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TRANS-MEDIATISED TERRORISM: SYDNEY LINDT CAFÉ SIEGE

Saira Ali & Umi Khattab

Abstract

This paper presents an empirical analysis of the Australian media representation of terrorism using the 2014 Sydney Lindt Café Siege as a case in point to engage with the notion of moral panic. Deploying critical discourse analysis and case study as mixed methods, insights into trans-media narratives and aftermaths of the terrifying siege are presented. While news media appeared to collaborate with the Australian right-wing government in the reporting of terrorism, social media posed challenges and raised security concerns for the State. Social media heightened the drama as sites were variously deployed by the perpetrator, activists and concerned members of the public. The amplified trans-media association of Muslims with terrorism in Australia and its national and global impact, in terms of the political exclusion of Muslims, is best described in this article in the form of an Islamophobic Moral Panic Model, invented for a rethink of the various stages of its occurrence, intensification and institutionalisation.

Key words: Australia, terrorism, moral panic, Islamophobia model, trans-media, discourse, case study

Introduction

Recent debates surrounding the threat of terrorism have allowed Western political establishments, including the media, to increasingly use the catch-all label ‘Islam’ to identify and condemn it. The seemingly systematic demonization of Muslims as a monolithic group with a shared common history has been referred to with terms such as ‘Islamization’, ‘Islam Phobia’ and ‘Islamism’ among others (Elchardus and Spruyt, 2014: 76). ‘Islamophobia’ is one such term, coined in 1997, to capture the multiple forms of anti-Muslim feelings, behaviours, or policies with the publication of the report, ‘*Islamophobia: A challenge for us All, the Runnymede Trust*’ (Ciftci, 2012).

Islamophobia, as played out in the public arena, seems to closely relate to the concept of terrorism. With no universally accepted definition, in the context of international law (Acharya, 2009), western leaders seem to label international terrorism as a threat to democracy and civilization. This label appears to be consistent before and after the 9 September 2001 attacks (9/11) in the USA (Acharya, 2009).

The fear of Islam, and Muslims as its centrally controlled, single-minded followers seem reflected and re-created by news and social media on a daily basis. The frequent media discourses of fear become even more ominous when they are targeted on racial or cultural lines (Stratton, 1998). The role of media in creating an atmosphere of fear is crucial and well-facilitated by the highly concentrated ownership of media networks (Appadurai, 1990). In examining the role of media in the manufacture and promotion of Islamophobia, Lean (2012) argues that it is not enough to only look at the concentrated efforts of news networks and “an ideological band” of experts using stereotypical images of Muslims and Islam to generate fear in society. In fact, it is necessary to consider how the media, influenced by “the Islamophobia industry” tends to “take their campaign to the next level” and actively seeks to “eradicate positive images of Muslims” through extensive use of carefully chosen narratives

and symbols (Lean, 2012: 76). Using the 15 December 2014 Sydney Lindt Café hostage saga as a case in point, this article revisits the notion of Islamophobia through the theoretical lens of moral panic and offers a qualitative analysis of the Australian media representation of the incident and its aftermath.

Methodology

Daymon and Holloway (2002: 105) argue that case study research differs from other qualitative approaches, as its purpose is to increase knowledge about “real, contemporary communication events in their context”. Lindlof and Taylor (2002: 11) in explaining the strength of qualitative research, argue that since realities are socially constructed, research should encourage deep understanding that illuminates the many different ways in which “cultural symbol systems” are used to give meaning to human sentiments, motives and actions. Using the Sydney Lindt café hostage crisis as the object of study, CDA is deployed, with a focus on what language represents and how it is used to make sense of the world.

Raymond Williams notes: “Language is...a socially shared and reciprocal activity...embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already shared and is reciprocal or may become so” (cited Brennen, 2013: 192). Hall (1997: 4-5) succinctly defines language as a signifying practice working through representation; and texts as literary and visual constructs, “shaped by rules, conventions and traditions” that are intrinsic to how language is used to convey meaning (Hall, 1975 cited Brennen, 2013: 200). Hence, texts provide a socially constructed reality that may be understood by breaking down and decoding words, concepts, ideas, themes and issues in the text within a particular cultural context (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011). ‘Discourse’ and ‘ideology’ are two of the main theoretical concepts used in CDA, which relate to the broader ideas and values expressed through language (Hansen and Machin, 2013).

