example, to celebrate Harmony Day24 in March 2009. In an article headlined ‘Celebrate diversity’ Bowie reported that a special event, “Harmony at Twilight” was the brain child of the Interfaith Working Party of the council’s Cohesive Communities Advisory Group. It [would] bring people of all faiths together to share a meal, make crafts and listen to entertainment’ (18 March 2009, p. 1). The official implementation of the Interfaith Working Party (as part of the Cohesive Communities Advisory Group linked to Camden Council) authoritatively endorsed these activities and legitimized the event as an “anti-racism project” (Nelson 2013, p. 105). Nelson argues these kinds of activities play “an important role in redefining Australia’s national identity as culturally diverse” (2013, p. 105). Accompanying the news article was an image of the Working Party, including Jameela Ahmed who was an active voice throughout the school debate (see Figure 3).

![Celebrate diversity](image)

Figure 3: The Camden Advertiser, 18 March 2009, p. 1

Ms Ahmed’s inclusion in this photo indicated that the Muslim community was directly involved with organizing the Harmony Day celebrations.

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24 Harmony Day is an Australian Federal Government initiative which began in 1999 and is designed to celebrate Australia’s cultural diversity, and promote inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging (Australian Government Department of Social Services 2016, n.p.).
The reaction from the community, as expressed in Letters to the Editor, was mixed. Some were unsure of what to make of the festivities:

Why did I attend Harmony Day in Camden? Out of curiosity. Curiosity about what? Harmony Day, the farm, the cultures and where people had travelled from to attend and I was hoping to catch up with local people. Did I enjoy it? Yes. What did I leave thinking? Absolute bewilderment. Did Harmony Day achieve its purpose? I’m still thinking about it (Yewen 1 April 2009, p. 2).

Others were more positive, and congratulated the Council for running an event to “celebrate the diversity in our community” (Taylor 1 April 2009, p. 2), and “for taking steps to encourage the seamless integration of these diverse peoples” (Kelly 8 April 2009, p. 4) into the Camden community.

### 5.6. Self-Referential Discourses

The self-referential discourses allowed the *Camden Advertiser* to reflect on and assess its own reportage of the proposed Islamic school, as well as its relationship with the local Camden community. Exploring this relationship is valuable because “community is an important framing concept: the news media sees itself in relationship to the community they cover, as responsive and responsible, as a friend and as an authority” (Cotter 2010, p. 30). This dual role which local media try to serve can be contradictory, because:

News organisations try to maintain a voice of authority in terms of story coverage, position within the larger community, and stance in relation to news delivery – which is where maintaining credibility comes in. At the same time they actively try to function as the ‘voice of community’, developing a one-to-one de-hierarchised, approachable, more symmetrical relationship (Cotter 2010, p. 58).

Trying to juggle the roles of friend and advocate, as well as authoritative informer can be difficult, and therefore invites further examination.
5.6.1. The Camden Advertiser’s Self-Promotion

The Camden Advertiser was highly self-referential and self-promotional in its coverage of the proposed Islamic school debate, and often included its publication title in news articles and thereby appeared to have an exclusive role in reporting on particular issues. For example, ‘Camden MP Geoff Corrigan has told the Advertiser…’ (Bowie 26 September 2007, p. 10), ‘Mr Obeid told the Advertiser’ (Stringa 6 February 2008a, p. 1), and ‘as the Advertiser was first to report on its website last week…’ (no author 3 September 2008a, p. 7). In another example, when the school was first proposed the Advertiser seemed to have gained early access to the school’s design, as reporter Alicia Bowie wrote: ‘Plans seen by the Advertiser show…’ (10 October 2007, p. 3) and explained ‘the plans will be on public display from Wednesday, October 17 to Wednesday, November 14’ (10 October 2007, p. 3). By highlighting the apparent exclusive access to the school plans, it could be argued that the Advertiser attempted to position itself as the authority on the school proposal in order to strengthen ties to the local community, potentially ensuring that the community would continue to source the Advertiser for the most up-to-date information. This self-referential framing (Boydstun & Glazier 2013) tactic in news reports, in the fashion of ‘… told the Advertiser’ or ‘the Advertiser understands …’ was used by the newspaper on a further 39 occasions which likely indicated that the editors and/or journalists from the newspaper perceived the idea of exclusivity to have a strong impact on readers. The importance of the exclusive is supported by Lim’s assertion that “the news environment is an intensively competitive market place where every news medium is eager to break a story first and fast” (2011, p. 227).

The idea of the ‘exclusive’ was used more explicitly on occasions where stories were labelled ‘Exclusive by Alicia Bowie’ (Bowie 10 December 2008a, p. 8), or where the word exclusive appeared in the lead: ‘In this exclusive interview with the Advertiser, the society’s vice-president offers some answers’ (Stringa 6 February 2008a, p. 1). When the Advertiser published an overview of the debate headlined ‘What happened’ (no author 3 June 2009a, p 1), the first reported entry was: ‘October 10, 2007 – The Advertiser breaks news of the Quranic Society’s plans for an Islamic school it wants to call Camden College’ (no author 3 June 2009a, p. 1). This phrasing, positioned the Advertiser as having the exclusive on the story, and also as having ‘scooped’ all other media sources in bringing it to the community first.
The *Camden Advertiser* also frequently invited interaction with the Camden community, and when readers did write Letters to the Editor, they were recognised by the newspaper editors for their contributions through acknowledgements such as: ‘and thanks to those who wrote’ (Senescall 9 April 2008, p. 4). Beyond the traditional Letters to the Editor published in print, the *Advertiser* website was also promoted as an open forum for residents to be included in the school debate. Some articles ended with invitations such as ‘Have your say: camdenadvertiser.com.au’ (Bowie 23 January 2008a, p. 11). On other occasions, readers were indirectly invited to the website in order to read comments from other community members through statements such as:

> Nearly 200 comments have been left at camdenadvertiser.com.au – both for and against the refusal (Bowie 4 June 2008d, p. 10);

> As news broke on camdenadvertiser.com.au last week of plans for a new Catholic school in Camden – and the Quranic Society’s court fight for its Islamic school – readers were quick to respond (no author 3 September 2008, p. 2)\(^{25}\); and

> An excursion a group of Camden High School students made to an Islamic school last month has continued to generate discussion amongst readers of camdenadvertiser.com.au this week (no author 24 September 2008, p. 4)\(^{26}\).

In this way, it could be argued that the *Camden Advertiser* did not only open up a dialogue between itself and the local Camden community, but it also provided a forum for the community to discuss the Islamic school proposal with each other. This allowed more comments (than were able to be republished in the newspaper as Letters to the Editor) to be viewed on the website, making the local points of view more accessible to a wider group of people. The website was also used to allow readers to access more in-depth information, such as in the lead up to Camden Council’s decision when readers were directed to the *Camden Advertiser* website:

> The *Camden Advertiser* broke the story of the Islamic school application and will be there until the end. Keep an eye on our website in the coming days for breaking news in the lead-up to the decision. Watch our website

\(^{25}\) This complete text was a caption leading into three Letters to the Editor
\(^{26}\) This complete text was a caption leading into six Letters to the Editor
on Tuesday night for live updates from the council meeting (no author 21 May 2008a, p. 1).

Whilst offering people the most up to date information before the Advertiser went to print, this statement also served to remind readers of the integral role that the newspaper played in bringing the story to light, and ‘scooping’ other sources, as already discussed. It therefore aimed to position the Camden Advertiser as the best source of knowledge for Camdenites regarding the Islamic school proposal.

5.6.2. The Camden Advertiser’s Positive Self-References

The day after the Camden Council had made the decision to reject the Islamic school, Rebecca Senescall, editor of the Camden Advertiser wrote an editorial titled ‘We’re holding the town’s mirror’ (28 May 2008, p. 4). In this piece, Senescall highlighted the importance of the Islamic school debate, and discussed the role of the Camden Advertiser within that debate. Firstly, she reviewed the website poll run by the Advertiser, ‘asking readers to vote on whether they thought the decision on the proposed Islamic school was the biggest decision our councillors have faced. So far, most have voted yes’ (Senescall 28 May 2008, p. 4). In discussing this poll, Senescall displayed the reciprocal relationship between the newspaper and its community, and also emphasized the powerful public discourses circulating about the proposed school, by proclaiming: ‘the fiery reaction to the proposal has meant that it has dominated the pages of our newspaper and website for the past eight months’ (28 May 2008 p. 4). By making deliberate reference to the newspaper’s extensive coverage of the school debate Senescall also conveyed that the Advertiser’s staff valued its significance, and further reinforcing its specific reporting agenda:

We actively sought to change the unknown to the known. We let debate rage in our letters page and in blog discussions on our website, drawing hundreds of participants. We checked out every rumour and reported back on what we found. We invited representatives of the myriad voices in the argument to explain their stances. We sought out those proposing the school and put the questions and accusations of our readers to them for responses. This paper has never labelled Camden racist or bigoted. Despite that, we received threats and insults from people lacking the
courage to put their names to their letters and we have been the target of a behind-the-scenes campaign from a couple of individuals unwilling to accept that we would not let them control the way we report the news. They expect us to back down. For the sake of our readers, we will not (Senescall 28 May 2008, p. 4).

Through this self-referential account Senescall argued that although the Advertiser’s coverage of the proposed school may not have always been popular, it had functioned in those ways to serve its community equitably. She seemed to portray the newspaper as having the town’s best interests at heart. It was also implied that the Advertiser wanted to help the town grow and advance, with Senescall stating:

It is our job to be the mirror reflecting the activities, the views, the hopes of the people who live here…At times, a glance in the mirror can be discomforting but that doesn’t make it any less valuable. It’s the only way Camden can make up its own mind about whether it likes what it sees and what it should do about it (28 May 2008, p. 4).

There was praise from some members of the community for the coverage the Camden Advertiser provided on the proposed Islamic school debate which was expressed through Letters to the Editor. Marasco wrote: “Congratulations to your staff for their conduct regarding the Muslim school. Your coverage was unbiased, professional, efficient and informing all along” (11 June 2008, p. 20). However this was not an opinion shared by all. In July 2008, an anonymous flyer was produced which claimed that the story published by the Advertiser ‘the day after the Islamic school decision – containing excerpts from some of the 3042 public objections to the school – did not represent what was on the file’ (Senescall 9 July 2008, p. 4). The Advertiser, through editor Rebecca Senescall, was quite defensive in its response to these accusations:

We have no objection to people critiquing our work. It’s healthy for anyone to scrutinize what they hear, no matter who says it. In that spirit, we encourage anyone who is interested to delve below the surface if the whispering campaign reaches them. Devote a day to reading the submission at the council for yourself. Go back through the 116 pages of Advertiser coverage of the Islamic school issue. See if you can find anywhere that the paper has labeled the town racist. See whether the
views of one side or the other of the school debate appear to have been prevented from being aired in the letters and stories. Inspect the hundreds of comments on our website’s blogs. Our coverage far surpassed that of any other media organisation (Senescall 9 July 2008, p. 4).

In this editorial, Senescall put the reputation of the Advertiser on the line by challenging readers to scrutinize its reporting on the Islamic school proposal, and explicitly declared its coverage to be the best of all media organisations. This editorial piece was accompanied by an image of four previous Advertiser front pages regarding the Islamic school (see Figure 4).

![Figure 4: The Camden Advertiser, 9 July 2008, p. 5](image)

These images demonstrated ‘a small selection’ of the Advertiser’s coverage on the school proposal, and served as a visual reminder of some of the key moments of the coverage. This repetition could have served to reinforce to the reader the rigorous efforts of the newspaper in reporting on the Islamic development.

Following on from the above mentioned flyer, the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group made an official complaint about the Advertiser’s coverage: ‘[Andrew] Wannet, a representative of the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group, which was formed to protest against the school, complained that the Advertiser has not displayed balance and fairness in its reporting on the issue and that the newspaper had misrepresented the submissions to the council’ (no author 17 September 2008a, p. 3). However, in September 2008 Wannet’s claim was challenged, when the Advertiser devoted a significant amount of space to the finding by the Australian Press Council that the coverage had indeed been ‘Fair and balanced’ (Australian Press Council 17 September 2008, p. 12). In fact, the newspaper reprinted the council’s adjudication in full, which
had found that ‘[The proposal] was extensively covered by the local media including the *Camden Advertiser*, the *Advertiser*’s own internet blog section and other internet sites’ (Australian Press Council 17 September 2008, p. 12). In response to Mr Wannet’s first complaint, that the *Advertiser* had not sought comment from the CMRG on a story about the Quranic Society’s views following public concerns relative to the school, and that it chose not to publish the CMRG’s media release in response, the APC found that:

The *Advertiser* said it had run many stories and letters about the issue including some from Mr Wannet and other members of the residents group and that Mr Wannet had posted many blog comments under various names on its website and submitted letters to the editor under false names. A further decision on what is newsworthy is the editorial judgement of the paper and it is under no obligation to print every letter or opinion it receives on an issue (Australian Press Council 17 September 2008, p. 12).

The second complaint was in regards to an article following the council’s decision to reject the school, in which the *Advertiser* reported that ‘the vast majority of the original submissions objected to the school on religious grounds and gave excerpts from some of them’ (Australian Press Council 17 September 2008, p. 12). The complaint also referred to ‘a comment attached to a letter also published on June 4 complaining about the paper’s coverage, an acting editor’s note said the excerpts represented about 99 per cent of the submissions that were received’ (Australian Press Council 17 September 2008, p. 12). In relation to this complaint the Press Council found:

…the interpretation of what is an objection on religious grounds is blurred as Camden Council officers found many of the submissions were based on a number of factors such as religion, planning, traffic, environment or other issues and would overlap into several categories. By selectively choosing some of the most outspoken excerpts based on religious grounds for publication after the council’s decision, the *Advertiser* could be accused of singling out one divisive theme from multiple concerns. In any case, the “99 per cent” comment is clearly an exaggeration (Australian Press Council 17 September 2008, p. 12).
Although the APC criticised the *Advertiser* for inflating figures to suit its purposes, overall they found that ‘this one piece of hyperbole is not sufficient to suggest the overall coverage of the debate was unfair…The Press Council finds the paper gave fair and balanced coverage to all views on a very controversial and divisive issue’ (Australian Press Council 17 September 2008, p. 12). The *Advertiser*’s choice to publish the APC’s decision in full could be seen to contribute to the open dialogic relationship that staff sought to maintain with the local community. Accompanying the article headlined ‘*Fair and balanced, press council finds*’ was an image of two previous front pages about which complaints had been made (see Figure 5).

![Image of front pages](image)

**Figure 5: The Camden Advertiser, 17 September 2008, p. 12**

By reprinting this content the *Advertiser* provided a direct visual reference for readers to recall which articles were being critiqued. It could be argued that these visual discourses also served as a reinforcement of the newspaper’s original content, and that in republishing it the *Advertiser* continued to stand by its coverage.

Following the decision by the Australian Press Council that criticism of the *Advertiser* was largely unfounded, the newspaper published another article headlined ‘*Muslim school saga a winner*’ which could definitely be interpreted as an attempt to boost the community’s trust in its reporting. The article stated:

> Your local newspaper team has won an award for outstanding journalism. The *Camden Advertiser* team of deputy editor Alicia Bowie and editor Rebecca Senescall were recognized at the annual Fairfax Community Newspaper awards night last week. The awards cover 16 newspapers across Sydney. The pair won the ‘Best News Story’ award
for their coverage of Camden Council’s decision to reject the application for an Islamic school in Camden. The judges said a divided Camden community had come under national scrutiny when the application for the school was lodged. “Under pressure from both sides of the debate, Alicia and Rebecca remained true to their journalistic ethics, presenting balanced, in-depth and insightful reporting,” the judges said (no author 26 November 2008, p. 9).

This self-promoting article was accompanied by an image of one of the front pages from the coverage (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: The Camden Advertiser, 26 November 2008, p. 9

The combination of the recycled image (which had now been republished three times) and the new textual information could have served to reinforce to the community that the Advertiser was considered a quality community publication. Additionally, during the NSW Land and Environment Court’s proceedings references to the Advertiser’s peer industry award had also been made in that formal context, to continue to remind people of the high quality news service. For example:

The Advertiser’s award-winning coverage of the debate continues, with reporter Alicia Bowie bringing readers updates from each day in court. Don’t miss breaking news on our website, starting on Tuesday. And read more of the story in the next two week’s issues (emphasis added) (no author 15 April 2009, p. 1).

This self-referential evaluative discourse reflected back to the award given to Bowie, Senescall, and the Advertiser more generally, in order to remind readers that their local newspaper was of a very high standard and a trusted “device for interpreting the world
and offering this evaluation to others” (Ghavamnia and Dastjerdi 2013, p. 449). Additionally, this media discourse also directed readers to the Advertiser’s website and its next available print edition. As such, it also functioned systematically to encourage readers to return to the Advertiser for valid information about the Islamic school development debate.

5.6.3. The Camden Advertiser’s Negative Self-References

The Camden Advertiser was open with sharing readers’ criticisms of it and this was partially achieved through publishing negative or critical Letters to the Editor. One such letter captioned ‘I am not a racist, I just fear the unknown’ read:

I read Rebecca Senscall’s Editor’s View (It’s time we embraced openness, October 17), where she stated that the number of people of Islamic faith had risen by 227 per cent. These statistics sound impressive until you look at the real figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In 1996 there were 124 people of Islamic faith in the Camden Local Government Area and in 2007 there were 397 (Stewart 24 October 2007, p. 6).

The initial editorial article had been technically accurate in its statistical representation. However, by publishing this response to it, the Advertiser enabled Stewart to question the integrity of the editor’s percentages, so that its transparency and commitment to the local community was made apparent.

The Advertiser was also candid and direct when powerful sources would not speak to its team, despite any potential negative effects this may have had on its perceived position of authority. For example, it was reported on numerous occasions that Macarthur MP Pat Farmer had refused to comment on the proposed school development to the Camden Advertiser, but had spoken to other media outlets (Kinsella 7 November 2007a, p. 8; Kinsella 28 November 2007, p. 9; Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9). By discussing Mr Farmer’s refusal to comment on the proposal on three different occasions, it could be argued that these reports were an attempt to denigrate Mr Farmer for his lack of engagement with the local newspaper, and by extension, the local community. Other occasions when different sources had declined to comment to the Advertiser had also
been reported. For instance, Kinsella wrote in 2007, that the spokesperson for the Quranic Society Jeremy Bingham, ‘did not respond to the Advertiser’s calls yesterday, but in an interview with ABC radio…’ (7 November 2007a, p. 8) and in 2008, Bowie stated that ‘the Prime Minister’s office did not respond to the Advertiser’s inquiries’ (Bowie 21 May 2008c, p. 9). Through these statements, the Advertiser was able to convey to its readership that it had reached out to these individuals, demonstrating its rigorous journalistic practice.

In contrast to voices that were rarely heard throughout the Islamic school debate, the president of the Camden/Macarthur Residents Group, Emil Sremchevich, had an exceptionally strong representation throughout the Advertiser’s various news genres. He had 12 Letters to the Editor published, and was quoted four times in news reports. This prominent voice was sustained regardless of the fact that Mr Sremchevich was quite critical of the Advertiser’s coverage. For example, in a letter captioned ‘We didn’t ask for it’ he wrote “I need to correct last week’s story about the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group involvement with Allen Powell. The group did not ask Allen Powell for a flora and fauna assessment” (30 January 2008, p. 10). When the Advertiser chose to continue publishing Mr Sremchevich’s letters, he in turn continued to find fault with its treatment of said letters. For example:

Thank you for publishing my letter in the paper last week. I am disappointed that through the headline ‘We need a referendum to be rid of this Muslim school’ you have created an incorrect impression of what I was trying to say. My point was very simply – that is, to allow citizens of Camden to make the decision instead of the politicians. Poor decisions by politicians in the past have had drastic effects on communities in general. Via your headline, you have shown lack of understanding of an important issue for the residents of Camden and demonstrated exactly my point: lack of trust in our politicians making the right decisions for us and newspapers sensationalising sensitive issues (Sremchevich 31 October 2007, p. 10).

By being open to sharing Mr Sremchevich’s criticisms, the Advertiser could have been attempting to avoid any claims of censorship or bias, and instead be perceived as representing a diverse array of views from the Camden community.
Interestingly, on numerous occasions Mr Sremchevich actually accused the *Advertiser* of content bias arguing “the fact that the majority of people in the Camden area oppose this proposal is totally ignored by the *Advertiser* and the proponents” (16 April 2008, p. 19), and claiming that:

You encourage proponents of the Muslim school in Camden to come forth and express their point of view [Bowie’s Voice, January 9], yet you hardly acknowledge the overwhelming opposition to the proposal and ignore the reason why…Instead of finding out why they do [object] (especially for this development) and finding out who is behind it, how it is financed and what effect it will have on the local community, you keep on about religious intolerance and differences (Sremchevich 16 January 2008, p. 12).

Mr Sremchevich was highly critical of what he perceived to be the “little scrutiny by the *Advertiser* in reference to the proposed school’s impact on Camden’s environment” (12 December 2007, p. 20), and also argued that “the media ha[d] latched on to the issue of religious intolerance as the main driving force and point of our protest” (Sremchevich 12 December 2007, p. 20) and that this focus was inaccurate. Furthermore, the CMRG’s president was not only disparaging of the local newspaper, but of the wider media, various politicians, and other Camdenites also, as evidenced in the following letter that was captioned ‘*We’re entitled to speak out*’:

If approved it [the Islamic school] will have the most profound effect on the Camden community in terms of social development, environmental impact and cultural differences and for you not to acknowledge that most residents overwhelmingly oppose this development just shows what I have been trying to say in the last month or so and that is, that the media, politicians and sitting-on-the-fence types have a very narrow concept of reality, especially when a development of this importance hits them in the face. Camden residents do have the right to vote yes or no for such a major change and for governments, media and others not to recognize that shows their lack of understanding of our democratic principles and values (Sremchevich 19 December 2007, p. 2).
Contrastingly, it may be argued that Mr Sremchevich’s extensive criticisms, as communicated through his published Letters to the Editor, actually represented the Advertiser’s commitment to being the ‘voice’ of Camden’s community, even when that voice was highly disparaging.

Mr Sremchevich’s and the Camden/Macarthur Residents Group’s opinions regarding the Advertiser’s media discourse, were also reinforced by several other community members’ letters. In one letter captioned ‘Council’s biggest decision’, Henderson exclaimed:

I am writing in support of the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group. I received one of the pamphlets and agree with everything on this pamphlet. Then reading the Camden Advertiser, April 2, I was upset to see your biased editorial and the story on page 16. This group has never uttered a word of discrimination and only use the defense of ‘this country is a democracy and that the majority rules’. Why do you paint this group as doing anything so wrong? (9 April 2008, p. 17)

In this letter, Henderson appears to imply that the Advertiser had been ‘Othering’ the mosque opposition through its coverage. Henderson continued to proclaim that “the Advertiser has never written anything positive for the people opposing the Islamic school but you always put in the negative” (9 April 2008, p. 17). This accusation of biased newspaper framing and inequitable representation was made, despite the number of CMRG affiliated Letters to the Editor published – that no doubt enabled the CMRG to have a clear oppositional voice throughout the Islamic school debate.

There were some occasions when the Advertiser directly responded to critiques from the community regarding its coverage. Following the release of the public submissions made in regard to the school proposal, the newspaper published a news article titled ‘What’s behind the school vote’ that explored the heavy reliance on opposition to Islam and/or Muslims in the submissions. This subsequently inspired an acerbic Letter to the Editor which challenged:

I agree [Editor’s Views, May 28] that you’re holding a mirror, but get your reporters to look into that mirror. When you do, do you see a journalist or a sensationalist? To Alicia Bowie (page 3, May 28), the dictionary describes sensationalism as ‘in pursuit of literary stirring of
strong common emotion amongst an audience or community, calculated to cause such an effect (ie violently exciting effects)’. Alicia, did you read my letter to the council in which I addressed nine planning issues and the letters of many other residents who didn’t mention Muslim? Or did you skip over them in pursuit of the word ‘Muslim’. Yes, let us all look into this ‘mirror’. Some at the Advertiser may not like what they see (Bray 4 June 2008, p. 12).

This hostile letter blatantly accused the Advertiser’s journalists of selective and provocative reporting, so as to develop more vivid content and by extension, spread misinformation. In response an ‘Editor’s note’ was published directly under Bray’s letter and clarified:

The Advertiser stands by its article on page 3 of last week’s paper. The excerpts represented about 99 per cent of the submissions that were received. Some objected on planning grounds, but the clear majority opposed the school on religious grounds, as was pointed out in the article (Editor’s Note in Bray 4 June 2008, p. 12).

As such, it was evident that although the Camden Advertiser staff practiced inclusive journalism by publishing criticisms of its various forms of coverage, when that criticism was unfounded or potentially defamatory, the newspaper was quick to respond self-referentially to defend its journalistic integrity.

5.6.4. The Self and ‘Other’ – References to ‘Outside’ Media by the Camden Advertiser

From very early in the debate, the wider Australian media became interested and involved in the reporting of the proposed Islamic school. In November 2007, Rebecca Senescall wrote in an article headlined ‘Don’t forget what makes us great’ that ‘by yesterday afternoon the whole of Sydney would have heard of the angst in Camden over the school proposal, thanks to the eager attention of the metropolitan media’ (7 November 2007, p. 6). Some commentators, such as Julianne Horsman, the afternoon news reader at local Macarthur radio station C91.3FM, were diplomatic in their critical assessment of the broader media coverage. For example, Ms Horsman stated in her
‘Reader of the Week’ profile that “it was interesting to see how we covered it [the Muslim school debate] compared with the Sydney media” (1 April 2009, p. 2). Others however were more blatant in their evaluation, arguing that the ‘international and domestic media attention’ (no author 4 June 2008a, p. 1) had bought ‘accusations of racism and xenophobia’ (no author 4 June 2008a, p. 1) to bear on Camden, after a New York Times journalist had contacted the Advertiser’s Alicia Bowie. Councillor Eva Campbell took a similar stance, noting the “less than favourable metropolitan media coverage” (in Bowie and Senescall 28 May 2008, p. 1) and its impact on the local issue. Additional comments were made about the extensive negative media attention by Kay Scarlett, family spokeswoman for the Boardman family, (a well-known family in Camden27). Ms Scarlett expressed that the family had been “deeply saddened” by media coverage that had presented Camden in a negative light’ (in no author 4 June 2008c, p. 9) and pointed out that ‘many facts related to the school’s application had been overlooked by the national media in favour of sensationalism’ (no author 4 June 2008c, p. 9). In this last statement, the national media were isolated as being the cause of the problematic news discourses, not the local media. As such, the Advertiser implied through selective use of quotations from authority figures, that it had not sensationalised its coverage. The newspaper therefore framed the external news coverage as problematic ‘Other’ and framed itself, as a credible news source for the local Camden community. This trust dynamic was reflective of Cotter’s ideas about how “the news media sees itself in relationship to the community [it covers], as responsive and responsible, as a friend and as an authority” (Cotter 2010, p. 30).

The Advertiser also published stories that accused the broader Australian media of disseminating complete misinformation. One example was in regard to reports by The Sun-Herald28 that Camden real estate agents had ‘held a secret meeting to stop Muslims buying real estate in Camden. Combined Real Estate agent Allan Sharpe said the meeting was a fabrication… Mr Sharpe said Camden real estate agents had written to the newspaper’s editor to complain’ (no author 28 November 2007, p. 9). A similar

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27 The Boardman’s are a prominent Camden family of farmers and the various family members have been involved in the Camden Show Society and the Camden Historical Society for decades (Elmerhebe 16 June 2015).

28 The Sun-Herald is the Sunday edition of The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH), also a Fairfax Media Limited publication, and is seen to be quite centrist in its editorial stance. In 2013 research from Roy Morgan showed that no single political party was supported by the majority of readers of the SMH (Roy Morgan Research Ltd 2013, p. 3).
example could be seen in June 2008, when ‘Frenchman and owner of Enzo Italian
Restaurant, Thierry Marillier…said he was misquoted in a Sydney newspaper last week
when asked for his opinion’ (Stillitano and Bowie 4 June 2008, p. 10). Although these
accusations of fabrication, misinformation and misquoting did not originate from the
Advertiser’s staff themselves, the newspaper gave authority to these claims by
publishing the reports and giving voice to members of Camden’s business community.

The Advertiser was also critical of the attention paid to the debate by ‘outside’ media in
its editorial writing. In one January 2008 editorial titled ‘Fair go denied by Sydney
media’ (Senescall 30 January 2008, p. 4), Senescall wrote that ‘Last week’s Sydney
media performance in Camden would be enough to give anyone a gutful’ (30 January
2008, p. 4). She proceeded to give an overview of the unnamed TV crew who had
visited Camden, and continued to report that ‘racial tension [was] set to explode in
Camden on Australia Day’ (Senescall 30 January 2008, p. 4), despite the fact that locals
had been quoted as saying that no protests had been planned:

Still, some metropolitan media trekked to Camden on Saturday in case
there was a bit of action. No harm there. But what was most disturbing
was that when there was nothing bad to report – no punches thrown, no
screaming, no placards – Camden failed to get a mention on the news at
all. Even though one cameraman filmed for hours, taking in stories of
our top citizens, and grabbing what surely would have been excellent
footage of women from the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary singing the
traditional God Bless Australia to the tune of Waltzing Matilda at the end
of the citizenship ceremony. It appears the Sydney media is giving
Camden the Campbelltown treatment: it only rates a mention if
something has gone wrong (Senescall 30 January 2008, p. 4).

Through this editorial, it could be argued that Senescall accused the wider metropolitan
media of not covering the ‘real’ Camden. A further extension of this could be that the
metropolitan media didn’t understand Camden the way the Advertiser did. The idea that
the Advertiser’s coverage of the Islamic school debate was ‘superior’ was supported by
Alicia Bowie’s report headlined ‘Let’s hear it for the silent majority’ published five
months later. Bowie wrote ‘I was appalled that the one person who was covered in
Australian flags at last week’s council meeting was jumped on for comment by the
media. The Advertiser refrained, because we knew that the woman was not
representative of the 200-strong crowd at the civic centre’ (4 June 2008a, p. 6). In this piece, Bowie clearly portrayed the *Advertiser* as understanding the local community, and as wanting to authentically represent that community, whereas the wider media were portrayed as chasing the most provocative story, regardless of accuracy. Both of these editorials could be interpreted as judgements of superiority by the *Advertiser’s* editors, and both also applied a “deficit framework, i.e. [they are] not as good or capable as ‘we’ are” (Dervin 2015, p. 2) to differentiate.

There were also editorial critiques directed at a specific program aired on ABC TVs *Four Corners* 

> The focus of the documentary was young Muslim men: their feelings of alienation, their frustration at being stereotyped and the dangerous ground on which Australia is treading in the way it has gone about fighting terrorism. But several grabs from Camden were thrown in for good measure. There was footage from the protest meeting at Belgenny Oval last November, and from the “information night” with Fred Nile at Camden Civic Centre just before Christmas (Senescall 12 March 2008, p. 4).

Senescall’s use of quotation marks around the phrase ‘information night’ likely functioned as a distancing technique (van Dijk 2014, p. 269) which suggests that the editor disagreed with a public forum led by far-right politician Reverend Fred Nile being described as a knowledge-building opportunity. Senescall also criticized the current affairs program for not mentioning that ‘only some people from Camden are against the school, not all. Or that not everyone from this area can be represented by a woman in a hat and Drizabone claiming the people behind the school “have got terrorists amongst them”’ (Senescall 12 March 2008, p. 4). The reference to the woman in ‘Drizabone’ was in relation to Camden resident Kate McCulloch, who had been widely quoted in other Sydney media sources as being strongly opposed to the Islamic school, yet was only quoted once by the *Camden Advertiser* when she was announced in

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29 *Four Corners* is a premier current affairs program on the ABC, Australia’s national public service broadcaster. *Four Corners’* high journalistic standards are reflected in the array of Walkleys, Logies and other national awards it has won since it began in 1961 (ABC 2016).

30 Drizabone is an oilskin coat strongly associated with Australian country workers. In 2010, Australian Geographic ranked the Drizabone coat at number 81 on its list of 100 Aussie icons (Australian Geographic 2010), making it a highly identifiable piece of a stereotypically Australian dress code.
2009 as the political candidate for One Nation in the seat of Macarthur. The Advertiser’s apparent choice to ignore McCulloch as a local source, (particularly when her comments had been sought by other media outlets) was an interesting one. It could be suggested that this omission occurred because the Advertiser did not consider her as accurately representative of the local Camden community’s views regarding the school proposal. Furthermore, the choice to not name her in the Advertiser’s editorial titled ‘Diversity’s darker side our shame’, supports this argument.

Another instance when the wider media was criticised by the Advertiser, (perhaps hypocritically), occurred in October 2008, when it was reported that the Lebanese Muslim Association had bought a cemetery in Narellan, near Camden. Rebecca Senescall explained:

We ran the story on page 6 last Wednesday; when a Sydney paper published its story the next day, it ran it on page 1 and tied it to the Islamic school debate. I don’t think that was quite fair, because this is an entirely different situation – a different group of people, a private land sale and no need for government approval (1 October 2008, p. 6).

In this editorial, the Advertiser was self-referentially explaining that its more vague link between the two issues was unlikely to evoke parallels and hence ‘tensions’ whereas the unnamed Sydney paper’s positioning strategy seemed designed to do exactly that. However, whilst the story the Advertiser ran (‘Graveyard’s new owner’) had indeed been published on page 6, it too made direct connections between the Islamic school debate and the new cemetery. Alicia Bowie had spoken to the Lebanese Muslim Association president, and reported that ‘Mr Kassir said the association was “definitely not” concerned that they might not be welcomed in the area, despite the community’s reaction to the proposed Islamic school’ (Bowie 24 September 2008b, p. 6). It therefore seemed unreasonable of the Camden Advertiser to chastise the wider Sydney media for drawing on the controversy that had surrounded the Islamic school proposal, when it had drawn very similar connections.

31 In a Sydney Morning Herald report headlined ‘Islamic school would breed terrorists: resident’, McCulloch had been compared to controversial and divisive One Nation Party Leader, Pauline Hanson (Murray 23 April 2009, para. 7).
5.6.5. The Self and ‘Other’ – References to ‘Outside’ Media in Letters to the Editor

Camden community members also wrote Letters to the Editor that critiqued the broader media coverage of the Islamic school debate. Some of these letters were general in nature, such as the contribution from Ahmed which implored readers to “ignore the media-induced Muslim phobia” (24 October 2007, p. 6), and another from Gill who similarly spoke of the negative “stereotypes [about Muslims] fed by the constant negative media portrayals of people of the Islamic faith” (5 December 2007, p. 16). Similar Letters to the Editor advised:

We have allowed the Sydney media to get away with presenting their often emotive and one-sided view of issues (Powell 19 March 2008, p. 25);

I noticed the residents of Camden made the Sydney media last week for all the wrong reasons (Fairbairn 7 November 2007, p. 20);

Give it a few weeks and we’ll have TV crews interviewing the biggest hick they can find (Ryan 2 July 2008, p. 15); and

The media don’t really have a high IQ. If they need news for the nation and indeed the world, why would they go and focus on a lady with a stupid hat? [Kate McCulloch] (Marasco 11 June 2008, p. 20).

In these numerous letters which scrutinized the “unscrupulous media” (Marasco 11 June 2008, p. 20), Camden residents made it clear that they were not happy with the way the extended media was representing either local Muslims or, their local town. A common concern in these letters was that the Camden community was being portrayed as “a bunch of racist redneck hicks” (Lysaught 14 November 2007, p. 18), or that residents were “sick of biased media painting us all as rednecks and bigots” (name supplied 19 March 2008, p. 25). In one protracted letter by Yewen, captioned ‘Media’s loyalty questioned’ (16 January 2008, p. 2), it was also asserted that “because we uphold our traditions, morals, heritage and Christian culture, the media choose to report us as being ‘rednecks’” (Yewen 16 January 2008, p. 2). This letter writer continued to warn others that “the media revel in sensationalizing” (Yewen 16 January 2008, p. 2), and also provided examples to support this claim:
On the night of the ‘information forum’ at the civic centre, the local and broader media reported ‘Protesters lock out’, ‘Camden is in lockdown’, and ‘Police have been called to protesters at the forum meeting in Camden’. All highly exaggerated, untrue statements representing irresponsible reporting that could have incited rage from outside groups” (Yewen 16 January 2008, p. 2).

The strength of this letter is drawn from the examples Yewen used to provide direct evidence of the kinds of sensationalised reporting that had occurred. However, the statement that these reports ‘could have incited rage’ suggests that they did not, and that perhaps the coverage from the wider media was not influential in Camden.

Along with general comments about the extended media’s role in producing negative coverage, several letters also called out specific media organisations in an effort to name-and-shame them for poor professional practice. In a letter captioned ‘The right of choice in Camden’ Sremchevich criticized “Channel Seven’s sensationalized news item on Wednesday night’s news in which it depicted the people of Camden as rednecks and racially intolerant because of their opinions” (7 November 2007, p. 4). Channel Ten was similarly singled out by Liberal MLC Charlie Lynn, who asserted “Channel 10’s attempt to beat up a racial story in Camden was an abysmal flop… We don’t need outsiders gatecrashing our town to denigrate our community in search of a cheap racial headline” (30 January 2008, p. 2). Other letters raised the matter of the broader media coverage, but not to critique the media discourse. Rather, these contributors were concerned about local behaviour and opinions that had drawn the attention of external media organisations. For instance Powell also referenced the infamous Four Corners program and concluded: “Our local bigots and racists have really put us on the map” (19 March 2008, p. 25). Here Powell appeared to place the blame for the negative coverage squarely with the local Camdenites, who had provided the fuel for such representation. However, Powell also questioned the integrity of the ABC journalists, asking: “Did they make any effort at all to find a representative of the quiet majority that approves of the Muslim school in Camden?” (19 March 2008, p. 25). As such, it could be argued that this contributor still held the extended media partially accountable for Camden’s tarnished identity. Another resident whose name was supplied to the Advertiser but withheld from publication quoted the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)’s preview of the Four Corners program which had warned: “Watch your fellow Australians as they spew
hate in scenes that could have been ripped right out of 1930s Germany” (SMH in name supplied 19 March 2008, p. 25). The connotations of 1930’s Germany (and the rise of Nazism) were extensive and powerful, and it could be argued that such a comparison displayed either the severity with which the metropolitan daily saw the Camden debate, or the sensationalizing in which the SMH were engaged.

The international attention that Camden received “but not in a way [that was] necessarily like[d]” (Youdale 4 June 2008, p. 13), was also referenced in relation to a BBC-TV program on the Islamic school debate. One letter writer, “an Australian residing in the United Arab Emirates” (Scott 18 June 2008, p. 16), wrote of their “misfortune to see a BBC World television news item on the Quranic school” (Scott 18 June 2008, p. 16). This letter from Scott allowed an international expression of the Islamic school issue to be remediated as part of the Advertiser’s local news discourse. The Advertiser was therefore able to use this letter, and the international reportage it related to, to express the problematic nature of the debate around this local development issue.

5.7. Concluding Remarks

The critical discourse analysis of the Camden Advertiser’s coverage of the proposed Islamic school revealed a number of distinct discourses which were employed with varying effects. Political discourses were evident through the authoritative voices granted to politicians at all levels of government (local, state and federal), as well as through the many links made to official policy and planning legislation in attempts to frame the limits of the debate. These framing attempts were not always successful, with a number of Letters to the Editor which attempted to use planning grounds as the basis for opposition to the school, often slipping into religious or cultural referents, thereby undermining the authority of these complaints. Politicians also drew on official documents to attempt to reinforce Camden’s rural identity. Some actors, including representatives from the Quranic Society and Advertiser editorial staff, attempted to use this rural identity as a point of commonality between the local Muslim community and the wider Camden community. However, opponents of the proposed Islamic school used rural discourses more effectively to ‘Other’ Camden’s Muslim population. These opponents portrayed local Muslims as being ‘not-rural’ and therefore as not belonging
in Camden. The ‘Othering’ of the school proponents occurred most prominently in published Letters to the Editor which perpetuated various themes: that there was not an existing Muslim community in Camden; that Muslims should change to fit in with Camden; that Islam and Camden (or Australia) were incompatible; and that Islam and Christianity have insurmountable differences. These discourses were used to divide the Camden community into ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ categories. In contrast, the *Camden Advertiser* took a strong editorial stance which promoted more inclusive discourses and suggested that Camden embrace openness and diversity. Similar ideas were also evident in Letters to the Editor, and in contrast to the ‘Othering’ discourses, a number of these letters actually reinforced similarities between Islam and Christianity as a basis for commonality and understanding. Finally, *self-referential discourses* were employed by the *Camden Advertiser* to reflect on both positive and negative aspects of its own coverage of the school debate. The *Advertiser* was very open about criticism that it received about the coverage, which emphasized the open relationship and strong connection the newspaper had with the local community. It also criticized the extended media for its coverage which resulted in external media sources being ‘Othered’ by the *Camden Advertiser*.

The critical discourse analysis revealed that Orientalist depictions of Islam were evident in the *Camden Advertiser*’s coverage of the Islamic school proposal. However, such discourses were most evident in published Letters to the Editor, and the editorial stance of the *Advertiser* was much more inclusive, promoting a positive approach to the school and the local Muslim community. The Quranic Society was also granted almost double the opportunities to speak in the coverage in comparison to the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group. The Quranic Society therefore had more chances to directly put across its perspective on the proposal to the community. Although there was certainly evidence of ‘Othering’ in the coverage of the proposed Camden College, it is argued that most of that treatment occurred in the published Letters to the Editor, and that the actual news reports and editorials produced by *Camden Advertiser* staff were much more positive and inclusive in nature.

6.1. Gungahlin and *The Canberra Times*: the Place and its Newspaper

Gungahlin is located approximately 13.5km north of Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Gungahlin was “officially launched as Canberra’s fourth ‘town’ by the ACT Chief Minister in 1991” (Cooke 2010, p. 36) and is rich in Aboriginal and natural heritage (Gungahlin Region Online 2013). The most recent Census figures available at the time of writing from 2011 show that Gungahlin had a population of 5,617 (ABS 2011g), whilst the ACT as a whole\(^{32}\) had a population of 357,222 (ABS 2011b). The dominant religion in Gungahlin was reported as being Christianity, with 2,796 adherents (49.8%) (ABS 2011g), and 197,021 adherents (55.2%) in the ACT (ABS 2011b), whilst Islam was reported as having 208 adherents (3.7%) (ABS 2011g) in Gungahlin and 7,432 adherents (2.1%) (ABS 2011b) in the ACT\(^{33}\). However, it must be noted that 456 residents (ABS 2011g) did not state their religion in Gungahlin and 27,025 residents (ABS 2011b) did not state their religion in the ACT, so these figures could be inaccurate.

*The Canberra Times* is owned by Fairfax Media Limited, and is published daily as part of the company’s Australian Community Media portfolio. Fairfax describes this portfolio as comprising “**Leading rural and regional newspapers and digital media** - specialising in news coverage via print publications and multi-media channels, digital ventures, events and research for local regional and agricultural communities. ACM's regional publications include *The Canberra Times***” (emphasis in original) (Fairfax Media 2016b, no page). The newspaper claims a current total readership of 773,000 (Fairfax Media 2016d, no page), with the print readership totalling 246,000 (*The Canberra Times* 2015, p. 4). In its 2015 media kit, *The Canberra Times* states: “We are curious. We want to know what’s happening in our suburbs” (*The Canberra Times* 2015, p. 2) and “we are proud of the words above our masthead: Independent. Always… That means getting both sides of a story. It means being honest with what we do and don’t know… Honest storytelling is essential to our brand, even when it’s

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\(^{32}\) The ACT does not have Local Government Areas, so the demographic statistics have been compared to the ACT as a whole, unlike the other two cases which were compared to the relevant LGAs

\(^{33}\) Gungahlin’s Muslim population is therefore just slightly larger than the national statistic of Muslims in Australia of 2.2% (ABS 2011a), whilst the size of the ACT’s Muslim population as a whole is almost on par with the national statistic.
The Gungahlin mosque was proposed in July 2009 by the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. (CMC). The initial site proposed was in the suburb of Nicholls but this location was abandoned by the CMC in January 2010 as it was found to be too small. A second site on The Valley Avenue was proposed in September 2010. The ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) approved the Gungahlin mosque in August 2012, but the main opposition group, the Concerned Citizens of Canberra (CCC), took their appeal to the ACT Supreme Court. The ACT Supreme Court ruled against the CCC in July 2014. The CCC then decided to appeal that decision, resulting in the legal battle being drawn out until November 2015 when the appeal was again denied. In January 2016 the CCC announced they would not pursue any further challenges in the High Court, allowing the mosque construction to go ahead. The Canberra Times published 103 news items on the controversial debate, including news stories, editorials, Letters to the Editor and infographics.

The critical discourse analysis of The Canberra Times’ coverage of the proposed Gungahlin mosque uncovered a number of unique discourses. A discourse of concerns emerged as a strong theme and was used in attempts to reframe discussion about the proposed mosque in more socially acceptable terms. Discourses of power in the coverage were manipulated to align authority with certain actors while simultaneously undermining the power of other actors, particularly opponents of the proposed mosque. Anti-Muslim sentiment was expressed throughout the published news items, including ideas of Westernisation, which contributed to the ‘Othering’ of the Canberra Muslim Community Inc., however the Concerned Citizens of Canberra were also arguably ‘Othered’ by The Canberra Times. In contrast to these divisive discourses, there was also evidence of more inclusive attitudes in both the written and visual elements of the news texts.

6.2. Discourse of Concerns

The term ‘concerns’ was used frequently in the reporting on the proposed Gungahlin mosque, appearing 90 times in 103 articles. According to Buttny (2009) ‘concerns’ is a more neutral term which can be used to reformulate the opposition to a proposed
development. In this case, it could be argued that the main opposition group, the Concerned Citizens of Canberra (CCC) – who even used the term in their name – were able to present themselves in a favourable light as not being discriminatory or racist, but as having genuine considerations about the mosque proposal. For example, in discussion about the first mosque proposal for Nicholls, it was reported that there were ‘community concerns’ (Doherty 18 November 2009, p. 3) in regards to traffic and parking. But once the new larger mosque site was found in Gungahlin, ‘Mr Stanhope [Chief Minister] said the extra space should alleviate any concerns about traffic or parking pressures’ (No author 4 February 2011, p. 7). So it was argued early on by people in positions of authority that any planning ‘concerns’ around traffic movements had been settled.