Brennen (2013: 201) defines ideology as the “dominant ideas of an individual, group, class or society, the way meanings are socially produced, or even as the false ideas upon which a social, political or economic system is based”. Fairclough (2003) explains that discourses pertaining to ideas such as national unity or cultural superiority, reflect certain social values and concepts that contribute to the reproduction of social life. Hence, it is through language that people constitute the social world or society. Texts represent dominant ideological positions within a specific culture, as all societies are based on “unspoken, unwritten assumptions about the way the world works” (Brennen, 2013: 201).

It is the aim of CDA to draw out the ideologies from within the texts. Ideology characterises the way certain discourses become accepted, obscuring the way they help to sustain power relations (Hansen and Machin, 2013). Hence, ideology stabilises and maintains the status quo, reinforces the beliefs of those in power, constructs and supports socially constructed meanings, and acts as “social cement and social control” (Cormack, 1995: 20). In this sense, the project unpacks meanings hidden within political and media texts to determine the presence of Islamophobia and the level of hysteria generated within and without during the time of terror. The study chronologically captures events of the siege as they unfolded, looking closely at actors and issues, while deconstructing official and non-official discourses across various media platforms selected purposively for analysis. Through an open-coding process, words such as ‘terror’, ‘Islam’, ‘Islamic State’, ‘IS’, ‘death’, ‘violence’, ‘militant’, ‘extremist’, ‘dark’, ‘halal’, ‘hostage’ and the like were identified for critical contextual analysis.

Moral Panic

Castells (2008) observes that a number of issues faced by humankind are global in their manifestation and implementation, including the problem of global security, unpredictable nature of global terrorism, and the practice of the politics of fear under the pretext of fighting terrorism. In this sense, the politics of fear (Furedi, 2005-2007) casts a shadow over informed debates about the causes of terrorism and the implementation of security policies, which often seem to be made on an ad hoc basis (Aradau and van Munster, 2007).

Fears about terrorism become linked to “contemporary folk devils: immigrants, bogus asylum-seekers, religious zealots and dole scroungers” (Mythen and Walklate, 2008: 229). Such discourses make particular ethnic groups suspect. Concerned about national security, social construction of race tends to slip into a “white-against-everyone-else paradigm”, and all people of colour lumped together and suspected of terrorist affiliations (Baynes, 2002: 8). Such racial profiling seems directly related to media depictions of non-whites. As Baynes (2002: 61-62) contends, “For perpetrators who are racialized as white, the news media and society presume that they are inherently good and that something bad happened to cause them to do wrong”, while for those racialized as non-white, the news media and society presume that they are “generally bad with no mitigation for their behaviour”. As a result, incidents of violence initiated by non-Muslims are rarely labelled as terrorism. This includes, for example, the co-pilot of Germanwings flight, Andreas Lubitz, who deliberately crashed the plane into the French Alps on 24 March 2015, killing all 150 passengers on board (BBC, 2015), and Robert Dear who, motivated by religious rage, shot down three and wounded nine people in a Planned Parenthood Clinic in Colorado Springs on 27 November 2015 (Fausset, 2015). In this sense, Beck (2006: 337) suggests that the lines of conflict of world risk society are no longer drawn along socio-economic factors or East-West geographies, but along racial and cultural ones.

This preoccupation with security threats has fostered a fear culture, endorsed by politicians, journalists and security professionals (Furedi, 2005-2007). The constant media fixation with future threats to human security encourages people to become more inward-looking and fearful, obscuring the fact that contemporary Muslim-minority Western societies remain “comparatively safe places to live” (Mythen and Walklate, 2008: 227), as opposed to Muslim-majority societies (See figure 1).