Nevertheless, these and other community ‘concerns’ were still evident as explained in one news report headlined ‘Racist’ Mosque Pamphlet Probed’. It was reported that a flyer produced in opposition to the proposed mosque claimed it should not go ahead because of “social impact” and raised concerns about traffic and noise, “public interest” and size’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1). In ‘Gungahlin Plan Welcomed’ (published on the same day) Gungahlin Community Council (GCC) president Ewan Brown explained that ‘the council had been advised of concerns about the uses to which the proposed mosque development would be put’ (Downie 30 June 2012, p. 2). There were also numerous mentions of ‘concerns about noise from the Islamic practice of call to prayer’ (Downie 30 June 2012, p. 2), (also cited in Fallon 3 July 2012, p. 10) despite Borhan Ahmed, the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. (CMC) president, repeatedly rebutting these particular ‘concerns’ by stating: “I can categorically assure you this will not happen” (in Downie 30 June 2012, p. 2), and “there will be no noise as there was no intention of amplifying the call to prayer at all” (in Fallon 3 July 2012, p. 10). It could be argued that the continued complaints to council about the call to prayer (in spite of Mr Ahmed’s repeated refutation of the accusation) represented a mistrust of, and an unwillingness to listen to, the Muslim community. According to O’Donnell, Lloyd and Dreher, “the politics of listening provides a means of moving beyond questions of speaking and voice to canvass issues of dialogue and meaningful interaction across difference and inequality” (2009, p. 423). As such, despite Mr Ahmed being given a voice in The Canberra Times on numerous occasions to provide informed reassurance about the claims, what was clearly absent in these exchanges was listening by the GCC.
There was further conjecture by The Canberra Times that opposition to the mosque, based on these ‘concerns’ around its use, was therefore not strictly limited to planning issues:

The secretive participants in the campaign against the mosque have consistently told media and government that they are concerned with local planning issues including traffic and noise. But The Canberra Times has established that the spokesman for the group ‘Concerned Citizens of Canberra’ describes himself as a pastor with Olive Tree Ministries (Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 1).

As such, it could be argued that this Times journalist was suggesting there was a religious element evident in the opposition. The Times also used strategic language choices such as ‘secretive’ and ‘established’ to reveal how it, as the community’s trusted news source, had made a discovery that suggested the CCC were undeserving of their trust. When the spokesman was also shown to be a clergyman, the incongruence regarding secrecy and mistrust only increased. Religiously motivated opposition to the mosque was highly criticised by many within the community, including Multicultural Affairs Minister Joy Burch, who was quoted in a report headlined ‘Politicians Receive Anti-Islam Booklet’ as saying “Everybody has a legitimate right to raise concerns about various projects, but to guise concerns about faith, religion or culture through other things such as traffic – that is not the way we do it here” (in Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 8). Here Burch’s powerful position of authority as the Multicultural Affairs Minister and her opinions about ideologically charged ‘concerns’ used to resist the mosque development, were made clear.

The Canberra Muslim Community Inc. also used the language of ‘concerns’ when it addressed resistance to the mosque development proposal amongst the Gungahlin community. When the initial proposal was being opposed because of traffic issues, the then president of the CMC, Khondoker Yusuf affirmed “We absolutely consider the people’s concerns so we don’t want to go for it if there is an issue with traffic parking” (in Violante 24 December 2009, p. 1). His claims were proven to be true when the CMC

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34 Joy Burch was a member of the ACT Legislative Assembly and was appointed as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in November 2009. The minister is supported by the Office of Multicultural Affairs in the ACT, who provide strategic advice “on issues affecting people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds” (ACT Government 2013).
abandoned its plans for the mosque in Nicholls, after “Traffic worries scuttle[d] Nicholls mosque” (Violante 24 December 2009, p. 1). As the plans progressed for the revised mosque location, the new president of the CMC, Borhan Ahmed said his group was ‘happy to meet with the Concerned Citizens of Canberra to discuss any issues they had with the proposal…“We are always prepared to talk to people and address any concerns that they might have”’ (in Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 8). By co-opting the language of ‘concerns’ the CMC were arguably able to take control of the discourse, because “‘concerns’ are something that people have, rather than something attributable to the project” (Buttny 2009, p. 242). By labelling these issues as ‘concerns’, the CMC was able to “immediately show ways of alleviating those concerns. A discourse of concerns (or problems) makes relevant ways to assuage them” (Buttny 2009, p. 242). These actions could be seen in the abandonment of the initial mosque site (due to traffic issues) and the sourcing of a larger site, as well as in Mr Ahmed’s repeated willingness to confirm that the call to prayer would not be disruptive. Taking control of the discourse of concerns in these ways granted some critical power to the CMC and the Gungahlin Muslim community throughout the mosque development proposal debate.

6.3. Discourses of Power

6.3.1. Facts, Figures and Official Documents

Power was expressed by actors within the articles in order to assert authority. Significantly, authority was also enacted by The Canberra Times journalists in ways which both produced and undermined the power of different social actors. One way this was achieved was through the use of figures, to show how the Muslim community had outgrown the existing mosque at Yarralumla. Whilst journalist Meredith Clisby chose to describe the growth with potentially negatively worded connotations such as, ‘expected surge in Muslim worshippers’ (Clisby 9 March 2010, p. 2) and ‘Muslim community expected to swell considerably’ (Clisby 21 September 2010, p. 8), Bianca Hall instead, in a report headlined ‘Faith Rewarded as Mosque Gets Green Light’, quoted numbers and explained, ‘The most recent data, issued in 2006, shows Canberra’s Muslim population is rising steadily; between 1996 and 2006, the number of people identifying as Muslim grew from 2458 to 4364’ (25 January 2011a, p. 1). These statistics were slightly inconsistent with an earlier report, which stated ‘At the 2006 census there were 4373 Muslims living in Canberra but Mr. Patel guessed the figure was now closer to
8000’ (Hand 19 July 2009, p. 3). These formal estimates demonstrated that the Muslim community had almost doubled in size since the last official census and it’s likely they were used here because they “seem[ed] to provide objective information from reliable official sources that may increase the credibility of the journalist and the newspaper” (van Dijk 2014, p. 3). The latter set of figures was also arguably rendered accurate when the paraphrased source, Mr Patel, was named in the report as ‘Australian Federation of Islamic Councils and chairman of the ACT Muslim Advisory Council, Ikebal Patel’ (Hand 19 July 2009, p. 3). Both of Mr Patel’s titles were used here to highlight his professional and representative expertise and his subsequent right to be heard throughout the debate surrounding the Gungahlin mosque. Conversely, titles were also misused in ways that had the potential to undermine the credibility of some news sources. For example, one report headlined ‘Mosque Starts and Ramadan is the Deadline’, identified Yasser Dobhaiwala as ‘Canberra Muslim Community chairman’ (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 1), when in fact he was actually the president of the organisation. There was also some confusion in this news article around the use of the name of the mosque proponents, the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. (CMC), as compared to the wider Canberra Muslim community. Ellery referred only to the Canberra Muslim Community, as did an unnamed writer in a later editorial (no author 4 July 2012, p. 10) and Christie in a published Letter to the Editor (8 July 2014, p. 3). In the professional news content, these omissions could indicate hasty journalists’ practice, whilst in the Letter to the Editor, the mistake could show a disregard for these Muslim people. Such an interpretation is likely when taken in the larger context of Christie’s letter, which contained multiple misunderstandings of Islam. There are therefore issues here around specificity and clarification which could have potentially impacted the recognition of authority of the mosque proponents as opposed to general community members.

The newspaper’s reporting style also provided some indirect critique of the official approval process. For example, when a traffic report indicating that 250 people would use the new Nichollns mosque during peak times was released, The Canberra Times reported, ‘the proposal to provide just 71 parking spaces on the site will meet the Territory Plan’s needs’ (emphasis added) (Doherty 18 November 2009, p. 3). The use of the word ‘just’ by the reporter implied that the number of car parks pitched in the mosque proposal would not be adequate, despite these figures meeting formal policy requirements. The article headlined ‘Traffic and Parking Study Approves Plans for New
"Mosque in Gungahlin’, was published alongside a photograph of a busy car park at the existing Yarralumla mosque (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7: The Canberra Times, 18 November 2009, p. 3](image)

It could be argued that this image was chosen for this exact reason, to visually reinforce the point being made by the journalists. However, the next day Shamsul Huda, the mosque designer and consultant was quoted as saying “[You can] challenge the standard but that’s what the standard is” (in Rudra 19 November 2009, p. 3). In this way, there was a juxtaposition created between the point being alluded to in the article, that the proposal is problematic, and the authoritative argument of the quote by the mosque designer, who spoke of institutional regulations to support his statement.

There were a number of authoritative groups named in the news reports on the proposed Gungahlin mosque which supported Islam and/or Australian Muslims. These included the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, the ACT Muslim Advisory Council, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, and the Australian Muslim Voice. The Human Rights Commission even became involved in the debate when the Concerned Citizens of Canberra produced a controversial flyer in opposition to the mosque proposal. *The Canberra Times’* use of these institutional representative and socially endorsed diverse community advocates as relevant news sources provided a validation framework for them as authoritative ‘voices’ in the debate. Such formal acknowledgment of these groups could also be seen to help in empowering the Muslim community, especially when positioned against the Concerned Citizens of Canberra. However, some people within the Gungahlin community appeared to find this level of bureaucratic support for the Muslim community problematic. In a Letter to the Editor captioned ‘Bias Shown’, O’Regan challenged: “The previous minister (Hargreaves) established a Muslim Advisory Council with direct ministerial access. His successor continues to provide this exclusive secretariat (presumably at taxpayers’ expense). The
minister should explain why” (O’Regan 23 July 2012, p. 8). O’Regan therefore denied the need for this specialist niche group and also questioned why it had been funded by Australian taxpayers. Although the word ‘Australian’ was not used in the letter it was certainly implied that ‘we’ as Australians were paying for ‘their’ group. As such, O’Regan created a problematic ‘us’ vs ‘them’ divide in the Gungahlin community.

6.3.2. Critiques of the Gungahlin Community Council

The Canberra Times could, at times, be seen as being quite critical of the Gungahlin Community Council (GCC)\textsuperscript{35}. In one article in particular headlined ‘Council Should Check Community Bona Fides’, The Canberra Times journalist Graham Downie called the GCC “largely unrepresentative” (Downie 8 July 2012, p. 20) and stated they “claim unto themselves far greater influence than they are entitled to claim” (Downie 8 July 2012, p. 20). This followed a complaint Downie had received from GCC president Ewan Brown, which expressed “The executive of the GCC reacted strongly to your assertion that it had given ‘tacit support’ to the plans to erect a mosque in Gungahlin” (in Downie 8 July 2012, p. 20). The journalist responded:

The council either misread that report or worded its response incorrectly. The report actually said the council had given tacit support to opponents of the proposed mosque. I would be happy to clarify the point with Brown but his email says the council is reviewing its mechanisms for purporting to make representations on behalf of the community and will decline to make any comment to the media until a resolution is reached. ‘So don’t bother to contact me until you hear otherwise’. So there!” (italics in original) (8 July 2012, p. 20).

The decision to publish this article on the GCC’s misguided complaint served to undermine the community organisation’s authority in several ways. As Downie pointed out, The Times staff had not made an error in reporting on the oppositional affiliations of the GCC, but the GCC’s president had made a mistake (as GCC spokesperson) in his response to Downie’s report, which meant the validity of any of his ‘oppositional’

\textsuperscript{35} The Gungahlin Community Council is not a local government body, but describes itself as a “voluntary, not for profit, community-based association” (Gungahlin Community Council 2015) which aims to “preserve and improve the social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being of Gungahlin and the Gungahlin community” (Gungahlin Community Council 2015).
views could be compromised. The reporter’s accounting of the GCC’s email response speaks volumes about the group inefficiencies from the group itself. In addition, Downie addressed the apparent no-contact order initiated by the GCC, and ended the discussion with ‘so there!’ (8 July 2012, p. 20). In employing this common idiom, it could be argued that Downie was implying that the GCC were being childish in their interactions (or lack thereof) with the media, and the GCC were resituated as an unreliable community representative body. This undermining of their credibility could affect what people may have thought about any oppositions they put forward about the mosque development proposal. Following this article it was reported in another headlined ‘Council Quiet on Contentious Issues’, that ‘Gungahlin Community Council [was] set to tone down its public comments for fear of misrepresenting the community’ (Fallon 17 July 2012, p. 10). GCC president Ewan Brown explained “[We’re] trying to address some of the criticisms we’ve experienced…about the representativeness of community councils and how valid are we [sic]” (in Fallon 17 July 2012, p. 10). It’s likely that Brown’s statement was a direct response to the problems identified and implied in Downie’s report, regarding the GCC’s suitability to advocate on behalf of local groups in the Gungahlin community. The awkward expression (‘how valid are we’) in his explanation doesn’t do anything to enhance his capacity as a representative spokesperson. These examples could then be a demonstration of the power of The Canberra Times to influence the public’s views of particular spokespeople and community groups.

6.3.3. Critiques of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra

The Canberra Times’ undermining of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra (CCC) was arguably more extensive and more overt. The CCC were labelled ‘an organised minority’ (Forde & Saat 10 July 2012, p. 9), ‘a controversial lobby group’ (Gorrey 11 September 2014, p. 3), and ‘a Canberra Christian fundamentalist group’ (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 1) by the newspaper’s journalists. The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) also named the CCC a “franchise” (in Cox 28 August 2012, p. 1) after it was announced that the CCC’s lawyer, Robert Balzola, had also been involved in the opposition to the Camden Islamic school. If the CCC were seen to be a franchise “whose sole aim [was] to deny Muslims any freedom, any right to freedom, any freedom to move or to practice their faith” (Diana Abdel-Rahman, CMCF deputy chair,
in Cox 28 August 2012, p. 1), then this view would have diminished the authenticity with which people viewed their concerns about the mosque proposal.

The legitimacy of the CCC was frequently called into question by *The Canberra Times* in ways which likely challenged the authority of the group. For instance Graham Downie wrote about the fact that there was no record of the CCC ‘on ASIC’s register of associations, businesses or companies’ (8 July 2012, p. 20), whilst in a Letter to the Editor, Gilbert compared them to a group called the ‘Combined Residents Association’ which the Supreme court had recently found “wasn’t a ‘genuinely representative body’” (14 July 2012, p. 8). There were also some concerns about the group’s legitimacy from a legal standpoint. When the CCC filed papers in the ACT Supreme Court to attempt to extend the deadline for submissions against the proposed mosque, it was ‘queried whether the Concerned Citizens group was actually a legal person – an individual or corporation – and competent to launch legal proceedings’ (Andrews & Cox 17 August 2012, p. 2). The undermining of the CCC’s authority was extended here through the questions raised about its legal standing. It could also be argued that by referring to the group using the shortened version ‘Concerned Citizens’, (when the accurate identifier was ‘Concerned Citizens of Canberra’) its legitimacy as a collective was further diminished. The CCC was also misnamed later in the reporting, when it was referred to as the “Concerned Citizens Group” (Back & Knaus 16 January 2016, p. 6). This misnaming became highly relevant later on when a group who identified as ‘Concerned Citizens’ from the NSW Central Coast had also become involved in Gungahlin’s protracted mosque development debate. It was therefore very important to name the correct protest group to ensure that actions (positive or negative) were not being attributed to the wrong organisation. Additionally, for a NSW group to comment on the controversy about a Canberran matter, in spite of the geographical distance between the two locales, demonstrated the more widespread fears and prejudices around Islam across regional and metropolitan Australia.

In response to the challenge to the CCC’s legal status, the group lodged incorporation documents with the ACT Office of Regulatory Services. In an article headlined ‘Mosque Campaign Lawyer also Fought Islamic School Plan’, it was reported that ‘The [incorporation] document name[d] just four members: the group’s president, Higgins resident and pastor Irwin Ross, his wife, Jill Ross, Gungahlin counsellor Adrian Robin Adair and Marjo van den Nieuwenhuijzen, a finance manager at ANU Enterprise’ (Cox
28 August 2012, p. 1). By selecting ‘just’ to precede ‘four members’, the journalist highlighted the very small nature of the group, which could have impacted on the perceived legitimacy of the group in regard to the broader Canberran community. Furthermore, the late attempt to incorporate the CCC as an authoritative entity was certainly not helpful in regard to its subsequent legal action against the mosque development’s approval. It was reported that ‘Supreme Court Master David Mossop found the group had no standing to challenge either decision, and would not have won even if they had demonstrated standing’ (Gorrey & Knaus 5 July 2014, p. 6).

Speculation surrounding the legitimacy of the CCC continued through questioning of its funding and group membership. This occurred in an article headlined ‘Ruling Allows Group to Take Mosque Fight to Court’, where Christopher Knaus reported that

The Concerned Citizens of Canberra group – which had just six members and $2159 in assets in October last year – has been told it must stump up $25,000 as security before the case can go ahead, after fears were raised about its ability to pay court costs if ordered to do so (27 March 2013, p. 3).

Again, the use of the word ‘just’ emphasized the CCC’s low membership as well as its limited financial capital and implied that both of these measures were insufficient. The issue of an outstanding $25,000 payment to shore up its legal challenge was also referenced. The CCC had tried to avoid paying the security based on two issues of public interest which it claimed were relevant to the case: ‘protection of the environment, and the “purposes of maintaining religious or ethical standards”’. Justice Sidis rejected both arguments’ (Knaus 27 March 2013, p. 3). Following this institutional disapproval of the minority group’s grounds for opposing the mosque development, the CCC paid the security, allowing the court case to proceed. However, by the end of the proceedings, it was ‘understood Concerned Citizens of Canberra now owe[d] the territory government a six-figure sum’ (Knaus 27 November 2015, p. 2), and that the ‘mosque opponents cannot cover costs’ (Knaus 27 November 2015, p. 2). The journalist’s discursive choice about the minimal constitution and poor financial status of the group implied that the CCC was unjustified in its opposition to the mosque and may have shown them to be irresponsible to the *Times*’ readers.
Another financial issue which haunted the CCC involved claims by Restore Australia, a far-right Queensland group, that it had given the CCC $8000 to support its fight against the Gungahlin mosque (Inman 20 October 2014, p. 1), which the CCC denied. Restore Australia chief executive Mike Holt, who was identified as a ‘former One Nation candidate’ (Inman 30 October 2014, p. 1), had confirmed in the report headlined ‘Anti-Mosque Group Denies Far-Right Cash Links’, that ‘Restore Australia had combined with at least two other groups to collect the donations…He declined to name the groups because they were having “security issues”’ (Inman 30 October 2014, p. 1).

Despite Mr Holt’s assertions CCC president Irwin Ross denied having accepted any money from Restore Australia, yet ‘declined to divulge where the $77,170 in donations had come from. “That’s our private information. It’s come from the public,” [Irwin Ross] said’ (Inman 30 October 2014, p. 2). The conflicting reports about the non-disclosure of funding sources, and the protected identities of ‘cause’ sponsors cast further doubts over CCC’s valid arguments against the mosque development.

There doubts were amplified when The Canberra Times also specifically named other groups associated with Restore Australia, including:

- a group called Islam4Infidels, which provides advice on how to oppose the construction of mosques and Islamic schools. Restore Australia has been linked previously to the Victorian Chapter of patriot Defence League Australia and to opponents of the Bendigo mosque (Inman 30 October 2014, p. 1).

By identifying Restore Australia’s affiliations with these additional anti-Islamic groups, and emphasizing Restore Australia’s ‘donation’ links with the CCC, it may be argued that any disclaimers made by the CCC that its opposition to the mosque was based on planning or development issues were nullified.

The Canberra Times also offered further critique of the identities and backgrounds of CCC’s group members. In an article headlined ‘Interstate Activists in Anti-Mosque Organisation’, Irwin and Jill Ross (the president and secretary of CCC) were revealed to be ‘the only two [ACT] territory residents listed on the Concerned Citizens

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36 Restore Australia, currently called Citizens Initiated Referendum (CIR) Now Party, is a group working to “change the government system and stop the Islamisation of Australia” (Restore Australia/CIRNow 2016). The group’s leader, Mike Holt, is a former candidate of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party.
executive’ (Inman 31 October 2014, p. 3). Two other members, Adrian Van Der Byl (the vice-president) and Max Cracknell (the treasurer) had ‘previously run as candidates for Fred Nile’s Christian Democratic Party’ (Inman 31 October 2014, p. 3), and were also exposed as not residing in the Gungahlin area. ‘Mr. Van Der Byl – who said he opposed “the advancing Islamisation of Australia”…lives about 125 kilometres from Gungahlin’ (Inman 31 October 2014, p. 3), but said he didn’t think this fact precluded him from being involved in the campaign. ‘Mr. Cracknell – who was also involved in the fight against the Islamic school in Camden in Sydney’s west – lives about 205 kilometres from Canberra. It is understood Mr. Cracknell is also president of the anti-Islamic Australian Christian Nation Association’ (Inman 31 October 2014, p. 3).

Clearly, both of these men were highlighted as not being part of Gungahlin’s community, potentially to question the legitimacy of their involvement in the local anti-mosque movement. Additionally, they were also shown to have connections to more widespread and insidious anti-Islam political activities. The CCC defended including people from outside of Gungahlin in its constitution, particularly interstate members, ‘saying a Gungahlin mosque has a national, not just local, significance’ (Inman 31 October 2014, p. 3). However, despite these claims, the frequent jeopardising of its legitimacy and authenticity as an organised opposition group likely had a substantial effect on the way Times’ readers viewed it, and by extension, its arguments against the Gungahlin mosque.

It was also reported on a number of occasions that there was general, widespread support for the mosque proposal, except from the CCC. For example, Sawa wrote of the ‘strong support for the mosque development from all political parties, the Canberra community and other religious leaders, despite vocal opposition from the Concerned Citizens of Canberra’ (Sawa 4 September 2012, p. 8), whilst in response to the CCC’s legal action, ‘Canberra’s Muslim Community president Yasser Dabhoiwala said it had otherwise received a lot of support’ (Gorrey 21 June 2014, p. 8). The anti-CCC sentiment was also evident in Letters to the Editor, with Simmons writing:

If ever anyone doubted that Canberra can produce intense sunshine, observe the latest unsuccessful legal protest against the building of a mosque in Gungahlin. There are sunburnt necks by the score in this town! (8 July 2014, p. 3).
This Letter to the Editor used the phrase ‘sunburnt necks’ as an alternate to ‘rednecks’, which seemed to imply that the CCC were uneducated and bigoted in their opposition to the mosque. Similar sentiments were expressed in an editorial titled ‘Vexatious, indulged litigants try us all’ (no author 10 July 2014b, p. 2). The use of ‘try’ in this headline was a clever play on words, with reference to the legal action being taken by the CCC as well as the annoyance caused by said action. The editorial discussed the ‘courtesies’ that were extended to the CCC in being permitted to continue its legal action, despite not having been incorporated at the time of the appeal being lodged. In arguing against the rights of the CCC to have appealed in the first place, the editorial also faulted the case it presented, calling it a ‘frivolous “not in my backyard” objection’ (no author 10 July 2014b, p. 2), and suggesting that:

Those who read the judgment will find clear, succinct rebuttals to the plaintiff’s submissions, aspects of which Master Mossop found to be, among other things, “confused”, “without substance” and “misconceived”…many will ponder how it was the Concerned Citizens of Canberra got as far as it did with a mishmash of threadbare arguments (no author 10 July 2014b, p. 2).

It can be seen here that the editorial writer was also highly critical of the quality, or lack thereof, of the case that was presented by the CCC. It is interesting to note too that readers were also directed by the writer to the judgement, allowing them to see first-hand the Supreme Court’s dismissal of the appeal. As such, although this particular piece was an editorial, and therefore more subjective due to its opinionated style, it also relied on the formal evidence at hand, and presented that evidence to the readership for verification, potentially giving the opinions expressed more authority.

Following the CCC’s distribution of an anti-mosque flyer in Gungahlin, there was a substantial amount of criticism of the ACT Discrimination Act published in The Canberra Times. Much of this criticism came from the Human Rights Commission, after it was found that the flyer ‘did not breach the ACT’s Discrimination Act’ (Cox & Boland-Rudder 3 August 2012, p. 3). ACT Human Rights and Discrimination Commissioner Helen Watchirs ‘said although the flyer was “undoubtedly offensive” the ACT’s current discrimination laws had too high a text for racial vilification for the flyer to be considered in breach of the Act” (Cox & Boland-Rudder 3 August 2012, p. 3). Dr Watchirs went on to suggest that ‘complaints would probably have more successful
under federal discrimination laws, which required a lower threshold to establish racial hatred, and included an explanatory statement that “envisages that Muslim people represent a racial group” (Cox & Boland-Rudder 3 August 2012, p. 3). There was an interesting power dynamic described here between state and federal discrimination laws, with the former apparently being harder to apply to establish discriminatory acts. The other important point here was that criticism of these distinctions came from a formal body, the ACT Human Rights and Discrimination Commission, which gave the critical comment more authority in the media and public discourses. The effects of this authority were evident when just over one week later it was reported that Attorney General Simon Corbell was moving for ‘tough religious hate laws’ (Cox 14 August 2012, p. 1). This institutional push was directly linked to the anti-mosque flyer, as Mr Corbell explained:

That kind of material has no place in a tolerant and diverse community and clearly seeks to vilify people of the Islamic faith and should be considered unlawful in the same way that discrimination on the grounds of race, gender or sexual orientation is unlawful (in Cox 14 August 2012, p. 2).

There was also the suggestion that the reforms were needed to update the ACT’s laws. Cox wrote: ‘If the bill is supported by the Assembly, it would bring the ACT into line with Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, which have passed similar laws’ (14 August 2012, p. 2). There was an implication here that the ACT was lagging behind in the area of protection against religious discrimination, and needed to catch up with other states in order to be more inclusive. However, interestingly, a report headlined ‘Move to Outlaw Vilification in the ACT on Grounds of Religion’, revealed that the issue of reforms to vilification legislation was still being dealt with in 2016 (Lawson 4 August 2016, p. 7), potentially demonstrating that uncertainty about the validity of religious intolerance prevails. Overall, it can be seen that the power and legitimacy of the CCC was consistently questioned by The Canberra Times’ journalists in both news articles and editorial writing, and was also criticised in Letters to the Editor. It may be argued that in these ways the The Canberra Times’ staff exercised their own power as media practitioners, to deconstruct the CCC’s reputation as an oppositional group. This does not mean, however, that The Canberra Times was unproblematic in its reporting of the Gungahlin mosque development proposal.
6.4. Discourses of the ‘Other’

6.4.1. Juxtaposition and Intertextuality

In July 2009, when the initial mosque at Nicholls had just been proposed, *The Canberra Times* ran an editorial titled ‘*Muslim community’s needs deserve respect*’ (no author 19 July 2009, p. 20). Whilst the message of this editorial was generally positive, tellingly it was positioned above a cartoon in reference to the 2009 Jakarta hotel bombings37 (see Figure 8).

![Cartoon Image]

**Figure 8: The Canberra Times, 19 July 2009, p. 20**

The cartoon showed a bearded man wearing a sign that read ‘Jakarta’ with fire behind him. The character asked “I am a martyr. Where are my brides?” In response, a horned devil with a spiked tale caressed his face and expressed “Hi sweetie”. Placing an opinion piece, (which was not directly in support of the mosque but did advocate inclusion and understanding within the community) above the cartoon created an interesting juxtaposition between two diametrically opposed views of ‘Islam’ – Islam as part of a multicultural Australia and Islam as a dangerous, violent and manipulative

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37 The 2009 Jakarta hotel bombings were two suicide attacks which occurred in Indonesia on the 17th July 2009. Three of the seven victims who were killed were Australians (ABC 19 July 2009, online), which made the event a prominent news story in the Australian media.
‘beast’. Such a stylistic juxtaposition could be interpreted as evidence of the pervasiveness of Orientalism in reporting of proposed mosque developments, even when definite attempts appear to be made to provide more balanced coverage.

Intertextual references were made during the reporting on the proposed Gungahlin mosque to the Islamic school proposal in Camden. In the same editorial piece discussed above, *The Canberra Times* spoke of ‘the ugly scenes at Camden in western Sydney when a proposal for an Islamic school was put to the community there in 2007’ (no author 19 July 2009, p. 20), and seemed to use this example as a warning to Canberra residents to be careful of their responses to the Gungahlin mosque proposal. The unnamed journalist wrote:

> No doubt some residents in Camden had genuine planning concerns, but they were quickly overwhelmed by protestors who simply used anti-Islam rhetoric to make their point, in scenes that were broadcast around Australia. One resident reportedly was even concerned about whether he would be able to display Christmas decorations in Camden should the school go ahead. All stuff and nonsense (no author 19 July 2009, p. 20).

In this editorial, the journalist not only cautioned against the inappropriate ways some people might go about making their protests, they also pilloried the more extreme ‘anti-Islam rhetoric’ which had been used in Camden.

There were also more direct links made between the Camden and Gungahlin cases, which came to light when it was reported that:

> A key figure in the campaign against the Gungahlin mosque has been involved in at least two similar campaigns in Sydney, including the opposition to an Islamic school in Camden. Sydney-based lawyer Robert Balzola is the solicitor representing the Concerned Citizens of Canberra…Mr. Balzola was a key speaker alongside the Reverend Fred Nile at a 2007 rally opposing an Islamic school in Camden and addressed the secret July meeting held by the Concerned Citizens in Gungahlin (Cox 28 August 2012, p. 1).

Here the mention of a covert meeting along with his direct links to other anti-Islam movements could have worked to undermine Mr. Balzola’s authority and his role in the
oppositional campaign as a professional advocate. Yet despite this potential, it could also be argued that the *Times’* repetitious links back to the ‘controversy surrounding the construction of an Islamic school in Camden’ (Forde & Saat 10 July 2012, p. 9) could have functioned to reinforce common features of Islamophobia in reporting on proposed Islamic developments.

6.4.2. Discourse of Westernisation

One interesting tactic used in the coverage of the mosque proposal by *The Canberra Times* was the Westernisation of the actual property development. In the first published article the proposed development was called a ‘centre’, ‘place of worship’ and ‘multipurpose building’ (Hand 19 July 2009, p. 3). It was similarly named a ‘house of worship’ (Inman 2 May 2013, p. 2) in a much later article. It is questionable as to what the motive may have been for journalists to have come up with so many alternatives to the word ‘mosque’, and if they deliberately avoided the term, perhaps in an effort to minimise the perceived differences between mosques and churches, instead emphasizing their common uses.

This need to ‘fit in’ was highlighted in a more provocative sense by Gungahlin Community Council (GCC) president, Alan Kerlin, who discussed his group’s view on “the need for the facility to integrate appropriately into the community: that perhaps the architecture needs to be in keeping with any suburban location, rather than looking like a Middle Eastern transplant” (in Hand 19 July 2009, p. 3). It could be argued that this statement gave implied consent to the building of the mosque, providing it didn’t look like it served a Muslim community. However, this critical stance was challenged by the mosque’s proponents when Canberra Muslim Community Inc.’s (CMC) president Yasser Dabhoiwala argued that:

> the design for the mosque blended the characteristics of existing buildings in the neighbourhood with signature features of a traditional mosque. These included a stylised minaret outside the main entrance. “Somebody driving past who is looking for a mosque will recognise it [the small tower] as a minaret,” he said. “To somebody else it will just appear to be an architectural feature” (in Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 2).
This moderate design appeared to meet the request of the GCC – for a mosque that was not identifiable as a mosque, except by those who already recognised it as such. In making these adjustments it could be argued that the CMC demonstrated its willingness to compromise and work with the broader Gungahlin community.

6.4.3. Opposition to the Mosque on Planning Grounds

Early in the debate there was a meeting about the development application which *The Canberra Times* reported drew ‘a mostly hostile crowd of about 100 residents’ (Rudra 19 November 2009, p. 3), which ‘resulted in frayed tempers and one accusation of racism’ (Rudra 19 November 2009, p. 3). There was reporting of apparent planning issues raised at the meeting, including ‘One woman [who] said the noise from worshippers parking their cars could have an impact on preschool children at class’ (Rudra 19 November 2009, p. 3), and ‘Liberal MLA38 Alistair Coe said he was concerned about parking issues if the mosque and its central courtyard were filled to capacity for prayer or events. But Mr Huda said the courtyard was a feature of Islamic architecture and would never be used for prayer’ (Rudra 19 November 2009, p. 3). In this latter example, Shamsul Huda, the project designer and consultant, was able to successfully refute the politician’s concerns by providing more information about the mosque’s design and use, simultaneously showing Mr Coe’s ignorance regarding Islamic culture. Mr Coe responded to the news article with a Letter to the Editor, published on week later, which was captioned ‘Mosque reality’ (26 November 2009, p. 20). In this letter Mr Coe denied that the meeting was hostile, instead arguing it had been “constructive, civil and long overdue” (26 November 2009, p. 20), and that:

The vast majority, if not all, of those present at the meeting did not express any concern with a ‘Mosque’ being constructed in the suburb, there are just concerns that this particular block might not be appropriate for any building (26 November 2009, p. 20).

Here, Mr Coe attempted to reframe his opposition to the mosque in terms of planning issues, by objecting to ‘any building’ on that particular block. There were additional

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38 MLA refers to a Member of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales. The Legislative Assembly is one of two chambers of the NSW state parliament. The other chamber is the Legislative Council. Members of the Legislative Council are referred to as MLC.
cases where Letters to the Editor attempted to link opposition to the mosque to planning issues, but the writers often slipped back into referencing issues of religion. For example, “Some of the letter writers who support the mosque in Gungahlin should go and live close to the mosque in Lidcombe (Sydney). Perhaps then they would change their mind. I have [lived in Lidcombe] so I know the disturbance that it causes with noise, traffic and sometimes unruly behaviour” (Cook 12 July 2012, p. 18). In this letter, Cook listed legitimate planning issues of noise and traffic first, but then seemed to add on the ‘unruly behaviour’ in the vicinity of the Lidcombe mosque. It could be argued that this placed the planning issues at the fore of the discussion, but still included the religious/cultural issues as something that needed to be discussed. One Letter to the Editor captioned ‘Not bigotry’ (Wilson 3 July 2012, p. 8), suggested surreptitious activity on the part of the Muslim community and used official planning language to convey this, “Non-disclosure of non-residential development plans is not honest marketing of virgin land” (Wilson 3 July 2012, p. 8). This letter writer also argued that “Joy Burch [Canberra’s Multicultural Affairs Minister]’s assertion of Muslims being ostracised [was] despicable political bullying” (3 July 2012, p. 8). While Wilson attempted to use planning and political discourses to dispute the mosque proposal, he slipped back into discussing the development in terms of the mosque proponents’ religion. He went on to state, “There is neither racism nor religious bigotry in residents recalling newspaper photographs published last year of the overflow of worshippers from the Lakemba mosque in Sydney completely blocking the street with their ritual obeisances” (Wilson 3 July 2012, p. 8). This statement was particularly interesting, because the new mosque proposed for Gungahlin had been pitched precisely because the Muslim community had outgrown the existing Yarralumla mosque. Additionally, scenes such as Wilson described, (with worshippers forced out of their mosque because of spatial constraints), appeared in photographs of Yarralumla which had been published in The Canberra Times three years earlier (see Figure 9 below).
The point of building the new mosque was to avoid circumstances such as Wilson described from happening again, so this letter writer’s concerns appeared to be unfounded and mistaken. Wilson’s mention too of the “dreaded Lakemba” (McGregor 2016) demonstrates how the suburb with a large Muslim population has become such a critical part of the public discourse on Islam in Australia.

In an editorial written by an unidentified Canberra Times writer, titled ‘Mosque criticism is ill-informed’ (no author 4 July 2012, p. 10), it was argued that:

It’s only fair that a proposal with the potential to affect the amenity (and real estate values) of neighbours and nearby residents receives close inspection and searching inquiry by authorities and the public (no author 4 July 2012, p. 10).

Initially this editorial appeared to be contributing to the ‘Othering’ of the local Muslim community, by listing potential negative effects on property prices caused by having a mosque in the area. The writer therefore seems to perpetuate “the most common outcry of any opponent to a proposed development…the negative impact on property prices” (Ryder 2015), which is linked to moral panics and “fears of neighbourhood change, and…the formation of ‘ethnic ghettos’” (Dunn 2001, p. 299). However, the piece went on to clarify:
One thing seems clear, the [Concerned Citizens of Canberra] is not well informed about territory planning processes. The ACT Planning and Land Authority, not the government, approves development applications, and the latter certainly does not commission “social impact assessments” on proposed places of worship (no author 4 July 2012, p. 10).

With this statement the tone of the editorial changed, it suggested that genuine well-informed planning issues should be raised and addressed, but emphasized too that using ‘scaremongering however, suggests the instigators of the group may not be the fair-minded dissenters they claim to be’ (no author 4 July 2012, p. 10). The piece therefore became more of a critique of the CCC’s justifications and tactics in opposing the mosque proposal. The editorial concluded by highlighting the need for a second mosque for Canberra’s Muslim community, and argued, ‘There is nothing to indicate it will be any more damaging to Gungahlin’s amenity (and real estate values) than any other place of worship in the area’ (no author 4 July 2012, p. 10). There was therefore a circular pattern to the editorial, in which the seemingly provocative statement made in the opening about real estate prices, was addressed and shut down as an inappropriate reason for rejecting the development.

A separate editorial (published in February 2015) which may have negatively impacted on perceptions of the CMC, regarded the Rivett mosque, another Islamic development in Canberra, which had been resolved ‘in less than two months…with all parties reasonably satisfied’ (no author 1 February 2015, p. 16). The Rivett mosque case was compared to the prolonged challenge to the Gungahlin mosque. The unnamed author of the piece wrote: ‘it is to the absolute credit of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community that they were able to take on the concerns of the community and be the adults in the conversation, going back to the government and asking for a new block of land’ (no author 1 February 2015, p. 16). This phrase could have been perceived as an attack on the CMC, implying that in the case of the Gungahlin proposal, it too could have modified its activities in the face of ongoing opposition, to expedite the approval process. Questioning the actions of the CMC mosque proponents, rather than the actions of the opposing CCC could be seen here as an attempt to blame the Gungahlin Muslim community for the ongoing drawn out legal challenges.

Throughout the protracted debate the Gungahlin Community Council (GCC) President Ewan Brown issued a statement that the GCC would not comment on issues “of a
contentious nature, particularly those involving religion, race, culture or ethnic origin…In effect, if we’re going to comment on something like the mosque it would be on matters of planning, road, infrastructure but not anything to do with their religious affiliations” (in Fallon 17 July 2012, p. 10). Since it was reported that this statement was made “to address some of the criticisms we’ve experienced” (Brown in Fallon 17 July 2012, p. 10), there was an inference that the GCC had previously made comments about the mosque which were based on issues of religion, race, culture or ethnic origin.

6.4.4. Submissions Opposing the Mosque

Both actual planning concerns and anti-Muslim sentiments were expressed within the ‘more than 30’ (Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1) submissions made to the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) in opposition to the mosque. These concerns included ‘traffic, parking, design, lack of consultation and, according to one anonymous submission, claims the mosque was not “compatible with Australian values and Australian law”’ (Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). Quoted within the news report headlined ‘Mosque Proposal Divides Residents’, was one submission which asked ‘the ACT government if it can “assure the citizens of Gungahlin that this centre will not be taken over by extremists, bent on bringing chaos to our immediate community”’ (in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1), whilst another claimed ‘the sight of women wearing burqas will be “perturbing” for children in the area’ (Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). A later letter similarly expressed “religious clothing creates a ‘them’ and ‘us’ society where the citizens do not feel truly equal” (Harrison 8 November 2014, p. 8). Yet another submission complained:

Muslims have to: “obey the Koran and therefore Sharia law. This means that Sharia law will always come first and Australian law second. I am particularly worried about the women and girls”…“In the DA [development application] several rooms are allocated for weekend classes – which means that all the girls from early age on will have Koran lessons and therefore will have no real chance to get integrated in Australian society” (in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1).

Further submissions similarly argued that a mosque would be “a threat to social harmony in Gungahlin” (submission in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1) and could “become the
focal point of hostility and social disharmony generated by Islam towards non-Muslims” (submission in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). There was a strong degree of irony in this last submission regarding alleged hostility by Muslims towards non-Muslims, particularly as much hostility had been expressed throughout the development debate by non-Muslims, towards the Muslim community. The Canberra Times went into great detail when directly citing the submissions that used anti-Muslim sentiments to oppose the development, whilst extra information about objections based on actual planning issues was limited to ‘several others complain the mosque will create too much traffic congestion’ (Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). As such, it could be argued that in reporting on the submissions to the ACT Planning and Land Authority, The Canberra Times gave minimal attention to those that discussed real planning issues, and instead provided extensive content from submissions that highlighted more extreme views against the mosque proposal. One possible explanation for this framing choice could be that “information about negative developments captures our attention far more than information about positive developments” (Sheafer 2007, p. 23). As such more contentious issues are generally considered to increase the newsworthiness of a story. It is also important to highlight that these negative and prejudicial views were mostly limited to the submission contents, rather than the overall news coverage, which tended to more favourably represent the proposed mosque and its future worshippers.

6.4.5. Organised Opposition to the Mosque

Other news items were more explicit in their criticism of Islam and the mosque proposal, particularly those that quoted members of the CCC. For example, in an article headlined ‘Gungahlin Mosque Objectors to Petition ACT Govt’ one unnamed CCC spokesman was reported as saying:

There were concerns about the numbers, with the mosque, what would go on at the mosque, if you look at say other cities, what do mosques do there?...It’s incredible, even in Sydney, they’re a no-go zone. When you look at the impact of these places, and perhaps not all mosques do have that, but some do, it creates that no-go zone. Now, in their own country, and there’s heaps of other countries, that’s their thing. But here in Australia I should be free to walk down a place, be it in the middle of
This statement clearly problematized the Muslim community by making claims that a mosque area should be considered an exclusive, unsafe, indeed ‘un-Australian’ place. These ideals were perpetuated when it was alleged that the CCC had sent out sample letters for Gungahlin residents to use to oppose the mosque. The example letter provocatively stated, “there is something different about mosques” and “mosques often result in hostility to non-Muslims in surrounding areas” (in Williams 6 July 2012, p. 1). It also went on to allege that a mosque “seeks to dominate the area in which it is placed” (in Williams 6 July 2012, p. 1). One interesting point about the form letters was that two of these three points of criticism were made in direct correlation to the mosque as a physical building, but they could each be extrapolated to position the Muslim community as ‘Other’, for under Orientalist theory Muslim people are often viewed as strange (‘something different’) and threatening (‘hostility’ and ‘dominate’).

The CCC president, Irwin Ross also ‘controversially used the kidnapping of Nigerian schoolgirls and the Boston Marathon bombing to explain his opposition to the development’ (Gorrey & Knaus 5 July 2014, p. 1). As such, Mr Ross attempted to link the Canberra Muslim community to international extremist Muslim groups, and stated that he was suspicious as to “what’s operating behind” the local Muslim community (Ross in Gorrey & Knaus 5 July 2014, p. 1). The Canberra Times repeated these controversial statements in a number of subsequent articles (Knaus 7 November 2015, p. 3; Knaus 23 November 2015, p. 4), and this material could be described as ‘boilerplate’, which is “recurring material inserted into stories extending longer than a single day to remind readers of prior context. It is a special type of ‘background’ information…Its discourse purpose is orientational, orienting the public to the status of a story to date” (Cotter 2010, p. 171). One purpose of this technique is to therefore remind news readers of what has already occurred. Significantly though, as Cotter further explains “boilerplate has implications for public understanding as it both responds to and frames the nature of a news story and its social entailments” (Cotter 2010, p. 180). Therefore by repeating Ross’ claims, it could be argued that The Canberra Times continued to disseminate the CCC’s Orientalist position. The negative claims were initially published in a news article following the approval of the Gungahlin mosque development by the ACT Supreme Court, and according to the
Supreme Court judgement, Mr Ross had displayed a “‘generalised hostility’ to the Muslim religion and its perceived spread” (Gorrey & Knaus 5 July 2014, p. 6), a sentiment that was repeated in a November 2015 article: ‘Irwin Ross, a fundamentalist Christian…was described as having a “generalised hostility to the Muslim religion and concern about what he saw as its spread”’ (Knaus 7 November 2015, p. 3. It was also reported that Mr Ross had submitted to the court a statement that included:

the following controversial paragraphs: “With the spread of mosques/schools, the property value of the land diminishes greatly. Local residents are often ‘encouraged’ or intimidated to sell their homes at lower prices. Another effect of the negative effect of Islam growing in our nation is that public/government opinion is noticeably becoming anti-Christian and pro-Islam, for example in the Defence Forces” (in Gorrey & Knaus 5 July 2014, p. 6).

In addition to these inflammatory statements, which included ideas pertaining to moral panics, Mr Ross also attempted to outline what he considered to be the key differences between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. However, as Gorrey and Kraus reported, ‘Master Mossop noted this attempt to distinguish the three faiths did not “reflect any degree of theological sophistication”’ (5 July 2014, p. 6). This judgement by a recognised and high profile authority figure was used to dismiss Mr Ross’ claims. However, even after the final decision had been made to reject the CCC’s challenge, therefore enabling the Gungahlin mosque to proceed, Mr Ross still perpetuated ‘Othering’ discourses. For example, ‘Mr Ross said his group would “monitor” its progress, and watch “all the other things” that are happening countrywide. “We’ll monitor how the mosque is going because we feel it’s of a public concern,” he said’ (Knaus 11 January 2016, p. 2). He therefore continued efforts to spread mistrust of the Canberra Muslim community, and Muslim communities Australia-wide. There’s no doubt these republished statements by Mr Ross were extremely contentious. The inclusion of them in the news discourses, together with descriptive terms such as ‘controversial’, and Master Mossop’s formal judgement of his character undermined the CCC’s authority, and the discriminatory anti-Islam message it tried to promulgate. However, through the various news discourse genres, The Canberra Times still gave the CCC a platform to spread its Orientalist message to the wider Gungahlin community.
Additional groups other than the CCC were also highly critical of the proposed mosque and the related Muslim community. It was reported in July 2012 that ‘Members of Gungahlin’s evangelical community [were] distributing extremist material from overseas in their campaign against the construction of a mosque on The Valley Avenue’ (Cox 13 July 2012, p. 1). Specifically named within the article was ‘far-right agitator Paul Weston, the chairman of the British Freedom Party... Mr. Weston says Islam was “worse than Nazism”’ (Cox 13 July 2012, p. 1). One interesting nuance in this article was that the term ‘extremist’ was applied to the far right, who often appropriate the term in reference to the Muslim community. The use of ‘extremist’ here to describe the far right’s activities could be seen to demonstrate criticism of the far right by The Canberra Times. “Akbarzadeh and Smith conclude that the terms ‘moderate’ and ‘mainstream’ are used to describe Muslims whom Australians should not fear in contrast to ‘extremists’” (Aly & Green 2008, para. 1). As such, it could be extrapolated that the fear usually associated with extremist Muslims had now been applied to the uncompromising far right. By extension, it may even be argued that The Canberra Times’ reporting style contributed to the ‘Othering’ of the far-right and their opinions.

Another group based on the NSW Central Coast, called ‘Concerned Citizens’, but which ‘had no link to the similarly named “Concerned Citizens of Canberra”’ (Cox 20 July 2012, p. 8), also distributed ‘anti-Islamic material to ACT politicians to support the campaign against the Gungahlin mosque’ (Cox 20 July 2012, p. 8). The distributed material called Islam the “greatest threat ever to confront Australia”...[it] is “as much of a political system as Nazism and Communism” and asserted that migration of Muslims to non-Muslim countries was “the main peaceful means of colonising the west for Islam”’ (Cox 20 July 2012, p. 8). This material was criticised by the Deputy Chairwoman of the Canberra Multi-Cultural Community Forum, Diana Abdel-Rahman, who said “I think [Canberrans] would be highly insulted to think that someone from near Sydney is trying to come in and ‘educate’ them” (in Cox 20 July 2012, p. 8). The presentation of ‘educate’ in inverted commas here suggested that the information on offer was certainly not educational or of benefit to any member of the Gungahlin community.