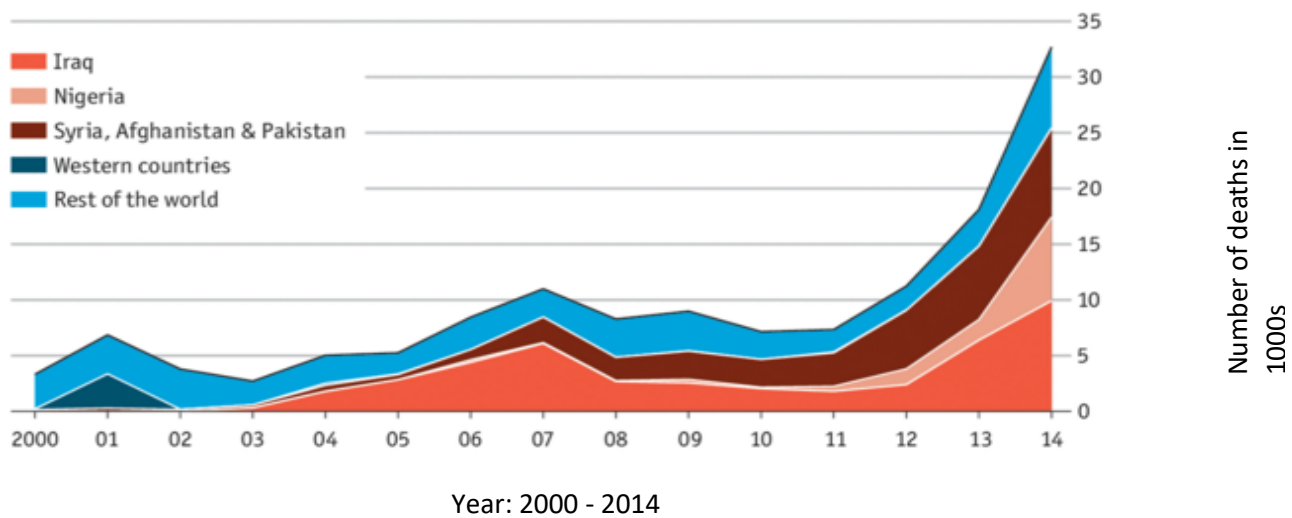


Figure 1: Global fatalities from terrorism
Source: (The Economist, 2015)

According to Furedi (2005-2007) dominant agencies, especially media, have been complicit in creating a climate of fear around terrorism. Virilio argues that extensive coverage of terrorism or “primetime terrorism”, as a global event not only amplifies the political impact of the attacks, but may also become a calculated factor in future attacks, making the media “collaborators of terrorism” (cited in Volkmer, 2008: 96).

Mediatized fear, often overconstructed and exaggerated, has been well-explained by the concept of ‘moral panic’, developed in the 1970s, to theorize social problems (Cohen, 1980). Moral panic can be described as a reaction, both mediatized and political, that is out of proportion to the actual risk or threat. Moral panics start with a root in reality, but intensify

through exaggeration and “folk statistics when comments appropriate to one or more particular incidents are generalized” (Introvigne, 2007: 48). Through “politically charged” narratives of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, moral panics can unleash “explosive and consequential effects by “reinforcing and unleashing racist ideas and practices” (Cottle, 2006: 56). The classic concept of moral panic, Cottle (2006) believes, is still relevant today, considering how various issues are framed by the media. For instance, media has played a crucial role in amplifying public fears around issues of immigration and asylum seekers in western societies, where these groups are often racialized as the ‘Other’ (Cottle, 2006).

Muslims in Australia

The 1991 Gulf war became a landmark in the politics of exclusion in Australia, as negative media depictions of Muslims was routinized (Aly, 2007). Where previously Australian Muslims had enjoyed some degree of social anonymity, they have now become “objects of the national gaze” (Saniotis, 2004: 51). The 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington added fuel to fire, provoking waves of racist attacks on Australian Muslims (Aly, 2007). Anderson (2015) observes that post 9/11, Islamophobic attitudes and actions practiced on a quotidian level severely damaged communal harmony and social cohesion, culminating in the notorious race riots at Sydney’s Cronulla Beach in 2005. The Committee on *Discrimination against Arab Australians* notes that Australian Muslims experienced various forms of harassment, and many of them believed that police were unhelpful and prejudiced (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2004). The report indicated that after 9/11, assaults on Muslim women became widespread. Hage (cited in Saniotis, 2004: 53) argues that many attacks were motivated by the “perceived undesirability of Muslims as Australian citizens”. Anderson (2015: 256) traces this phenomenon to the return to power of the conservative Abbott government in 2013, which sought to deflect attention from its unpopular economic policies

through a renewed focus on “generating fear and anxiety regarding Muslims.....in Australia amid the context of a global resurgence of Islamophobia”.