One final group that needs discussion here is the Australian Motorist Party (AMP). Burl Doble, the AMP candidate and former One Nation member, said the party had ‘concerns about traffic from the development...Mr. Doble was asked if his party would
drop its objections to the mosque if worshippers were prepared to walk, ride or take the bus to their prayers. “That’s fair to say,” he replied’ (Towell 7 September 2012, p. 5). This statement was published in an article titled ‘Motorists Party takes hard line on crime’ (Towell 7 September 2012, p. 5), which reported ‘Canberra’s drug dealers, prisoners, soft judges and Muslim drivers have all been put on notice by the Australian Motorist Party’ (Towell 7 September 2012, p. 5). By naming ‘Muslim drivers’ under the headline about crime yet another negative label was applied and connotation implied. In response to the AMP’s ‘concerns’, a subsequent editorial in November 2012 awarded Mr Doble and the AMP ‘the John Howard dog whistle39 award’ (Towell 24 November 2012, p. 2), because they had ‘tried to claim that their objections to a mosque in Gungahlin were based on worries about traffic and parking in the northern town centre. Yeah, right’ (Towell 24 November 2012, p. 2). This was a clear statement by reporter Noel Towell that the AMP’s objections to the mosque were not genuinely based on planning laws but were founded on racist principles.

6.4.6. The Flyer

One prominent aspect of the development debate that requires significant attention is the publication of a flyer by a ‘collective’ who were known only as ‘an anonymous group called the Concerned Citizens of Canberra’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1). In an article headlined ‘Racist’ Mosque Pamphlet Probed’ it was reported that Labor backbencher John Hargreaves had ‘said the pamphlet should be “condemned by the entire community of Canberra as a KKK attack on the Muslim community”’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1). There are some interesting parallels which may be drawn here between the CCC, (which was introduced for the first time in this particular report) and the KKK – Ku Klux Klan, with both group titles being reduced to a triple single-letter acronym. Mr Hargreaves effectively communicated the ideological fundamentalism of both groups and positioned the CCC as highly problematic from the outset.

The flyer itself was very strongly worded, asserting that the “500-capacity mosque will dominate the viewscape and will impact on you and all other residents of Gungahlin”

39 Dog whistle politics refers to the use of coded language in political rhetoric which appears to mean one thing to the general public but has a different meaning to a targeted sub-group. The term is often used in the negative sense, and in an Australian context is frequently applied to former Prime Minister John Howard’s political campaigning (Barrett 2006, p. 90).
(emphasis added) (in Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1). The use of the word ‘dominate’ could be understood to suggest the mosque patrons would attempt to control, or take over the community, whilst the accusation that the mosque would ‘impact on you’ was constructed as a statement of certainty, not as a concern to be discussed or questioned. These statements attempted to clearly outline what the CCC perceived to be the inevitable negative impact of the mosque on the “Australian neighbours” (quoted in Cox & Boland-Rudd 3 August 2012, p. 3). “Australian neighbours” was interesting phrasing here, as it appears to presume that Muslims are not already Australian, or that there are no Australian Muslims. Such lexicalisation clearly contributes to the establishment of an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ dichotomy in Gungahlin. The flyer included the message that:

Honesty and transparency in communicating with others whom your actions may affect is the accepted way that Australian neighbours treat each other. This developer and its client appears to have made little effort towards this. Therefore it is doubtful that they will be a good neighbour to the Gungahlin community (in Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1).

In this section the CCC outlined perceived virtues of the ‘Australian’ way of life. By implying that the CMC had not adhered to these socially constructed values, the CCC accused the Muslim community of being dishonest and secretive, leaving them no options of ‘fitting in’ with Gungahlin. However, there was a distinct contradiction here in that the flyer proceeded to invite other concerned community members ‘to attend a secret, closed-door meeting tomorrow about the development’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1). After said meeting this curiosity was challenged outright by ACT Multicultural Affairs Minister Joy Burch who described these particular actions by the CCC as “an irony – and perhaps that’s too subtle a word” (in Cox 2 July 2012, p. 2), emphasizing that this was “not the way that Canberra operates” (in Cox 30 June 2012, p. 2). There were further examples of the CCC’s clandestine behaviours when a spokesman for the group asked not to be identified, and it was reported that ‘The Canberra Times was asked to leave yesterday’s meeting after a majority in attendance said they did not want media present’ (Cox 2 July 2012, p. 1). Also, when the CCC had sent sample opposition letters to residents the group also informed ‘people how to keep their name secret when lodging an objection letter to the ACT Planning and Land Authority’ (Williams 6 July 2012, p. 1). Later in the debate, when members of the CCC had been identified, ‘The
Canberra Times contacted Mr. Ross, Mr. Adair and Mr. van den Nieuwenhuijzen, each of whom refused to be interviewed’ (Cox 28 August 2012, p. 1). Finally, when the CCC mounted a challenge to the ACT Supreme Court against the decision for the mosque to be approved, Mr Ross attempted to have his name supressed from the proceedings ‘to protect himself from “further unfavourable media attention”. But Justice Sidis dismissed his attempts to join the legal battle, saying she was not satisfied the interests of justice demanded it. She said she was “especially concerned” at Mr. Ross’ attempts to have his name and other details supressed’ (Knaus 27 March 2013, p. 3). Following from these multiple examples of evasive behaviour, The Canberra Times began to refer to the CCC as ‘the secretive participants in the campaign’ (Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 1), and did so on multiple occasions (Andrews & Cox 17 August 2012, p. 2; Andrews 10 November 2012, p. 7). These repetitions likely functioned to convey many negative characteristics of the CCC to The Canberra Times’ readership.

In addition to the secretive meetings and withholding members’ names, it was later suggested that the CCC was also secretive in its reasons for opposing the mosque development. It was suggested by one of the secret meeting attendees that at least part of the reason the CCC meeting may have been closed to the media was because “although they contest planning, they kept on bringing it back to social impact” (Ayoub Bouguettaya in Cox 2 July 2012, p. 2). This theory was further enforced by the revelations regarding the background of the CCC spokesman, Irwin Ross: ‘The secretive participants in the campaign consistently told media and government that they were concerned with local planning issues, including traffic and noise. But The Canberra Times revealed in June that Irwin Ross, the group’s spokesman, was a Christian fundamentalist activist’ (Andrews & Cox 17 August 2012, p. 2). This ideologically-charged identifier was repeated in an article headlined ‘Existential Crisis for Anti-Mosque Group’ (Andrews 10 November 2012, p. 7) further emphasizing the possibility that the religious persuasions of the mosque opponents may have been the true reasons behind their rejection of the development.

These accusations that religious or cultural prejudice was at the core of opposition resulted in condemnation by the “the territory’s political, multicultural and religious leaders” (Cox 7 July 2012b, p. 8), and subsequently, the Human Rights Commission launched an investigation. One article about the investigation was headlined ‘“Racist” mosque pamphlet probed’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1). The fact that the word ‘racist’
appeared in inverted commas meant it could have been interpreted two ways; either it was a quote (although if this was the case it was not made clear), or *The Canberra Times* was being cautious about identifying the flyer as racist material (*before* the Human Rights Commission had made a finding) and had used the quotation marks as a distancing technique (van Dijk 2014, p. 269).

One Letter to the Editor that also mentioned the CCC’s flyer, but appeared to counter any risk associated with it was captioned ‘Bias shown’ (O’Regan 23 July 2012, p. 8). O’Regan wrote in reference to the Human Rights Commission which was investigating the anti-Islamic flyer and letters, and quoted a previous legal finding^40 that “Muslims ‘do not share common racial, national, or ethnic origins’, and are therefore not an ethno-religious group within the terms of the Act” (O’Regan 23 July 2012, p. 8). In this letter, O’Regan did not argue that the flyer was *not* prejudicial or wrong, but simply that it could not be covered by the Discrimination Act. Despite this exacting point, when coupled with his opinions on the “dangers” of a mosque and his references to an “undercover mosque” (O’Regan 23 July 2012, p. 8), it became clear that this letter writer was definitely against the development. Therefore, whilst he criticized the newspaper for being biased and unbalanced, at the same time he also demonstrated his own prejudicial stance against the proposed mosque.

### 6.4.7. Letters to the Editor

Anti-Islamic sentiments were expressed in many other Letters to the Editor. One such example was a letter by Dunlop, who wrote in response to an editorial on the importance of multiculturalism and interfaith dialogue. Dunlop disagreed:

> Here’s another perspective: not all faiths are equal. Some promulgate behaviour inconsistent with the values of surrounding cultures. While Catholicism is a bit hard on adulterers and divorcees, it doesn’t advocate death as a punishment for the offending women. Many Muslims do (11 July 2012, p. 10).

Here, Dunlop contrasted the ‘good’ Catholicism with the ‘bad’ Islam, where the former was portrayed as mostly reasonable and the latter as irrational and extreme. In reference

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^40 NSW case: Ekermawi v Network Ten Pty Ltd [2008] NSWADT 334 (O’Regan 23 July 2012, p. 8)
to the statement that ‘not all faiths are equal’, Dunlop clearly portrayed Catholicism as being superior to Islam. The letter continued to suggest that the community should “hear assurances about values to be promulgated at Gungahlin” (Dunlop 11 July 2012, p. 10). The call for guarantees was also implied in the letter’s caption ‘Mosque proponents need to reassure community of values’ (11 July 2012, p. 10) which was shared with four other letters. This caption, and the statement in Dunlop’s letter were clearly representative of “the burden upon moderate Muslims…not only to prove their loyalty and integrity, but also to incessantly try to detach Muslims and Islam from the ideology and actions of the loud minority” (Iner & Yucel 2015, p. 7). In the local context, this letter could be seen to suggest that it was not the responsibility of the wider community to accept a Muslim community in Gungahlin, but rather, that it was the Muslim community who should take responsibility for proving their worth and working their way into the broader community.

Another grouping of four Letters to the Editor published by The Canberra Times the following day were run under the collective caption ‘‘No misconceptions whatsoever’ about Muslims’ (12 July 2012, p. 18). In this instance, all four letters shared a deeply negative view of Islam and the proposed Gungahlin mosque. The headline was drawn from the first letter by Morland, published as a response to Brendan Forde & Norshahril Saat’s editorial on dialogue and multiculturalism, and suggestion that the CCC were an organised minority who had misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims. Morland wrote about the “barbaric, cruel and sadistic treatment of women” (Morland 12 July 2012, p. 18) by Muslim societies, and also alleged that “those women lucky enough to avoid such treatment must be content living in a tent for most of their lives” (Morland 12 July 2012, p. 18). Represented in this letter was a common critique of Islam expressed by people such as Bernard Lewis – that Islam is a product of outdated and uncivilised societies. Lewis’ work has been described by Edward Said as a prime example of Orientalism, particularly as he wrote about the “backwardness of the Islamic world as compared with the advancing West” (Lewis 2001, p. 24). This derogatory view was evident in Morland’s letter, since he wrote about the ‘barbaric’ treatment of women, and included a stereotypical supposition of ‘living in a tent’ to contrast Islamic culture with the more civilised West.

Similar stereotypes about Muslim women also featured in a letter by Dunlop, who argued that residents could find “tired old institutionalised misogyny closer to home, at
our new mosque at Gungahlin, for example” (Dunlop 4 September 2012, p. 8). The West’s dominant ideology of cultural superiority could also be seen in a letter from Byrne, who wrote about the Muslims’ “repressive culture” (5 July 2014, p. 8). These stereotypical and reductionist views of Islam were drawn upon to oppose the Gungahlin mosque and were clear evidence of the pervasiveness of Orientalist thought across The Canberra Times’ coverage.

In a powerful letter captioned ‘Freedoms Not a Fluke’, Farrands wrote about what they considered to be the “increasing Islamification of Australia” (20 January 2015, p. 3):

- a recent writer seems unconcerned about halal certification (never mind those who are appalled by the sly introduction of this Islamic tax on our foods), another welcomes the burqa (never mind those who see it as a symbol of separation and divisiveness), some are unconcerned by the construction of mosques in our suburbs (never mind that mosques are not like churches), and some are willing to argue against freedom of speech (never mind that being offended is part and parcel of being free to express an opinion) (20 January 2015, p. 3)

This contribution effectively used literary devices through the repetition of the phrase ‘never mind’ in order to rebuke people who had been inclusive and welcoming of cultural differences, which Farrands perceived as threatening to the Australian lifestyle. Farrands also used inclusive language: ‘our food’ and ‘our suburbs’ to imply cultural and collective ownership that was likely to be impeded by the Gungahlin Muslim community. Some of Farrands’ assertions were corrected in a follow-up letter, which used the Australian Grocery and Food Council to refute Farrands’ claims of a Halal tax (Castello 23 January 2015, p. 2), and challenge some of the misconceptions that had been spread.

Further misunderstandings of Islam were evident in the naming on three occasions of the mosque as an ‘Islamic mosque’ (Clisby 9 March 2010, p. 2; Clisby 21 September 2010, p. 8; Cox 7 July 2012b, p. 8). There is no other kind of mosque; mosques are only associated with Islam so this tautology potentially demonstrated a level of ignorance on the part of the journalists involved and/or a lack of research on the issue. Several misunderstandings about Islam also appeared in Letters to the Editor. In a letter captioned ‘Religious Hyperbole’ Christie expressed that “Islam is a very confusing...
deity” (Christie 8 July 2014, p. 3). Islam is a religion, not a deity. The deity worshipped by Muslims is Allah. It is questionable as to why *The Canberra Times* would have chosen to publish a letter which had such a glaring error in it which could have reflected negatively on the newspaper. However, perhaps the *Times* published the letter to demonstrate how the writer had exposed themselves as an ill-informed individual making ludicrous comments that display fearmongering. The letter went on to somewhat frantically argue:

The ACT Supreme Court…did not see any correlation between followers of that deity kidnapping and raping hundreds of young girls nor that the warring warriors (ISIL) of that deity murdering followers of the same deity, posed a threat to our insular society. There was also a report of an Australian ‘freedom fighter’ claiming that his Allah has called for the torture and murder of other ‘followers of Allah’. Perhaps there is more than one Allah. Perhaps the Canberra Muslim Community group could clarify this? (Christie 8 July 2014, p. 3).

This letter very provocatively and without substantiation, implied that the followers of Islam in the Gungahlin community were connected to Boko Haram and/or Islamic State, a stereotypical conflation of all Muslims as extremists/zealots/terrorists. Additionally the closing sentences which asked the CMC to clarify if ‘Allah’ had a plurality of meanings (depending on disparate contexts) could be interpreted as condescending. Expecting the Muslim community to defend itself against the actions of violent fundamentalists was unfair, and being unwilling or unable to differentiate between followers of Islam and Islamic extremist was exceptionally naive.

A letter captioned ‘Education in Islam’ (Pilcher 10 July 2014, p. 2) was written in response to the above letter, and it stated:

With all due respect to L. Christie, if you’re going to criticise a religion and its adherents you should at least get your basic terminology right. The deity to whom Christie refers to as ‘Islam’ is known by his followers as, variously, Jehova, Jesus or Allah, depending on brand preference. The followers of Islam are known as Muslims and they refer to this deity as ‘Allah’. (He has several other titles including ‘Holy Ghost’, ‘I am that I am’ and ‘He Who Must Not be Named’, but one need not go
I propose, in order to be respectfully inclusive of his followers and to avoid confusion with other gods (a generic term, not a title), that this particular one henceforth be referred to as JehovahJesusAllah, listed in order of their invention (Pilcher 10 July 2014, p. 2).

Although this letter writer aimed to provide an ‘education’ in Islam, beyond correcting the deity name from Islam to Allah amongst other variations, the letter comes across as disparaging of all religions, or ‘brand preferences’ as Pilcher calls them. As such, whilst the letter aimed at one level to correct misinformation, at another level it appeared to be highly critical of religion, including Islam, and could therefore have contributing to the ‘Othering’ of Islam and Muslims, particularly in the Australian context.

6.4.8. Islam vs. Christianity

Much of the conflict around the proposed Gungahlin mosque could be interpreted through the lens of a conflict of religions, specifically Christianity vs. Islam, especially once it was discovered that the president of the CCC was a Christian man, often referred to in news coverage as a ‘Christian fundamentalist’ (Andrews and Cox 17 August 2012, p. 2; Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 1; Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 1; Gorrey and Knaus 5 July 2014, p. 1; Knaus 7 November 2015, p. 3; Knaus 23 November 2015, p. 4; Knaus 27 November 2015, p. 2). The lawyer for the CCC, Robert Balzola, was also revealed as ‘the president of a Christian lawyers group called the Religious Freedom Institute that lobbies for Christian rights’ (Cox 28 August 2012, p. 1), and described as ‘a prominent Christian who has opposed a mosque in Bendigo for a similarly named group, the Concerned Citizens of Bendigo’ (Knaus 7 November 2015, p. 3). There was therefore strong reported evidence that the opponents of the Muslim development were Christians, and this could be seen to contribute to a ‘Clash of Civilisations’ (Huntington 1997), wherein cultural differences and especially religious differences are claimed to be the main source of conflict in the modern world (Bell 2002, p. 2).

Following the publication of flyers in opposition to the mosque proposal, there was discussion of changes to the ACT’s anti-discrimination laws. One article on this subject headlined ‘Fears vilification change may affect churches’ (Cox 16 August 2012, p. 3), specifically emphasised the effects any legislative changes may have on churches and
Christian leaders. The report quoted Anglican Bishop Stuart Robinson, head of the Canberra and Goulbourn Archdiocese and Monsignor John Woods, administrator of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulbourn, whose comments comprised the majority of the content. These high profile clergymen were mentioned by name or title six times in total and each quoted twice. Both spoke against proposed changes to the anti-discrimination laws, however, it was also reported that ‘Monsignor Woods “unreservedly condemned” anti-Islamic material that had been distributed throughout Canberra this year’ (Cox 16 August 2012, p. 3). At completion of the article one single quote was included from the Canberra Islamic Centre president Azra Khan, who offered: “My feeling is that [the amendment] would be supported widely” (in Cox 16 August 2012, p. 3). Pointedly, this was the only statement by someone associated with the Muslim community that was included in the report. It may be argued that this minimal representation favoured the Christian community who were reported to be potentially in danger of being negatively affected by the law changes. However, this is problematic because it was the Muslim community who were actually at risk of vilification if the laws were not amended.

6.5. Discourses of Inclusion

6.5.1. Supportive and Welcoming Attitudes

Despite the Orientalist ‘Othering’ that appeared in some of the news items about the Gungahlin mosque development, there was also some evidence of a more inclusive attitude. General support for the development was offered by official spokespeople including the ‘Opposition multicultural affairs spokesman Steve Doszpot [who] said “of course I support the Muslim community”’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 2) and Gungahlin Community Council (GCC) president Alan Kerlin, who confirmed ‘the GCC encouraged the building of the Islamic mosque’ (Clisby 9 March 2010, p. 2), although Mr Kerlin had previously spoken about the need for the mosque to ‘integrate’ into Western style. Mr Ahmed of the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. (CMC) also exclaimed that ‘he had received “overwhelming” support from the Canberra community for the mosque’ (Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 8), whilst Ikebal Patel, the former president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, explained “Canberra, besides a little bit of opposition to the Gungahlin mosque and the Islamic school, has been very supportive” (in Gorrey 21 June 2014, p. 8). The authority that came from these official utterances
lent power to the supportive and inclusive discourses in contrast with the ‘Othering’ that occurred elsewhere in the coverage.

Following the approval of the mosque, journalists at *The Canberra Times* continued to offer support to the cause. One editorial piece read: ‘When complete, it will – contrary to the views of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra – have no more impact, social amenity or otherwise, than any other similarly sized place of worship in the ACT’ (no author 10 July 2014b, p. 2). This positive phrase was emphasized stylistically, placed as a pull-quote on the front page of *Times2*, an insert of the newspaper which “delivers lifestyle and feature content to enrich the lives of Canberrans” (*The Canberra Times* 2015, p. 7).

Another way support for the development was communicated was through figures used to provide evidence of the limited vocal minority who had opposed the mosque. For example, in an article headlined ‘Respect the Key to Interfaith Harmony’, it was reported that ‘Last year, Canberrans overwhelmingly backed the building of a mosque in Gungahlin after 30 residents had tried to block the development. There are now seven mosques in Canberra, adding to the religious landscape of churches, synagogues and temples’ (Griepink 9 February 2013, p. 8). In this piece ‘Canberrans’ as a whole were pitted against a small collective of 30 who had rejected the mosque’s proposal. This direct comparison made the opposition appear trivial in relation to the rest of the community. In addition, the article specified that seven mosques had been built in Canberra, noting too, the presence of religious buildings from various denominations, in an effort to highlight Canberra’s multicultural and diverse community cultures.

The diversity of the community was supported by the Canberra Interfaith Forum, which was developed to promote discussion and respect between the faiths. ‘The forum’s members include people of Christian, Buddhist, Baha’i, Jewish, Muslims, Hindu and Sikh faiths. In 2012 27000 Canberrans identified as Muslim and 3000 identified as Hindu. Australia-wide, the largest growing religion is Islam, which has increased by 40 percent since 2006’ (Griepink 9 February 2013, p. 8). Despite some grammatical issues (in listing the Christian/Buddhist/Jewish faith, the report should have referenced the Islamic faith, not Muslims), this statement clearly acknowledged the diversity of faiths within Canberra’s communities and once again, used figures to demonstrate the growth patterns for non-Christian religions in the area, and nationwide. The multiplicity of religions in the area was also reinforced by the image chosen to accompany the article,
which showed Natalie Mobini, Ahmed Youssef, Paul Taylor, Robyn Horton and Amardeep Singh, who were scheduled to speak at the interfaith forum at the National Multicultural Festival\(^4\) (see Figure 10).

In the photo’s caption, the members of the interfaith forum were identified by name only and were not directly aligned with the religion they adhered to, and were representing at the event. This brevity was in the spirit of the article and the forum more generally - which aimed to achieve peace and acceptance amongst adherents of different faith communities in Canberra. It was also representative of responsible reporting by The Canberra Times, in that the publication did not unnecessarily call attention to these person’s religious ideals.

It may be argued that the use of culturally-specific terminology in The Canberra Times’ news discourses could represent attempts by the newspaper to be more inclusive in its reporting. For example, in a 2014 article headlined ‘Mosque Starts and Ramadan is the

\(^4\) The National Multicultural Festival has been an annual event in Canberra since 1996 which “promotes equality of opportunity, maintaining social cohesion, building social capital and minimising social exclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse Canberrans” (ACT Government n.d.). The event is supported by the ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs.
Deadline’, David Ellery used the terms “minaret” (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 2) and “Adhān” (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 2) in relation to the mosque. Both of these terms were subsequently explained, with a minaret being clarified as a “small tower” (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 2) and the Adhān being explained as the call to prayer. A third term, “Muezzin” (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 2) was used in the report without explanation. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2015), a muezzin is the official who leads the call to prayer, and in a large mosque he would stand on the minaret. Perhaps this terminology was also used by Times’ journalists to help its general readership to learn more about the proposed mosque and how it would function, thereby breaking down some of the obstacles (generated through ignorance or disinterest) which may have existed between the Gungahlin Muslim and the wider Canberran communities. This strategy was also used in a June 2016 news article on Ramadan which aimed to educate readers on what Ramadan is, when it starts and ends, as well as the five pillars of Islam. This article used words such as “Iftars” (Jeffery 12 June 2016, p. 3) which were explained as being community evening meals during Ramadan. The article also included Muslim voices to help explain the practices of Ramadan, including Islamic Society of the ACT president Adbul Hakem and Ahmadiyya ACT Elders president Khalid Syed. The image accompanying the article was of community member Rahimat Ali and his son Rehan at the breaking of fast, which was an inclusive image in that it was not just of people of power within the Canberra Muslim Community Inc., but was a more grassroots representation of Gungahlin’s Muslims (see Appendix C).

6.5.2. Benefits of the Mosque

Other inclusive news items focused on why the mosque was needed, with two images published in July 2009 used to demonstrate the urgency of the situation. The first image showed that there was an overflow of worshippers from the existing Yarralumla mosque (see Figure 11).
Within the relevant article, Ikebal Patel from the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils and the ACT Muslim Advisory Council explained: “People are praying out in the sun in summer on the ground and in the dirt. In winter we have people praying out in the rain and the cold, putting [down] mats or just pieces of cardboard. It’s not conducive to quiet reflection or praying” (Hand 19 July 2009, p. 3). Within the same article it was stated that “hundreds of cars lined Empire Circuit, some double- or triple-parking on the grass” (Hand 19 July 2009, p. 3). Whilst the parking situation was not directly supported by the image accompanying this article, it is presumably what was demonstrated in an image from a later article on 24th December, 2009 (Figure 12).

Both images used intensification, whereby repetition of key elements in the image (people in Figure 11, and cars in Figure 12) achieve the news value of superlativeness (Bednarek & Caple 2012b, p. 106). As such, the two photographs demonstrated the
strain on both worshippers and infrastructure that had been caused by the Muslim community outgrowing the existing Yarralumla mosque, and provided clear evidence for why the new mosque was needed. This urgent demand was reiterated by reported figures that the new mosque would ‘serve a congregation of between 3000 and 5000’ (9 July 2014, p. 1). The necessity for the mosque development to go ahead was also backed by ACT planners, who as Mark Sawa reported had ‘found “the potential impact of not allowing this development to proceed, as a hypothetical option, was…considered and found to be significant” given the constraints that would be placed on the associated needs of a growing Muslim community’ (Sawa 4 September 2012, p. 8). Therefore the ACT planners, as an official entity with responsibility for holistic appraisals off and solutions to Canberra’s planning developments, seem to have played an important role in endorsing the Gungahlin mosque, based on the needs of the Canberra Muslim community. This example demonstrates the multimodal nature of the newspaper articles, because it is the combination of text and image which highlighted the importance of the mosque development.

Several articles also emphasized the benefits that the mosque would have for the broader Gungahlin community. For example, Alan Kerlin of the GCC declared that ‘it was imperative the mosque be built in the town centre since this would bring business into Gungahlin during peak prayer time’ (Clisby 9 March 2010, p. 2), and CMC president Borhan Ahmed also highlighted the potential economic advantages of a new mosque: “Gungahlin is a growing area. Any new facilities within the area will be an added boost to the local economy as well” (in Fallon 3 July 2012, p. 10). It could be argued that these strategic statements were designed to offer some kind of foreseeable value (generated by the mosque) to the wider Gungahlin community, in order to garner support for the proposed development.

6.5.3. Muslim Voices and Images

There was some evidence within the coverage of powerful Muslim voices representing the Muslim community’s interests in the debate. Although, members of the CMC were only quoted in 19 articles, which was almost half the number of opportunities granted to spokespeople of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra (CCC), who were quoted in 36 articles. One high profile Muslim voice which was frequently ‘heard’ in the reporting
was Ikebal Patel, chair of the ACT Muslim Advisory Council and president of Muslims Australia, who directly featured in three articles. Mr Patel spoke of the “excitement within the community” (in Clisby 21 September 2010, p. 8) in regard to the Gungahlin proposal, and confirmed the need for a new mosque and the growing numbers of the Canberra Muslim community, on other occasions. Osman Adam, the president of the Islamic Society of Belconnen, spoke about an Islamic school being proposed for Gungahlin, and Dr Abdul Hakin, president of the Islamic Society of the ACT, spoke about Ramadan and tolerance within the community. These authoritative voices helped to lend power and legitimacy to the Canberra Muslim community in the media discourse.

Once the mosque debate was officially over, in January 2016, following the confirmation that the CCC would not pursue further legal action [‘Group gives up fight against proposed mosque’ (Knaus 11 January 2016, p. 1)], the CMC president Dr Md Anisul Islam was indirectly quoted as saying that, ‘the CMC was very happy to hear the group’s decision, and he thanked the government and members of the wider Canberra community for supporting the mosque… He also wanted to “extend a hand of friendship” to members of the Concerned Citizens Group’ (Back & Knaus 16 January 2016, p. 6). This authoritative voice responding to the success of the mosque proposal was supported by an image of Dr Islam and the CMC vice-president Azmat Sharlef at the mosque site (see Figure 13).
This visual discourse was a powerful example of inclusive reporting by *The Canberra Times* because not only did it show two of the key people involved in the mosque development, it also displayed a combination of what could be considered ‘traditional’ Islamic dress and ‘modern’ dress, comprised of a business suit. The photograph did not therefore depict a stereotypical representation of Islam, and contributed to a more comprehensive and contemporary image of Muslim people.

Other, less prominent, more grassroots, Muslim voices were also heard in the *Times* reporting. For example, Ayoub Bouguettaya, identified as ‘a practicing Muslim and
Australian citizen’ (Cox 7 July 2012b, p. 8), spoke about the secret meeting held by the CCC in opposition to the proposed mosque. He offered an interesting insight into the location of the secret CCC meeting: “I don’t know if they’re aware but that’s a room that’s actually been used for Muslim prayers” (in Cox 7 July 2012b, p. 8). It could be argued that here that Mr Bouguettaya used his insider knowledge to weaken the CCC’s oppositional profile by poking fun at their ignorance. There were also some claims to propriety made by The Canberra Times on behalf of Mr Bouguettaya, with reported references to ‘a mosque in his neighbourhood’ (Cox 7 July 2012b, p. 8), and ‘the place he had chosen to make his home’ (Cox 7 July 2012b, p. 8). The possessive pronouns here could have been used to demonstrate belonging to the local Gungahlin community. There were also official calls for Muslim voices to have an equal representation throughout the mosque proposal debate, as shown in a report headlined ‘Muslim groups must be heard in mosque battle, says judge’ (Knaus 15 March 2013, p. 10). This message was in reference to the appeal against the mosque approval in the ACT Supreme Court, a matter which had been underway for six months, but the CMC had yet to take part:

Acting Justice Sidis said she must hear from them before the proceedings were finalised and said previous attempts to contact them were unlikely to have been effective. She said the group must be written to and said if they did not appear next week, the court would assume that they did not wish to be heard (Knaus 15 March 2013, p. 10).

This was a very interesting statement by the judge, because it raised a number of follow up questions: Why was it likely that attempts to contact the CMC had been ineffective? Who was being blamed for the ineffective communication - the contactors or those contacted? Whatever the answer to these questions, it was reported almost two weeks later that ‘The Canberra Muslim Community organisation has chosen not to be a party in the proceedings but is closely observing the legal battle’ (Knaus 27 March 2013, p. 3). With this report, the issue of voice changed slightly, because it could now be suggested that the Muslim community had in fact not been denied a voice, but rather, had chosen to not have a voice. This decision may have shifted the power dynamic in favour of the CMC, as it had been invited to make choices in the debate’s formalised proceedings.
After the CCC had lost its appeal the CMC were represented visually. A large photograph was published of CMC members Mohammed Yunus, President Yasser Dabhoiwa, Nazre Sobhan and Borhan Ahmed, and showed them smiling and looking happy. This was in stark contrast to a smaller photograph of CCC president and spokesperson Irwin Ross included in the report’s framing layout (see Figure 14).

![Image: Gungahlin mosque opponents lose court battle](image)

**Figure 14:** The Canberra Times, 5 July 2014, p. 1

The picture of the CMC members leaving court was significantly larger than that of Irwin Ross, and was also more dominantly positioned in the context of the news story, appearing immediately under the headline ‘Gungahlin Mosque Opponents Lose Court Battle’. In visual analysis, the concept of salience is defined by Jewitt and Oyama as how “some elements can be made more eye-catching than others” (2001, p. 150), while Martinec and Salway explain that “a more important item tends to be of a greater size than a less important one” (2005, p. 365). According to these views it could be argued that the CMC were portrayed as the central and powerful group entity in the article, which was entirely appropriate considering their victory in the legal battle.
6.5.4. **Opposition of ‘Othering’**

In the course of the reporting on the proposed mosque development, some of the news items directly addressed the ‘Othering’ that occurred regarding the Muslim community. One way this was achieved was through voices of authority quoted as news sources. For instance ‘Multicultural Affairs Minister Joy Burch said she was disappointed Gungahlin’s Muslim community had “yet again been ostracised”’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1), whilst ‘Brian Medway, a senior pastor at Grace Belconnen, one of the churches attended by Irwin Ross…said he was “ashamed” of flyers opposing the development’ (Cox 7 July 2012b, p. 8) that the CCC had produced. The State Opposition Leader at the time, Liberal Zed Seselja, was also quoted as saying:

> Freedom of worship is one of the most basic beliefs of the Liberal Party and we fully support the right of the Muslim people to build a place of worship in Gungahlin. While I support the right of people to object to any development through proper government channels, I do not support opposition to the mosque based on religious grounds (in Cox 13 July 2012, p. 1).

These three high profile voices all spoke against the negative campaign that had been launched by the CCC and reiterated that opposition based on religious grounds was not appropriate, nor legitimate. This concern was also shared by some of the ‘20 Canberra residents [who] wrote to the government in support of the development’ (Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). One resident complained about the CCC’s flyer and said:

> the group’s objections to the mosque are “flimsy at best and outright bigoted at worst. Though I am not a religious person I feel that someone should be just as free to build a mosque as a church and having it near Gungahlin town centre seems as good a location as any in the area” (in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1).

Other submissions quoted in the article headlined ‘Mosque Proposal Divides Residents’ also spoke of concerns that “a few members of the community will let their fear and ignorance get in the way of allowing any member of the Gungahlin community a place to call their own” (submission in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1), and another stated “I am disappointed that people feel the need to tar all Muslims with the terrorist brush” (submission in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). The dread and insensitivity included in the
original submissions demonstrated elements of the Othering campaign that the CCC had employed, as the group displayed its ‘concern’ through these tactics.

One particular article which argued against ‘Othering’ was headlined ‘\textit{Imposition of Sharia law a “myth”}’ (Peake 20 August 2012, p. 4). Labor’s Maria Vamvakinou, head of a federal inquiry into multiculturalism, spoke against a number of stereotypes, misconceptions and confusions surrounding the Muslim community in Gungahlin. Ms Vamvakinou said she ‘hope[d] to push back against the notion that all Muslims in Australia want[ed] to impose Sharia law…describe[d] this as a myth and a “fault line” in the community, along with the perception that Muslims do not want to integrate with mainstream Australia’ (Peake 20 August 2012, p. 4). She continued to explain that “the majority of the Muslim community never asked for Sharia law and I know they have never sought it…We do not see the need for the implementation of Sharia law as part of accommodating cultural sensitivities” (in Peake 20 August 2012, p. 4). This Federal politician’s detailed critique of the misinformation used to negatively frame Islam and Muslims as ‘Other’ functioned to powerfully refute the Orientalist discourse in the community.

When the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) approved the Gungahlin mosque on 29th August 2012, it was reported that ‘several objections to the mosque on religious and cultural grounds had been found to be “irrelevant” and “unsubstantiated”’ (Cox 30 August 2012, p. 1). In an article headlined ‘\textit{Mosque Approval Praised},’ reporter Lisa Cox wrote:

\begin{quote}
In his report on the development application, chief planning executive David Papps said … While ACTPLA “carefully considered and deliberated on the many representations received” some objections to the development were “irrelevant”. “Some of the representations included statements or reports concerning lack of community integration, assimilation, differences in faiths and beliefs, differences in world views, security concerns, perceptions about values and sources of funding and alleged links between members of the Muslim community and/or adherents of the Islamic faith to crime, organized crime, violence and terrorism and the like,” Mr. Papps states in the report. “Many of them were found to be irrelevant because they did not relate to the ACT Muslim community. Many were also unsubstantiated (largely drawn
This official finding of the chief planning executive was a formal and institutionalized dismissal of the ‘Othering’ that had been occurring throughout the mosque development debate. By acknowledging that problematic and unnecessary ‘Othering’ had taken place through various means and stages of the development proposal process, the ACTPLA invalidated opposition based on ‘Othering’ and affirmed, as Canberra Multicultural Community Forum deputy chair Diana Abdel-Rahman did, that “processes were followed, guidelines were accepted, information sessions were held…[planning consideration] was done like any other place of worship” (in Cox 30 August 2012, p. 1).

Other news items featured the journalists’ voices to argue against ‘Othering’. In some cases, this was explicitly done, and was clearly apparent in an editorial captioned ‘Muslim Community’s Needs Deserve Respect’: ‘It is incumbent on all involved that opinions are respectfully put and considered and that we don’t succumb to trying to alienate Muslim members of our community’ (no author 19 July 2009, p. 20). Whilst plainly critical of ostracizing tendencies, the editorial also inclusively described Muslims as (already) ‘members of our community’, a much more encompassing form of expression than the divisive ‘us’ vs ‘them’ found often throughout the coverage.

Another editorial piece by Graham Downie argued the idea ‘that people are entitled to object to a development application is not questioned. But there is a process for objections and stirring up xenophobia is not part of it’ (Downie 8 July 2012, p. 20). Again, The Canberra Times’ team had made a very clear statement with no room for misinterpretation; that ‘Othering’ was not appropriate under any circumstances, nor was it an acceptable or legitimate strategy for contesting the mosque development proposal.

Additional journalists argued against the ‘Othering’ that had been perpetrated by the CCC by undermining the group’s authority. For instance, in an article headlined ‘Flyers in the Face of a Fair Go for All?’ Lisa Cox described Irwin Ross as ‘a Christian fundamentalist activist who live[d] at least 15 kilometres away from the proposed site’ (Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 1). Along with the negative connotations of the word ‘fundamentalist’, used here by the reporter as an ‘Othering’ strategy to “help create another group as apart from us, different from us and dangerous to us” (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery 2013, p. 148), the information about Mr Ross’s proximity to the mosque’s (potential) location served an interesting function. The question implied
was: if Mr Ross lived ‘at least 15km away’ was he really eligible or entitled to have a voice in the matter? In an article.headlined ‘Group Loses Its Fight to Stop Mosque Being Built’ it was later reported that ‘many of the members [of the CCC] did not live in Gungahlin’ (Knaus 7 November 2015, p. 3). This was a fitting approach to critiquing the CCC by *The Canberra Times*, because much of the ‘Othering’ of the Muslim community had been comparatively based on claims that they did not belong or did not reside in the area targeted for the mosque development.

Ian Warden, another editorial writer for *The Canberra Times* wrote acerbically of how the debate over the Gungahlin mosque had inspired him to consider granting a 2013 ‘un-Australian of the Year’ award (Warden 29 December 2012, p. 2). The journalist ‘warned’ that if he’d been awarding the prize in 2012 that, ‘Canberra’s NIMBYs, the most dynamic and imaginative in the world, would have jostled for the award. NIMBYs in the running would have been the opponents of the Gungahlin mosque’ (Warden 29 December 2012, p. 2). The acronym NIMBY stands for ‘Not In My Back Yard’, and is defined by Dictionary.com as being “used to express opposition by local citizens to the locating in their neighborhood of a civic project, as a jail, garbage dump, or drug rehabilitation center, that, though needed by the larger community, is considered unsightly, dangerous, or likely to lead to decreased property values” (2016, no page). Boydstun & Glazier have also identified NIMBYism as “a powerful frame…firmly rooted in considerations regarding self” (2013, p. 713). It could be argued therefore, that by referring to Canberra’s NIMBYs as ‘the most imaginative in the world’, Warden had inferred that their reasons for opposing the mosque development had been concocted or invented. Also, by linking these mosque opponents to an imagined award for the most ‘un-Australian of the Year’, he also implied that to advocate ‘Othering’ was indeed ‘un-Australian’. As previously stated regarding inconsistent arguments about location and legitimate belonging, being ‘un-Australian’ was another claim that was often levied against the Muslim community. Consequently, Warden critiqued the CCC by using some of the frames of opposition that they themselves had used against the Gungahlin Muslim community in opposing the mosque development.

One final editorial piece of note, captioned ‘*ACT Can Be Model of Diversity with New Mosque*’ and written by Brendan Forde and Norshahril Saat, (who were PhD candidates from the Department of Political and Social Change at the Australian National University), argued that ‘much of the rhetoric of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra
group is grounded in many misconceptions about Islam and Muslims’ (Forde & Saat 10 July 2012, p. 9). After first identifying the roots of the ‘Othering’ which had been occurring, Forde and Saat articulated that:

Dialogue is the most crucial element in developing mutual trust and understanding…Through dialogue Muslims can have a forum to share their faith with others and also to respond to concerns…The debate over the proposed Gungahlin mosque provides us with this opportunity for dialogue. Handled correctly, this situation can allow us to grow as a community (Forde & Saat 10 July 2012, p. 9).

While these writers suggested mutual engagement and conversation as strategies to overcome prejudicial ‘Othering’, they also cautioned about the potential negative consequences if misunderstandings within communities were not discussed:

The resulting mistrust can provide a fodder for extremist agendas to take hold. This exacerbation of fear by those who seek to appropriate and exploit religion for their political agenda leads to violence. We were reminded of this in July 2011 when Anders Behring Breivik murdered eight people in downtown Oslo…on the pretext of ‘defending’ Norway from the evils of multiculturalism (Forde & Saat 10 July 2012, p. 9).

The writers’ specific example of a Christian man (rather than a Muslim) who had used religiously motivated extreme violence to assert a warped nationalistic ideology, helped to debunk misconceptions that these kinds of acts were exclusive to Islamic fundamentalists, or ‘Others’.

6.5.5. Letters to the Editor

Several Letters to the Editor also demonstrated that some Gungahlin residents had been extremely disappointed by the ‘Othering’ of the Muslim community. One example of this was a group of five letters published under the shared caption: ‘Anti-mosque campaign perpetuates fear, intolerance’ (4 July 2012, p. 10). Four of the five Letters to the Editor were supportive of the mosque. These letters argued that “Fear of, and prejudice against, people of different race and religion take various forms. They need to be condemned as un-Christian and un-Australian” (O’Sullivan 4 July 2012, p. 10), and
also referred to a similar campaign against a Buddhist temple in the suburb of Lyneham 30 years prior: “I submit that the people of Lyneham have not suffered unduly from having the temple in their midst, nor will the people of Gungahlin suffer from having a mosque” (Calvert 4 July 2012, p. 10). Both of these letters therefore criticized the opposition to the mosque at a general level, however two others directed their criticism at the CCC specifically. For example, John Mason asserted that he was “disgusted at the way the Concerned Citizens of Canberra have besmirched our reputation as a progressive, tolerant city by stirring up hatred against Muslims in the name of ‘social impact’” (Mason 4 July 2012, p. 10). He further went on to suggest that “by hiding behind the traditional bigot’s white sheet of anonymity, presumably because they fear hordes of wild-eyed jihadists, these people betray their ignorance as well as their cowardice” (Mason 4 July 2012, p. 10). Interestingly, this letter indirectly referenced the KKK (‘traditional bigot’s white sheet of anonymity’), used previously in other Times coverage (specifically in regard to the CCC) and used media stereotypes of Muslims as ‘wild-eyed jihadists’ to belittle alarmist attitudes, to denigrate the CCC, and by extension, the ‘Othering’ of the Muslim community. The final letter published in this collection was by Brendan Forde, who had previously written an editorial for The Canberra Times. He picked out a specific statement by a CCC spokesman, that mosques were ‘no-go zones’, to refute: “What an extraordinary statement! Mosques are no more ‘no-go zones’ than churches are. The status of a mosque in providing a space for Muslims to pray in privacy and dignity should be no different from that of churches for Christians” (Forde 4 July 2012, p. 10). Forde used a specific example of the CCC’s rhetoric to explain that as a place of worship, a mosque was no different to any other value for religious observances. Forde also addressed the CCC’s tactics more generally, and stated that “Concerned Citizens of Canberra are perpetrating fear, intolerance and division in our community … intolerance cannot be ignored. Rather, it must be exposed, challenged and defeated” (Forde 4 July 2012, p. 10). Forde therefore explicitly called out the CCC for its ‘Othering’ techniques that had created tension in the community and said they must be overcome. His previous editorial had also provided the tactics to do so; namely, education and dialogue.

Grouping the Letters to the Editor, as above, was a common approach used by The Canberra Times throughout the mosque debate. On 11 July 2012, five letters again shared a caption: ‘Mosque proponents need to reassure community of values’. However,
this time only one of the letters actually shared the sentiment expressed in the headline – that it was not the responsibility of the wider community to accept the Muslim community, but that the Muslim community was responsible for pleading its case. The other four letters were actually very pro-mosque, which meant that the headline could have given a false impression to anyone skimming the newspaper. The disconnect between the headline and the majority of the letters also subverted the role of headlines, which is to summarise what is known and tell audiences “what they are supposed to be interested in” (van Dijk 2014, p. 245). One letter called the debate over the mosque a “misinformed Christian witch-hunt” (Drumgold 11 July 2012, p. 10) and asked “Why is it, in light of the sea of similarities we share, we so fear the few insignificant differences?” (Drumgold 11 July 2012, p. 10). Reverend Paul Black, rector at St John’s Anglican Church, Reid, similarly expressed: “One would hope the development will be approved and that friendships born from diversity, shared experience and our common humanity will grow and flourish as a result” (Black 11 July 2012, p. 10). These two letters both attempted to draw people’s attention to the similarities and commonalities amongst the Gungahlin community, rather than the difference like the ‘Othering’ discourse did. Both letters also referenced religion, with Reverend Black’s institutional status used to reinforce his authority, and Drumgold’s specific language choices regarding the Christian witch-hunt to describe the prejudicial campaigning against the mosque.

In his letter, Hargreaves told a story from his childhood:

> When I was seven years old, I went to a two-teacher primary school in Sydney. I was terrorised by a woman dressed head-to-toe in black, with a white bib and a gold chain around her neck. She disciplined me regularly with a long piece of cane. Her name was Mother Mary Angela and my parents revered the good nun. She wore the dress of a devotee to her religion proudly. She terrorised the seven-year-old not with her black habit but with her cane. Can someone explain the difference between a Muslim woman proudly wearing the dress of her religion and a nun doing the same? (Hargreaves 11 July 2012, p. 10).

By telling this personal narrative the letter writer contrasted Islam and Christianity and cleverly exposed how stereotypical meanings aligned with religious dress can be incongruent with how those identified by religious dress may behave and may be
understood. Judy Bamberger similarly used comparison and contrast in her letter to demonstrate that although the actions of ‘Othering’ suggested that Islam as an extraordinary culture was dangerous, the mosque proposal would actually be quite ordinary in relation to resultant changes to the local community:

A mosque will no more inherently ‘change the character of the town centre’ than a new church, Starbucks, Coles or Costco. A mosque is no more a ‘threat to social harmony’ than a Polish community centre, a Hindu temple or the new ASIO building. A mosque is no more likely to be ‘taken over by extremists’ than a centre housing the Exclusive Brethren (an ‘extremist cult’, according to a former prime minister). A mosque is no more ‘incompatible with Australian values’ than an Orthodox Jewish enclave (marriage, divorce significantly different from Australia’s, inequality of sexes embedded in the culture). Why don’t we protest against these? (Bamberger 11 July 2012, p. 10).

In this evaluation, Bamberger used religious and secular examples to demonstrate that the mosque proposal was simply another development application for the town. She cleverly integrated some of the more common reasons used to oppose the mosque, including that it would ‘change the character of the town’, was a ‘threat to social harmony’, would be ‘taken over by extremists’ and was ‘incompatible with Australian values’, so that she was able to directly and explicitly challenge these ‘Othering’ frames and refute each of the claims. Bamberger’s kind of direct rebuttal was a very effective statement against some of the ‘Othering’ techniques employed by various mosque opponents.