Saniotis (2004: 58) observes that the vilification of Australian Muslims is a continuation of the historic xenophobia by non-Muslim Australians, “embodied in commonwealth policies aimed at discouraging 'undesirable' immigrants from coming to Australia”. He contends that since the 19th century, Muslims have been viewed as inimical and debased, which seem to continue to inform mainstream conceptions of immigrant Muslims. The construction of Muslims as the ‘Other’ appears to be based on a series of interrelated cultural myths and stereotypes that juxtaposes the primitiveness of the Islamic culture with the civilized western culture.

Media’s focus on Islam and Muslims has been particularly intense following the recent events of terrorism across the world. As Kabir (2006: 327) notes, by carefully framing headlines and images, the media’s “cultural superiority” implies that “the customs, dress and religious practices of Muslims have sinister associations with the terrorist activities of Islamic militants”. Although Muslims only make up 2 per cent of the Australian population (Safi, 2014), the constant connection of moderate Muslims with images of extremism and violence has placed Australian Muslims in a very difficult position indeed.

Sydney Siege

Man Haron Monis initiated a 17-hour hostage crisis at the Lindt Café in Sydney’s central business district on 15 December 2014. Posing as a customer, Monis pulled out a gun, forcing customers and staff to stand against the Café windows and hold up a black flag with white writing (Doherty et al., 2014). Originally, the flag was mistakenly reported as that of the so-called Islamic State (IS) – “Pictures showed a black and white flag...used by Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria being held up” (Business Insider, 2014). It was later identified as

the *Shahada* – the Islamic creed, “There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God” – rendered in calligraphic Arabic (The Daily Telegraph, 2014). This message, among others, appears on the flag of Saudi Arabia (Doherty et al., 2014).

The cabinet national security committee, in conjunction with the New South Wales (NSW) state government and police, set in motion a massive counter-terrorism operation (Symonds, 2014). Central Sydney was flooded with police and emergency services (Symonds, 2014). Snipers were placed overlooking the café, while heavily armed paramilitary police were stationed immediately outside (Symonds, 2014). The Seven television station building, located opposite the Café was evacuated (The Daily Telegraph, 2014). Police and Tactical Operations Unit cordoned off the area, attempting to make contact with the Lindt Café workers and Monis.

Throughout the day, Monis forced his hostages to call radio and TV stations across the country, relaying his demands (Doherty et al., 2014), which included releasing five hostages for an on-air live broadcast phone call with the Prime Minister (PM); releasing two more hostages for a public declaration from the government that his was an act of terror committed on behalf of IS; and releasing one last hostage for a real IS flag (Doherty et al., 2014). None of the broadcast stations aired his demands.

Soon after, four videos were uploaded to YouTube and Facebook from inside the Café. The speakers, all women hostages standing in front of the black flag, warned of bombs being “ignited” in the city if the hostage-taker’s demands were not met (Doherty et al., 2014). Some hostages managed to escape, agitating Monis who then shot the Café manager (SBS, 2014a). Soon after police stormed the Café. Monis was killed, while one hostage lost her life in the crossfire (SBS, 2014a).

While the siege was in progress, police also ramped up security in Sydney suburbs and major cities, as Queensland police commissioner ordered all available police onto the

streets (Symonds, 2014). As far away as New York, police presence was heightened around the Australian consulate (Symonds, 2014). No explanation was given for this extraordinary mobilisation for what the then PM Tony Abbot initially referred to as a ‘hostage-taking’ situation (Symonds, 2014).

The incident took place three months after terrorism alerts were raised to the highest level in a decade, in view of the expected organized or “lone wolf” attacks licensed by the IS (Kenny, 2015).