6.5.6. Similarities Between Islam and Christianity

Many voices in the mosque debate compared the controversy to either a hypothetical or actual (and recent) church proposal, in attempts to uncover what they suggested was the true, religious motivation behind opposition to the Islamic development. One editorial writer asked ‘would the building of a new church in Canberra cause undue distress?’ (no author 19 July 2009, p. 20), whilst community members such as ‘practicing Muslim, Gungahlin resident Ayoub’ Bouguettaya questioned why there had not been similar objections to the construction of the nearby Uniting Church’ (Cox 2 July 2012, p. 2).
Multicultural Affairs Minister Joy Burch was quoted as saying she did “not recall the same sentiment around traffic, social impact, traffic noise, public interest, bulk, scale and height” (in Cox 30 June 2012, p. 2) being raised about the Uniting Church development. The Gungahlin Uniting Church minister Mark Faulkner also said ‘there had been no objection to the building of the Uniting Church nor to the Salvation Army, both also in Valley Avenue. Yet the Canberra Muslim community had been hounded’ (Downie 30 June 2012, p. 2). Reverend Mark Faulkner wrote a guest editorial piece for *The Canberra Times* where he elaborated on this point:

> Having been through the whole building process as a community group, as we built our church and community centre on The Valley Avenue, I am aware of the many requirements and regulations that apply and they will be no different for the building of a mosque. If our genuine concern about a mosque is planning regulations, then there would have been objections to our building, or to most other buildings in the Gungahlin area (Faulkner 25 August 2012, p. 7).

In this piece, Rev. Faulkner drew on the comparison of the mosque and the church to insinuate that there must have been reasons other than planning regulations behind opposition to the mosque proposal. In fact, he went on to state outright that ‘the objections [we]re part of the tide of fear and prejudice that ha[d] been both actively and subtly washed over our communities by extreme ideologies’ (Faulkner 25 August 2012, p. 7). In contrast to this dread and discrimination which Rev. Faulkner said would lead the community to diminish itself and become bitter (25 August 2012, p. 7), he affirmed: ‘I look forward to being neighbours with the Muslim community in Gungahlin as an example of authentic community life and as expression of our hope for the world’ (Faulkner 25 August 2012, p. 7). It is clear that Rev. Faulkner’s idea of ‘authentic community life’ was one in which a diversity of religious cultures is embraced and celebrated.

Other letter writers made comparisons between the treatment of Muslims and adherents of other religions. For example, Maley wrote in response to a letter from Byrne who had offered “a series of sweeping and derogatory generalisations about Muslims. Would you feel equally comfortable publishing a series of sweeping and derogatory generalisations about Jews?” (8 July 2014, p. 3). The letter could be seen to suggest that some people felt entirely at ease saying disparaging things about Muslims that would not be
acceptable to say about anyone else, which is also argued by Edward Said (2003, p. 287). The criticism was also directed at The Canberra Times for actually printing such inflammatory material and therefore repeating and spreading the ‘Othering’. However, it could also be argued that when viewed in the larger context of The Times’ editorial stance on the mosque and their critiques of the CCC, that the discriminatory material may have been reappropriated in order to expose those in the community who did the ‘Othering’. Davis provided some more direct comparisons with real life examples and critiqued the main mosque opponent directly:

Will he [Irwin Ross] also be advocating the closure of all Buddhist temples in Canberra. After all, the Buddhists in Burma are torching, killing and driving into refugee camps the Rohingya Muslims…Would Mr. Ross have argued for a prohibition on Catholic churches in Canberra during the bombing campaign of the IRA in England? Mr. Ross and his group need to stop the hyperbole and start practising Christian tolerance and understanding (Davis 8 July 2014, p. 3).

In his letter, Davis attempted to demonstrate that religions other than Islam have been involved in terrorist activities, but are not discriminated against in the same ways. The finishing line of the letter also promoted “Christian tolerance and understanding”, which could be a reference to the background of Mr Ross as a “Christian fundamentalist” (Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 1). In contrast to this Christian group who had lead opposition against the mosque, the president of the CMC, Mr Dabhoiwala said support for the proposal ‘had been led, in large measure, by the established Christian churches’ (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 2). Such interfaith dialogue and support had been seen in the editorial from Rev Faulkner (25 August 2012, p. 7) and was also evident in a Letter to the Editor from the Very Reverend Ivor F. Vivian, province of Australasia, Liberal Catholic Church. Vivian’s letter stated that it was “quite inappropriate for those proclaiming to be ministers and witnesses to Christ’s teaching to attempt to deny an established faith a place where its adherents may worship, contemplate their sacred books and seek divine guidance on the role of their community in our city” (8 July 2012, p. 18). Although this letter did seem to question the Muslim community’s ‘belonging’ in Gungahlin (‘their community in our city’), overall it clearly critiqued the CCC, and any other Christian leader who would oppose the mosque on religious grounds.
6.6. Concluding Remarks

The critical discourse analysis of *The Canberra Times*’ coverage of the Gungahlin mosque development has revealed a number of pivotal discourses which may have influenced readers’ understandings of the proposal and the various parties involved. The unique discourse of concerns was identified through the frequent use of the term ‘concerns’ throughout the coverage and was especially evident in the name of the key opposition group, the Concerned Citizens of Canberra. The theme was used to frame the discussion of the mosque in more neutral terms, and was often applied in conjunction with planning issues. Discourses of power were produced through the use of facts, figures and official documents. However, the most interesting application of power was by *The Canberra Times* to critique the Concerned Citizens of Canberra on a number of grounds, including its legitimacy as a legalised entity, its financials, its representatives and the identity of its ‘fundamentalist Christian’ members. These tactics may have decreased the authority that readers attributed to the Concerned Citizens of Canberra and, by extension, their arguments against the mosque. There were attempts to ‘Other’ the Gungahlin Muslim community through the promotion of anti-Muslim sentiments, including the alleged untrustworthiness of the Muslim community, by both the CCC and writers of Letters to the Editor. The westernisation of the development proposal, as well as the contrasts drawn between Islam and Christianity highlighted the religious element which was often brought into the debate. In contrast to these various attempts at ‘Othering’, similarities between Islam and Christianity were emphasized in Letters to the Editor which contributed to a more inclusive discourse. Diversity and multiculturalism were evidenced in both written text and visuals, and so were authoritative and grassroots Muslim voices and images. There was also extensive ‘Othering’ of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra by *The Canberra Times* in editorials and news reports which situated the group as being counter to, and outside of, the wider Gungahlin community.

The critical discourse analysis revealed that Orientalism was evident in *The Canberra Times*’ coverage of the proposed Gungahlin mosque. The attempted Westernisation of the development proposal was apparent through ideas that the Muslim community and its mosque would need to change, in order to fit in with the broader Gungahlin community. Letters to the Editor displayed evidence of moral panics and references to the ‘dreaded Lakemba’, as well as apparent divisions between Islam and Christianity.
Orientalist attitudes were also evident in news reports, particularly through the quotations of submissions against the mosque that featured explicit anti-Muslim sentiments and controversial statements by members of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra, particularly their leader Irwin Ross. The platform granted to such statements through the media discourse allowed them to spread and to potentially influence readers’ understandings and opinions of the mosque proposal.

Although there was ample evidence of ‘Othering’ in the coverage of the Gungahlin mosque, including extremely inflammatory statements from the Concerned Citizens of Canberra and in Letters to the Editor, the extensive critique of the CCC by *The Canberra Times* may have served to damage the reputation of the Christian group. In denigrating the opponents of the mosque, implicit support of the CMC and their development proposal may have been interpreted by some readers of *The Canberra Times*. Therefore whilst the coverage of the proposed Gungahlin mosque cannot be deemed unproblematic, it could be argued that the editorial stance of *The Canberra Times* regarding the issues was largely positive.
7. Case Comparisons

7.1. Quantitative Comparison

The Berwick Leader published only 23 news items across the 12 month period of the Doveton mosque development debate, which suggests that despite suppositions of controversy, there was not that much news space dedicated to the issue. Additionally, the majority of the items published were Letters to the Editor (56.5%), demonstrating that the local newspaper appeared to cultivate a news discourse context in which it could be argued that Doveton community members and professional journalists had an equal role in the storying of the issue. This becomes especially telling when considered in respect to The Canberra Times case study, which included 103 published news items, with only 34% of those being Letters to the Editor. Whilst the Camden Advertiser actually had a higher percentage of Letters to the Editor published – 60% - and published 323 news items in relation to the Islamic school. In his study of media agenda-setting, priming and media affects, particularly in regard to how an issue’s importance is gauged, Sheafer asserts that:

information about negative developments captures our attention far more than information about positive developments…A negative object attribute is therefore, expected to increase object importance and accessibility on the public agenda. A positive tone, on the other hand, is not expected to have much effect. (2007, p. 23).

Therefore, in this study it could be argued that the limited amount of public outrage about the Doveton mosque, in comparison to the Gungahlin mosque or Camden Islamic school, may explain why the Berwick Leader produced substantially fewer news items than did The Canberra Times and the Camden Advertiser.

Additionally, the Doveton case had only one news report published on the Berwick Leader’s front page, while the majority of items (seven articles) appeared on page 14. In comparison, the Camden Advertiser published 20 front page reports, with the majority of news items (67 articles) appearing on page 2. The Canberra Times published 18 front page news reports, with the majority of news items (19 articles) appearing on page 3. These comparisons indicate that news items published in the Camden Advertiser and The Canberra Times were much more likely to have appeared ‘above the fold’. Cheney suggests that the placement of a news item on the front page or ‘above the fold’ can
indicate that “some news has a greater impact on readership, behaviour and sentiment than other news” (2015, p. 136). The Berwick Leader also published only one photograph across the entire data set, whilst the Camden Advertiser published 79 photographs and The Canberra Times published 36 photographs. The Berwick Leader therefore lacked an extensive visual news discourse, whilst the Camden Advertiser and The Canberra Times’ extensive visual representations may mean that these newspapers had more resources, including production staff, journalists and photographers, to devote to their coverage of the proposed Islamic developments.

The Berwick Leader’s coverage could be considered problematic in that there were no representatives of the Afghan Mosque Project Committee directly quoted in its news reports. Without further research, it is not possible to know whether the Berwick Leader did not contact the Afghan Mosque Project Committee, or whether Committee members did not make themselves available for comment. However, what can be ascertained is that the Muslim community does not have a prominent voice in the Doveton mosque coverage. Additionally, the spokesperson for the Catch the Fire Ministries, Daniel Nalliah, was only quoted in one news report (4.3% of the coverage), which demonstrates minimal direct representation. However, Catch the Fire Ministries was mentioned eight times, which is more than double the amount of times the Afghan Mosque Project Committee was named (three). In comparison, various spokespeople from the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. were directly quoted in 19 of The Canberra Times’ news reports (18.4% of the coverage), whilst the Concerned Citizens of Canberra were quoted in 36 articles (35% of the coverage). These statistics indicate that the opposition group had almost double the representation of the Gungahlin mosque proponents, and also reveals that the Concerned Citizens of Canberra were directly cited in over a third of the entire data set. This majority trend was continued across the various types of news items in terms of how many times each group was mentioned. For instance the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. was mentioned 47 times, and the Concerned Citizens of Canberra were mentioned 111 times, again revealing that lexically the opposition had more than double the amount of representation as the mosque supporters. This trend of lexical prominence was observed across both the Doveton and Gungahlin cases, and clearly identifies that mosque opponents features most conspicuously throughout the respective newspapers’ coverage.
In the Camden case, however, spokespeople for the group proposing the Islamic school, the Quranic Society, were quoted in 19 news reports (5.9% of the coverage), whilst the opponents, the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group were only directly quoted in 10 articles (3.1% of the coverage). The Camden case therefore went against the trend of the Gungahlin and Doveton cases, giving more opportunities for the local Muslim group to directly speak, than the opponents to the Islamic school development. When it came to lexical representation, this weighting was even more evident, with the Quranic Society mentioned 105 times, and the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group mentioned only 31 times across the entire coverage. This prominence means that the Islamic school supporters were mentioned over three times more than the Islamic school opponents, again going against the trend apparent in the Doveton and Gungahlin cases. This finding is extremely significant when it is considered that coverage by the Camden Advertiser therefore arguably offered more opportunities for Muslim community spokespeople to be heard, yet the Camden Islamic school was eventually denied, whilst the coverage by the Berwick Leader and The Canberra Times offered more opportunities for the mosque opponents to be heard, and yet both mosques ended up being approved for development.

7.2. Discursive Comparisons

7.2.1. Opposition Groups and Spokespersons
As mentioned above, the Doveton mosque debate did not appear to create as much public outrage as the Gungahlin mosque or Camden Islamic school debates. This is partially evident through differences in the amounts and scope of coverage, but is also observable through the nature of the various oppositions that emerged in regard to each development proposal. Whilst the Gungahlin mosque and the Camden Islamic school both had strong opposition of a grassroots nature, (the Concerned Citizens of Canberra and the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group respectively), the Doveton mosque development’s main opposition was the Catch the Fire Ministries. Catch the Fire Ministries is an official church entity, led by Daniel Nalliah. Mr Nalliah is also the president of the Rise Up Australia Party, a far-right political party. Therefore, distinct from local resident initiatives to form organised and formal opposition groups, (as in the Gungahlin and Camden cases), Doveton’s opposition did not appear to have a basis in, or similar ties to, the local community. This could suggest that while local Doveton residents were passionate about and interested in getting involved in the mosque debate
as demonstrated by the large percentage of Letters to the Editor in the data set), they were not necessarily vehemently opposed to the development.

Significantly, Mr Nalliah’s motives for resisting the mosque development were scrutinized by the *Berwick Leader*, with references made to ‘his strong views against Islam’ (Sultanie 10 December 2012, p. 5); and his ‘controversial party’ which ‘has controversial policies on Islam and openly opposes Australia’s multicultural policy’ (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5). Mr Nalliah’s personal character was also critiqued when his outlandish actions and controversial views were reported: ‘Mr Nalliah is famous for claiming to have raised a person from the dead and blaming the Black Saturday bushfires on Victoria’s abortion laws’ (Kennedy 1 April 2013, p. 5). These mediated discourses about Mr Nalliah’s attitudes and political leanings were arguably used by the *Berwick Leader* to raise questions about whether Catch the Fire Ministries’ opposition was based on genuine local planning matters, or indeed on underlying prejudices.

In similar ways, *The Canberra Times* in Gungahlin was critical of Irwin Ross, the president of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra. In regard to Irwin Ross’ characteristically extraordinary claims, it was reported that he ‘controversially used the kidnapping of Nigerian schoolgirls and the Boston Marathon bombing to explain his opposition to the development’ (Gorrey & Knaus 5 July 2014, p. 1). These provocative representations may be likened to Daniel Nalliah’s outlined above, and demonstrate that the news discourses undoubtedly discredited both oppositional community group leaders. More broadly, *The Canberra Times* also reported references to the Concerned Citizens of Canberra as ‘an organised minority’ (Forde & Saat 10 July 2012, p. 9), ‘a controversial lobby group’ (Gorrey 11 September 2014, p. 3), and ‘a Canberra Christian fundamentalist group’ (Ellery 9 July 2014, p. 1). The group also had its legal standing to oppose the mosque, as well as its funding sources, questioned over the course of the debate. Its credibility and integrity was further challenged when CCC members were accused of holding secretive closed-door community meetings and writing secret mosque objection letters, had refused to be interviewed, and attempted to have their names kept out of legal action. Combined, these mediated discourses were likely employed by *The Canberra Times* to diminish the legitimacy with which people viewed the Concerned Citizens of Canberra and their ‘concerns’ about the mosque proposal.

In Camden’s case there was little evidence of such overt critique by the *Camden Advertiser* of the head of the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group’s (Emil
Sremchevich’s) character, or of the group as a whole. However, some editorial pieces, particularly those written by Rebecca Senescall, were critical of opposition to the proposal Islamic school in more general ways. She wrote of ‘threats and insults from people lacking the courage to put their names to their letters’ and ‘a behind-the-scenes campaign from a couple of individuals unwilling to accept that we would not let them control the way we report the news. They expect us to back down. For the sake of our readers, we will not’ (Senescall 28 May 2008, p. 4). Whilst this editorial declined to explicitly name the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group, it can be inferred that it was the target of this critique based on multiple negative published Letters to the Editor by group members Emil Sremchevich and Andrew Wannet. Therefore the criticism of opposition groups and spokespersons by the Camden Advertiser was more implicit than the really overt critique offered by the Berwick Leader and The Canberra Times, and as a result may have had less of an impact on how readers interpreted the arguments made against the Islamic school.

The most apparent similarity across all three cases particularly in terms of oppositional discourses is that varying degrees of opposition did exist and, at least for a short period of time, provided real challenges to the proposed Islamic development outcomes. Another similarity is that the three local newspapers reported on Christian discourses being contrasted and compared with misconceptions about Islam. The Christian discourses were explicit in Doveton and Gungahlin, where the main opposition to the proposed mosques came from a Christian church (Catch the Fire Ministries) and a ‘fundamentalist Christian’ (Irwin Ross of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra).

Although the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group in Camden did not have any formal ties to a Christian organisation, dominant Christian values were frequently utilized by the group (and other community members) as a justification for opposing the Islamic school. All three cases therefore displayed evidence of a ‘clash of civilizations’ (Huntington 1997) between the groups proposing the Islamic developments and their opponents. The religious discourses also promulgated ‘Othering’ in the relevant communities, dividing residents into ‘Us’ and ‘Them’.
7.2.2. The ‘Dreaded Lakemba’

One common theme identified in all three cases studies was the idea of the ‘dreaded Lakemba’ (McGregor 2016). “The Sydney suburb of Lakemba has become popularly associated with some of the ‘ethnic’ communities present in the surrounding Local Government Area (LGA) of Bankstown, including the Lebanese communities settled in the area, and, within that, a significant Sunni Muslim community” (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007, p. 574). In the reporting, Lakemba was often referred to as an exemplar of what not to be, to “provide samplings of information about past occurrences that [would] foster dispositions and ultimately direct behaviour toward similar occurrences on later encounter” (Zillman & Brosius 2012, p. vii). Morris refers to the stigma around targeted areas such as Lakemba as ‘neighbourhoodism’, wherein prejudice emerges against neighbourhoods “that are perceived to be low income and occupied by a concentration of racial minorities” (1999, p. 35). Whereas Dunn, Klocker & Salabay speculate on the impact media discourses involving Lakemba may have, as “part of a racialization process…in which Muslims are constructed as fanatical, intolerant, militant, fundamentalist, misogynist and alien (Dunn 2001)” (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007, p. 576).

In Doveton, when Lakemba was brought into the discussion by Cr Rosalie Crestani, it was in reference to a ‘Mosque crime wave fear’ (Kennedy & Strachan 25 March 2013, p. 3), which represented a moral panic discourse through suggestions of violence and anti-social behavior should the mosque be approved. In Gungahlin, there was no reference to personal risk in association with the ‘dreaded Lakemba’. However, a Letter to the Editor did discuss “the overflow of worshippers from the Lakemba mosque in Sydney completely blocking the street with their ritual obeisances” (Wilson 3 July 2012, p. 8), so it speculated about a concentration of attendees in numerical and spatial terms. Further evidence of a ‘moderate’ type of moral panic was in regard to anticipated decreases in house prices by Irwin Ross, the leader of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra, should the Gungahlin mosque be approved.

Similarly to the Gungahlin case, in Camden specific references to Lakemba were only identified in the Camden Advertiser’s Letters to the Editor (Girona 24 October 2007, p.2; James 13 May 2009, p. 4; Lugano 30 January 2008, p. 20; Cawood 2 April 2008, p. 24). In one website comment which was published by the Advertiser, Lakemba was not named specifically yet generic “Muslim suburbs” which were also deemed to be
dangerous and discriminatory to non-Muslims” (It’s our town 2 July 2008, p. 2) were referred to. Lakemba was therefore referenced in the *Camden Advertiser* as an undesirable place because of its large Muslim population. Moral panic discourses were also identified in the *Camden Advertiser’s* Letters to the Editor when it was proposed that Islamic school development approval would result in increased crime and “constant bashings/stabbings and murders to take place in the beloved Camden” (unnamed author of a submission in no author 28 May 2008c, p. 3). In all three cases studies there was clear evidence therefore of the ‘dreaded Lakemba’ being used as a negative exemplar, and by extension, moral panic discourses were generated in association with the proposed Islamic developments.

7.2.3. ‘Acceptable’ Reasons for Opposition to Islamic Developments

Across the three case studies there emerged a common set of what were seen to be ‘acceptable’ reasons for opposing the proposed Islamic developments. In Kathleen Foley’s US report on strategies for securing municipal approval for mosque developments she explained that “informed opponents understand that blatant hatred and fear cannot block a mosque from being developed, and so they speak instead about traffic, lighting, noise and other legitimate land use concerns” (Foley 2010, p. 36). Foley’s research also found that in the US context42, although opponents may have been focused on critiquing land use issues, “those stated reasons veiled their true intent to exclude Muslims from the neighbourhood” (Foley 2010, p. 7). In the three cases under study here, similar justifications arose.

In the Doveton case, local councillors quoted in news reports were very careful to continually link views regarding the proposed mosque to planning regulations and formal procedures. Letters to the Editor also used references to development application processes, institutional, and multi-faith discourses to explain that local government protocols were necessary for any ‘new’ place of worship. Once the Catch the Fire Ministries dropped its case against the Doveton mosque, the *Berwick Leader* reported that Nick Moore, Casey Council’s acting planning manager had stated, “The decision for Planning Application … now reverts back to the decision made by council at the

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42 Foley’s (2010) research was particularly focused in the areas of Voorhees, New Jersey; Scottsdale, Arizona; Savannah, Georgia.
Planning Committee meeting held on the 12 March 2013 approving the application” (in Allaoui 7 October 2013, p. 3). It was apparent then that legitimate planning discourses played a pivotal role in deliberations about the Doveton development.

In the Gungahlin case, the initial mosque that had been proposed for Nicholls was abandoned, after the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. responded to complaints about traffic issues. Once the new site was identified at Gungahlin, opponents still highlighted issues of ‘social impact’, ‘traffic and noise, “public interest” and size’ (Cox 30 June 2012, p. 1) as well as ‘parking, design, lack of consultation’ (Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1) as areas of concern. These legitimate planning concerns were occasionally aligned with presumptive reasons for opposing the mosque, including “noise, traffic and sometimes unruly behaviour” (Cook 12 July 2012, p. 18). In this letter, Cook’s combination of varying justifications was problematic because it alluded to ideas of ‘Othering’ and moral panic, even though civic planning was supposedly the focus of critique.

In the Camden case, there were a number of important organisations which made submissions to council regarding the Islamic school proposal, including the police, RTA, Busways, and Department of Primary Industries, who between them listed traffic, the bus rank length and planning laws regarding rural resource lands as reasons for opposing the mosque. The mayor, Chris Patterson added others, which included “the impact on the environment, what amenities are available in the area, any safety concerns” (in Kinsella 7 November 2007b, p. 9). He also explicitly emphasized that “Council [could] not make a decision based on an applicant’s religion, race or marital status” (Patterson in Kinsella 7 November 2007b, p. 9). By overtly stating what types of acceptable development considerations Council could officially evaluate, importantly Mayor Patterson also stipulated that there was no place for racial or religious prejudice in the decision-making process. Although these ‘acceptable’ reasons for opposing Islamic developments were identified and utilized in the case studies, in other published news items the more socially ‘unacceptable’ reasons became clearer in the media discourse.

7.2.4. ‘Unacceptable’ Reasons for Opposition to Islamic Developments

In the Gungahlin case an overt religious dichotomy emerged which was most clear through the opposition set up between the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. and the
Christian-led group, Concerned Citizens of Canberra. The suggestion of an ulterior motive for the CCC’s opposition was made apparent in news discourses that reported: ‘The secretive participants in the campaign against the mosque have consistently told media and government that they are concerned with local planning issues including traffic and noise. But…’ (Cox 7 July 2012a, p. 1). Similar tensions were identified in the Doveton case, with news discourses representing the Catch the Fire Ministries’ dominant opposition to the Afghan Mosque Project Committee’s development proposal as being based in their religious differences. Some Letters to the Editor published in the *Berwick Leader* also directly referenced the religion of the mosque proponents as the reason for their opposition (Ferguson 1 April 2013, p. 14; John 1 April 2013, p. 14; Wilczewski 30 September 2013, p. 15) without mentioning any planning issues.

These ‘unacceptable’ social reasons for opposing the Islamic developments were paradoxically applied in the Camden case in an institutional sense when the Council drew on “topics of religion and culture” (no author 29 April 2009b, p. 5) to defend its decision to the Land and Environment Court. This was despite numerous previous published statements from Councillors (including Mayor Chris Patterson) that decisions about the proposed Islamic school should be made according to planning legislation alone. The announcement of Council’s new line of defence, which deviated from official planning laws, drew outrage from the community and from within Council ranks.

7.2.5. **Discourses of the ‘Other’**

Evidence of ‘Othering’ tactics were identified across all three case studies, and were manifest in a number of distinct ways. The first common ideal was that there was no ‘acceptable’ place for either an existing or potential Muslim community within the larger local community. In Camden, this denial was most evident in the Letters to the Editor which allowed Camdenites to make claims about identity and belonging in Camden, based largely on rural identity discourses. In Doveton, the lack of Muslim voices represented in the *Berwick Leader*’s coverage could have been misconstrued as ‘evidence’ that any Muslim community in Doveton was inconsequential and/or positioned as a ‘lesser than’ in an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy. In the Gungahlin case, although the presence of a Muslim community was not explicitly denied, flyers were
published by the Concerned Citizens of Canberra that claimed the new mosque would have a negative impact on “Australian neighbours” (quoted in Cox & Boland-Rudder 3 August 2012, p. 3). The ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ categories implicit in this statement demonstrate how “mundane conversations about floor area ratio and impervious surfaces are being replaced by heated disputes over national identity and national security” (Foley 2010, p. 41). Such focus on ‘Australianness’ discounted the idea that Muslims and Australians could coexist in local community contexts and also precluded any idea that Muslims may have already been Australian.

A second manifestation of ‘Othering’ discourses was through the idea that ‘Muslims should fit in with “us”’. This opinion was evident through Letters to the Editor in the Camden case, such as one letter from ‘Priscilla’, which argued that the Muslim community should set aside their Muslim identity and prove they are “Australians first” (Priscilla 24 October 2007, p. 6). Letters such as these put the onus on Camden’s Muslim community to change and adapt. A Doveton resident also wrote that successful relationships between Muslims and the broader community would “need the moderate Muslim community to publicly condemn the actions of the terrorist organisations” (Edgar 1 April 2013, p. 15). In Gungahlin, a similar theme was identified in Letters to the Editor which asked for the Canberra Muslim Community to ‘prove’ it was different from extremist groups. Dunlop stated that he wanted to “hear assurances about values to be promulgated at Gungahlin” (11 July 2012, p. 10). These letters were representative of “the burden upon moderate Muslims…not only to prove their loyalty and integrity, but also to incessantly try to detach Muslims and Islam from the ideology and actions of the loud minority” (Iner & Yucel 2015, p. 7).

More extreme versions of ‘Othering’ were found in arguments that any Muslim community is incompatible with any local or national ‘Australian’ community. In the Camden case this attitude was evidenced in Letters to the Editor, plus it also featured literally in direct quotes from official sources, including Pauline Hanson, who called “for a moratorium on any further Muslim immigration because they are incompatible with our way of life” (in Kinsella 21 November 2007, p. 9). The Camden Advertiser also reported that the Camden Council claimed ‘the world view of the Quranic Society is ‘not compatible’ with the Australian egalitarian culture’ (Bowie 29 April 2009b, p. 4) when the Council argued its case in the NSW Land and Environment Court. In the Doveton case, one Letter to the Editor argued “there is no place in a Christian society
like Australia to have such a huge mosque built” (John 1 April 2013, p. 14). The claims of incompatibility were not as explicit in the Gungahlin case, however, Letters to the Editor did frequently reference an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ dichotomy. A further argument of incompatibility was present in news discourse when Cox quoted a formal submission against the mosque which charged that Muslims have to “obey the Koran and therefore Sharia law. This means that Sharia law will always come first and Australian law second” (in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). This supposition, presented in an institutional framework, attempted to construct a convincing argument by using rhetoric about an Islamic rule-system to differentiate between Muslims and Australians.

7.2.6. Inclusive Discourses

In contrast to the ‘Othering’ discussed above, there was also evidence of more inclusive discourses across all three case studies. In each study it was possible to identify explicit out-and-out support for the proposed Islamic developments. In the Doveton case, this was mostly apparent in the Letters to the Editor published in the Berwick Leader, which showed a strong grassroots level of support for the mosque proposal. In the Gungahlin and Camden cases, support was also evident through Letters to the Editor, as well as through official sources that were directly quoted in news reports. Significantly, one powerful way support was communicated was through direct opposition to ‘Othering’ discourses. For example, in Gungahlin there were authoritative sources directly quoted in The Canberra Times’ news reports, who spoke against the treatment of the local Muslim community and against the Concerned Citizens of Canberra’s oppositional tactics: “I am disappointed that people feel the need to tar all Muslims with the terrorist brush” (submission in Cox 10 July 2012, p. 1). Letters to the Editor were more explicit in their opposition to ‘Othering’, such as Mason who wrote that he was “disgusted at the way the Concerned Citizens of Canberra have besmirched our reputation as a progressive, tolerant city by stirring up hatred against Muslims in the name of ‘social impact’” (4 July 2012, p. 10). Similarly, in the Camden case Letters to the Editor offered the strongest ‘voice’ for direct challenges to ‘Othering’. This was particularly evident in two letters of communal support. The first letter was titled “Embarrassed by intolerance” (B. Shipp et al 11 June 2008, p. 21), and was signed by 40 Camden residents, and the second letter (published one week later) was written by 22 residents to reinforce many of the points made in the first letter (Roberts-Everett et al. 18 June 2008,
p. 4). The combined actions of these residents in producing a communal discursive contribution to the debate functioned to disparage any anti-Islamic sentiments and substituted them with inclusive discourses of welcoming and togetherness. Letters to the Editor were therefore a powerful site for both the construction of ‘Othering’ and its opposition through communal and welcoming attitudes during the Islamic development debates.

Discourses of inclusivity were also generated across the three case studies when it was pointed out that prejudicial and discriminatory anti-Islam discourses were incongruent with Christian principles. For example, in the Doveton case a Letter to the Editor challenged the “fundamentalist Christian church” (Reiher 15 April 2013, p. 21) that opposed the mosque, Catch the Fire Ministries, by citing directly from the bible’s teachings about the tolerant and respectful treatment of ‘Others’. A similar sentiment was expressed in the Camden case by Father Chris Riley, who challenged ‘Camden residents to forget notions of race’ (Bowie 30 January 2008, p. 3). In the Gungahlin case, a letter published in The Canberra Times by the Very Reverend Ivor F. Vivian, province of Australasia, Liberal Catholic Church, asserted that it was “quite inappropriate for those proclaiming to be ministers and witnesses to Christ’s teaching to attempt to deny an established faith a place where its adherents may worship, contemplate their sacred books and seek divine guidance on the role of their community in our city” (8 July 2012, p. 18). The Reverend’s statement advocated inclusivity by promoting equity, in that his comment regarding a place of worship made no distinction between Christian churches and Islamic mosques.

Ideas of equity were strongly situated within this inclusive discourse, as evidenced in comparisons between Islamic developments to either hypothetical or existing Christian developments in the local communities. In Gungahlin, a Muslim resident, Ayoub Bouguettaya ‘questioned why there had not been similar objections to the construction of the nearby Uniting Church’ (Cox 2 July 2012, p. 2). The Gungahlin Uniting Church minister Mark Faulkner had previously stated ‘there had been no objection to the building of the Uniting Church nor to the Salvation Army, both also in Valley Avenue. Yet the Canberra Muslim community had been hounded’ (Downie 30 June 2012, p. 2). In Camden, residents wrote Letters to the Editor which confirmed that in Camden “we have Catholic schools, we have Anglican schools, we have Presbyterian schools and Greek schools and Jewish schools. Why then can we expect our Muslim population to
accept a denial to their request for their own schools?” (Jen 9 January 2008, p. 2). Similar sentiments were expressed in further letters (Szynal 24 October 2007, p. 6; Graham 30 January 2008, p. 10; & Kelaita 19 March 2008, p. 25). In Doveton, the same links were established between Islamic developments and Christian developments, however letter writers were also more multicultural in their appeals, including “churches, mosques and synagogues” (Nick 1 April 2013, p. 14) as well as temples (Oaks 1 April 2013, p. 14) in their comparisons. Therefore in contrast to the religiously prejudicial undertones to the opposition to proposed Islamic developments in the three case studies, equity between different faith-based schools and places of worship was also promoted.

7.3. Concluding Remarks

Despite the differences in the eventual planning development decisions, there are a number of similarities evident in the local newspaper coverage across the three case studies. All cases demonstrated instances of ‘Othering’, whereby the local Muslim communities were portrayed as dangerous and threatening to the wider local communities. This was achieved in part through arguments of incompatibility and divisions between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, as well as references to the ‘dreaded Lakemba’ as a negative exemplar in association with moral panics about the proposed Islamic developments. Comparatively, there was also evidence of more inclusive discourses in all three newspapers that demonstrated less discriminatory attitudes within some sections of the local populations. Ideas of equity between different faith-based schools and places of worship were also promoted. All cases also drew on what were deemed to be ‘acceptable’ reasons for opposing the developments, including planning regulations and formal procedures of decision making, however ‘unacceptable’ arguments based on religiously motivated discrimination were also identified as being problematic. However, there were important differences between the three cases in terms of the amount of news space dedicated to each case study by their local newspaper, the placement and treatment of published news items, and the opportunities for key players in each locale to participate, directly or indirectly, in the coverage of the proposed developments. These differences suggest that although the cases shared thematic similarities, each case study also needs to be understood as a unique example of the
ways news is produced and received, and the effect this may have on eventual planning decisions regarding mosques and Islamic schools.
8. Conclusions

8.1. Research Question 1: Is Orientalism evident in the news items studied?

A critical discourse analysis of local newspaper reporting on proposed Islamic developments in specific Australian communities has shown that Orientalist depictions of Islam were evident in the news items studied. This finding is consistent with the review of the relevant literature which suggests that Islam and Muslims have been treated very negatively in mainstream Western media, and are often portrayed as strange and threatening to the West. Similar results have previously been found in the Australian context, and such depictions have been linked to ideas of Islamophobia, racism and moral panics.

In Doveton, Orientalism was most prominent in the Berwick Leader’s coverage of the proposed Green Street mosque through the exclusion of the voices of the Afghan Mosque Project Committee and the minimization of local Doveton Muslim voices. Extra contributing factors to this ‘Othering’ included anti-Muslim sentiments expressed through direct sources quoted in the reports, and through paraphrasing by journalists, particularly regarding ‘the dreaded Lakemba’ and moral panics about ‘Others’. Some Letters to the Editor also spoke of conflicts between Islam and Christianity, and incompatibility between Islam and Australian society, contributing to the representation of Islam as ‘Other’ in Doveton. Finally, visual discourses revealed the ways in which stylistic design and layout decisions can also contribute to ‘Othering’ through the limited and generalized visualisations of the mosque debate. The combination of these factors lead to the symbolic annihilation (Weerakkody 2009) of the Afghan Mosque Project Committee from the coverage.

Orientalist depictions of Islam were also evident in the Camden Advertiser’s coverage of the Islamic school proposal in Camden. However, such discourses were most evident in published Letters to the Editor, which perpetuated various themes: that a Muslim community did not exist in Camden; that Muslims should change to fit in with the wider Camden community; that Islam and Camden (or by extension, Australia) were incompatible; and that Islam and Christianity have insurmountable differences. Although many of the letters attempted to use planning grounds as the basis for opposing the school, they also often referenced religion or culture, thereby undermining the legitimacy of these complaints. Additionally, opponents of the proposed Islamic
school effectively used rural discourses to ‘Other’ Camden’s Muslim population, portraying local Muslims as being ‘not-rural’ and therefore as not belonging in Camden.

Finally, in Gungahlin the attempted Westernisation of the mosque proposal was just one example of the Orientalist discourses apparent in The Canberra Times. The pressure for Westernisation was portrayed through ideas that the Muslim community and its mosque would need to change in order to fit in with the broader Gungahlin community. In addition, Letters to the Editor displayed evidence of moral panics and references to the ‘dreaded Lakemba’, and also perpetuated apparent divisions between Islam and Christianity. News reports also communicated Orientalist depictions, particularly through the quotations of formal submissions against the mosque that featured explicit anti-Muslim sentiments and controversial statements by members of the Concerned Citizens of Canberra, particularly their leader Irwin Ross. Such published extracts contributed to the ongoing construction of an ‘Us’ vs ‘Them’ division in the Gungahlin community.

8.2. Research Question 2: Can reporting on the Doveton mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?

The political discourses evident in the Berwick Leader’s coverage of the proposed Green St mosque were demonstrated, in part, by reference to and employment of the official procedure in place for assessing development applications. Such a framework could be seen as an attempt to keep the media discourse neutral and balanced. However, the various ways in which local political actors, particularly those involved in the mosque opposition, drew on their existing public profiles and attempted to enhance their authoritative voices was a strategic attempt to influence the discourse in their favour. The fact that the Letters to the Editor constituted the majority of published content demonstrated the extensive level of local community inclusion/involvement in the Berwick Leader’s coverage of the Doveton mosque, and simultaneously revealed the lack of journalistic attention paid to the Islamic development proposal. Although the Berwick Leader made inclusive publishing decisions regarding Letters to the Editor which promoted understanding and tolerance of the local Muslim community, and also appeared to critique the mosque opponents (Catch the Fire Ministries) in news reports and headlines, ‘Othering’ was still evident in the coverage. Visually, the stylistic design
of the Berwick Leader and layout decisions only provided limited and generalised visualisations of the mosque debate. Additionally, the newspaper’s symbolic annihilation (Weerakkody 2009) of the Afghan Mosque Project Committee, and minimal engagement with the local Muslim community, denied Doveton’s Muslims a voice or presence in the debate and this meant the coverage was hugely problematic. Therefore, although the Doveton mosque was granted approval, the reporting by the Berwick Leader cannot be deemed to have been positive or inclusive of the local Muslim community.

8.3. Research Question 3: Can reporting on the proposed Camden school be deemed to be more negative, accounting for its denial?

Similarly to the Doveton case, in Camden a political discourse was evident through the authoritative voices granted to politicians at all levels of government (local, state and federal), as well as through the many links made to official policy and planning legislation in attempts to frame the limits of the debate. However, these framing attempts were not always successful, with a number of Letters to the Editor which attempted to use planning grounds as the basis for opposition to the school, often slipping into religious or cultural referents, thereby damaging the attempted neutrality of the coverage. The rural identity of Camden was also a strong discursive trope in the newspaper coverage. Although representatives from the Quranic Society and Advertiser editorial staff attempted to use this rural identity as a point of commonality between the local Muslim community and the wider Camden community, opponents of the proposed Islamic school used rural discourses more effectively to ‘Other’ Camden’s Muslim population. The ‘Othering’ of the school proponents occurred most prominently in published Letters to the Editor which perpetuated various themes: that there was not an existing Muslim community in Camden; that Muslims should change to fit in with Camden; that Islam and Camden (or Australia) were incompatible; and that Islam and Christianity have insurmountable differences. These discourses were used to divide the Camden community into ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ categories. However the editorial stance of the Advertiser was much more inclusive, promoting a positive approach to the school and the local Muslim community. The Quranic Society was also granted almost double the opportunities to speak in the coverage in comparison to the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group. The Quranic Society therefore had more chances to directly put
across its perspective on the proposal to the community. Through self-referential discourses the *Advertiser* consistently reinforced this affirmative argument and stood by its coverage of the school debate. There was also some evidence of more inclusive attitudes in Letters to the Editor through the highlighting of similarities between Islam and Christianity. Although there was certainly evidence of ‘Othering’ in the coverage of the proposed Camden College, and the Islamic school was eventually denied, it is argued that most of that treatment occurred in Letters to the Editor, and that the actual news reports and editorials produced by *Camden Advertiser* staff were much more positive and inclusive in nature.

8.4. Research Question 4: Can reporting on the Gungahlin mosque be deemed to be more positive, accounting for its approval?

The critical discourse analysis of *The Canberra Times*’ coverage of the Gungahlin mosque development has revealed a number of pivotal discourses which may have influenced readers’ understandings of the proposal and the various parties involved. The term ‘concerns’ was used frequently throughout the coverage and was especially evident in the name of the key opposition group, the Concerned Citizens of Canberra. The discourse of ‘concerns’ was used to frame the discussion of the mosque in more neutral terms, and was often applied in conjunction with planning issues. There were attempts to ‘Other’ the Gungahlin Muslim community through the promotion of anti-Muslim sentiments, including the alleged untrustworthiness of the Muslim community, by both the CCC and writers of Letters to the Editor. The westernisation of the development proposal, as well as the contrasts drawn between Islam and Christianity highlighted the religious element which was often brought into the debate. The platform granted to such statements through the media discourse allowed them to spread and to potentially influence readers’ understandings and opinions of the mosque proposal. However, *The Canberra Times* used its power as a respected local newspaper to critique the Concerned Citizens of Canberra on a number of grounds, including its legitimacy as a legalised entity, its financials, its representatives and the identity of its ‘fundamentalist Christian’ members. Such tactics may have decreased the authority that readers attributed to the Concerned Citizens of Canberra and, by extension, their arguments against the mosque. In denigrating the opponents of the mosque, implicit support of the Canberra Muslim Community Inc. and their development proposal may have been
acknowledged by some readers of The Canberra Times. Further inclusive discourses were also evident through the emphasis of similarities between Islam and Christianity in Letters to the Editor. Diversity and multiculturalism were evidenced in both written text and visuals, and so were authoritative and grassroots Muslim voices and images. Therefore, whilst the coverage of the proposed Gungahlin mosque cannot be deemed unproblematic, it can be convincingly argued that the editorial stance of The Canberra Times was largely positive, which could be linked to the approval of the mosque development application.

8.5. Implications of the Research

This research has confirmed the presence of Orientalist discourses in published news content regarding proposed Islamic developments in Australian local newspapers. Arguably, there is therefore a need for more education for journalists in regard to cultural sensitivity when covering news stories involving Islam and/or Muslims. The research currently being conducted by Jacqui Ewart and Mark Pearson (2016) on the Reporting Islam Project is an important step in this direction. The need for educational initiatives for media professionals and the wider community has also been supported by the National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security: Final Evaluation Report September 2005 – June 2010 (Australian Government Dept. of Immigration and Citizenship 2012), and the Forum on Australia’s Islamic Relations (FAIR 2013). Such measures could aid in decreasing the reliance on ‘Othering’ news frames currently in frequent use. Significantly, this original research project has identified a gap in the literature regarding alternative discourses that challenge dominant Orientalist depictions of Islam in Australian local newspapers. Such overlooked discourses offer encouraging evidence of more inclusive representations of Australia’s Muslim communities in Australian news media.

The research has also shown that simple direct causal links cannot be drawn between the reporting on proposed Islamic developments and eventual local government planning decisions, with the Doveton mosque being approved despite highly problematic and exclusionary reporting, and the Camden Islamic school being denied in spite of a highly inclusive and positive editorial stance. Gungahlin was the only case
where the reporting was found to be positive and the proposed mosque was approved. Yet, although direct links cannot be established it would be naïve to suggest that the published news discourses had not influenced local community members’ knowledge regarding the proposed developments as evidenced in the detailed analyses from each case. There was extensive evidence in all three cases of the local communities engaging with their local newspaper, and responding to previously published content through Letters to the Editor. As such, this research builds on prior studies that have repeatedly demonstrated the crucial relationships between media discourses and the construction of social knowledge.

8.6. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

This research has produced a critical discourse analysis of local newspaper content regarding proposed Islamic developments. A CDA approach has allowed conclusions to be drawn about how published news content could have been understood by readers and therefore how such material may have impacted on proposed local Islamic property developments. Due to the identification of emerging alternate discourses to the dominant Orientalist frame, further research should attempt to identify further news publications in which such challenges are apparent, and the varying ways they are manifest. Re-appropriations of this type of study on different data sets would contribute to affirming the theoretical reliability of this project.

The early research intent included efforts to develop understanding about the production of news content featuring Islam and Muslims, from the perspective of journalists, and the reception of this content by Muslim community leaders. However, relevant parties from the communities under study declined invitations to participate in semi-structured interviews, resulting in a review of the research design. Future research should therefore attempt to engage with these key actors in order to understand how journalists approach reporting on stories involving Islam and Muslims, and to find out if they consider they have satisfactory professional protocols for reporting on Islam with cultural sensitivity. A broad comparative study between media organisations which have published more inclusive content, and those which have published more problematic content may also reveal important distinctions according to journalistic practices. Additionally,
interviews with Muslim community leaders and/or Muslim community members could offer important insights as to how they evaluate reporting on proposed Islamic developments, if they consider it to be fair and balanced showing cultural sensitivity, and what, if anything, they believe needs to change to improve matters. Further collaboration between the academic, journalistic and Islamic communities can only serve to continue to improve the accuracy and quality of representations of Islam in Australian news media.
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10. Appendices

10.1. Appendix A – Coding Mechanism

1. Newspaper Analysed

2. Article Title

3. Journalist

4. Date of Issue
   ____/____/_______

5. Section published in (if labelled, otherwise, ‘not specified’)

6. Page Number

7. What type of story is it?
   a. Hard news (timely and directly reported stories)
   b. Commentary/analysis (subjective stories with possible reflective
coverage and discussion of consequences of the issue)
   c. Feature (longer story with more sources involved and a human interest
aspect)
   d. Editorial (subjective story written by newspaper editorial staff)
   e. Letter to the Editor
   f. Other (please identify)
      i. ____________________________

8. Sources cited in the news story
   a. Council
   b. Local Muslim group spokesperson
   c. Local community group spokesperson
   d. Local community member
   e. Local Muslim community member
   f. Supporter of proposed development
   g. Opponent of proposed development
   h. Other (please identify)
      i. ____________________________
9. Lexicalisation (tally how many times are these words/ phrases/ groups used in the article)
   a. Muslim
   b. Islam
   c. Mosque
   d. Fundamental/ Fundamentalism/ Fundamentalist
   e. Extreme/ Extremism/ Extremist
   f. Terror/ Terrorism/ Terrorist
   g. Controversial/ Controversy
   h. Community opposition group
   i. Local Muslim group
   j. Imam
   k. Understanding
   l. Concern/ Concerns
   m. School
   n. Rural

10. Is there a photograph?
   a. Yes   b. No
   i. If yes, who is pictured?
      1. Muslim women (identified by traditional dress)
      2. Muslim men (identified by traditional dress)
      3. Muslim spokesperson
      4. Opposition spokesperson
      5. Non-Muslim community members
      6. Politicians
      7. Non-Human
         a. Mosque/ school plans
         b. Mosque/ school site
      8. Other (please identify)
         a. __________________________
   ii. Camera angle
      1. Camera looks up at subject
      2. Camera looks down at subject
      3. Camera is level with subject
iii. Gaze
   1. Subject looks at camera
   2. Subject looks away from camera

iv. Proximity
   1. Head and shoulders
   2. Waist up
   3. Full body
   4. Full body in scene

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