The Perpetrator

Monis was an Iranian-born Australian who had arrived as a refugee in 1996 seeking political asylum which was granted in 2001 despite a warrant out for his arrest in Iran (Knowles, 2014). He fled Iran after a US \$200,000 fraud case (Gayle, 2014). The former chief of the Iranian police stated that Monis had "a dark and long history of violent crime and fraud" (Mehr News, 2014). He was being interrogated by Interpol and Iranian police at the time his asylum was granted, and was not extradited because Australia has no extradition treaty with Iran (Mehr News, 2014).

The siege inquest revealed that Monis had been posing multiple identities ranging from Iranian intelligence official, political activist, spiritual healer, expert in black magic, outlaw biker gang member to Muslim cleric (Wells and Ryan, 2015). Diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia, he told a psychiatrist that he had changed his name several times for "security reasons" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2015). In 2013, Monis was charged with writing hate letters to families of soldiers killed in Afghanistan and a year later, indicted with accessory to murder of his ex-wife and over 40 counts of sexual assault (Harvey, 2015).

Monis had converted from Shia to Sunni Islam, and attended Islamist rallies promoting conspiracy theories about Australian security agencies (Davies, 2014). While on bail, and facing a likely lengthy imprisonment (Harvey 2015), Monis declared allegiance to IS (Safi and Quinn, 2014). Australian Muslim analysts state that his conversion to Sunni Islam was less out of genuine religious conviction than designed to provide credibility in seeking an association with IS. After all, one “can't really claim to love IS when [one's] a [Shia] and they're trying to exterminate you" (Aly, 2014). He was a long-time self-proclaimed *sheikh*, albeit not recognised as such in the Islamic community (Knowles, 2014). He seemed to have been marginalised by Australian Muslim authorities and mosques for his extremist views and criminal history. Apparently, he adopted an extreme Islamist ideology on his own, as police and intelligence agencies have not been able to establish any connections between Monis and international terrorist organisations (CBS, 2014).

Trans-media Stories

News about the Sydney siege emerged in real time over news and social media with journalists and the public publishing and sharing posts as events unfolded. While social media played a huge role during the crisis, it was not necessarily a positive one. According to terrorism expert, Greg Barton, social media has the potential to negatively interfere with future operations like the one which brought the Lindt Café siege to an end (cited in Duffy, 2014). At the height of the siege, New South Wales (NSW) Deputy Police Commissioner confirmed that social media was hampering their ability to control information and that sites were being closely monitored to form part of police tactical response (Duffy, 2014).

Controlling the flow of information became difficult when Monis himself started using social media to manipulate an outcome to his benefit by forcing a hostage to post his demands on her Facebook page (See figure 2). The posts were shared many times over, till a relative of a hostage pleaded against sharing, concerned over the risk to hostages' lives

(Duffy, 2014). Barton admitted that it was almost impossible to “hermetically seal information flows off” anymore and that this may well have undermined the “good professional response from media” (Duffy, 2014).

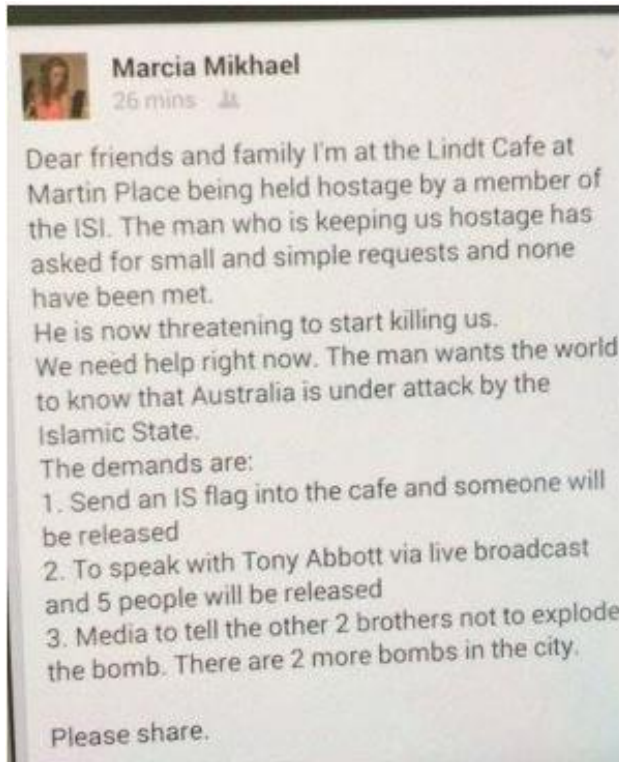


Figure 2: Monis’s demands on hostage’s Facebook page
Source: Powell, 2015

Terrorist groups such as IS increasingly use social media for publicity and are extremely adept at it. When someone like Monis, inspired by a terrorist group, stages an attack, no matter how inefficiently, the terrorist group achieves notoriety through social media that fuel the 24-hour news cycle (Duffy, 2014). For example, while IS was oblivious of Monis before the siege, media speculation about Monis being associated with IS such as “A gunman sympathetic to Islamic State...involved in a hostage siege in a Sydney city café” (Kerin, 2014), brought him to their attention and they were quick to acknowledge his actions, featuring him prominently in their official English language magazine, *Dabiq* – an important recruitment and propaganda tool (Knott, 2014). The foreword in the magazine stated that the

“blessings in his efforts were apparent from the very outset”, as Monis "brought terror to the entire nation" and erased his history of "transgression" (Knott, 2014).

As rumours about Monis and the black flag became widespread, the siege threatened to open up old prejudices (SBS, 2014b). Muslim leaders, including more than 40 prominent Muslim organisations, across Australia rushed to condemn the attack (SBS 2014b). The Grand Mufti, Australia's highest Islamic office holder, said he and the Australian National Imams Councils (ANIC) were devastated and “condemn this criminal act unequivocally and reiterate that such actions are denounced in part and in whole in Islam” (SBS 2014b). However, hard-line political groups such as Australian Defence League (ADL) were venting undesirability of Muslims through social media. ADL urged its Facebook followers to descend on Lakemba, a Muslim-majority suburb of Sydney, if hostages were harmed (Davies and Elliot, 2014). ADL continued its tirade with posts like, “Here it is folks, homegrown islamic terrorism in our backyard, courtesy of successive australian governments and their brainwashed voters" (SBS, 2014b). Similarly, Lindt Café's Facebook page was flooded with messages of support, congratulating the company for not being “Halal certified” (Hamad, 2014), directly linking Islamic practices with the incident.

As anti-Islamic sentiment flooded social media, a Twitter campaign #illridewithyou was launched, offering to ride on public transport with Muslims fearing backlash (Law, 2014). Supporters posted selfies on social media and affixed the hashtag to themselves in real life: “Practical thing: I've made a temporary sticker for my bag so people who need me can spot me #illridewithyou” (Haggerty, 2014). Several politicians and celebrities showed their support for the campaign with messages like: “Australians tonight doing what we do best - uniting to overcome intolerance and hate #illridewithyou” (Ruppert, 2014). Within a few hours, the campaign amassed almost 120,000 tweets (Ruppert, 2014) and was trending globally (Al-Jazeera, 2014; See figure 3). It received immense gratitude from Muslims

around the world, as Muslim women in Toronto handed out roses to those who would ride with them (Al-Jazeera, 2014).



Figure 3:

#illridewithyou trends globally
Source: (Al-Jazeera, 2014)

Overall, Press Council Australia praised media professionals for the coverage (Meade, 2014) and for refusing to give Monis a platform to air his demands (Crikey, 2014).

Following instructions given by the police, most media outlets suppressed the identity of the gunman and the names of the hostages until they were given the go-ahead (Meade, 2014).

Seven News received three international awards from the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) for the siege coverage (Hayes, 2015).

It is arguable that the highly concentrated media ownership offers the Australian people “less different voices”, and so their decisions are based on fewer viewpoints than “almost any other place in the free world” (Donovan, 2011). In fact, some commentators believe that democracy is at stake, but “the people in power aren’t listening because they are very happy with the way they can easily dominate the news cycle” (Donovan, 2011). Pew research shows that 63% of stories in Australia come directly from government officials

(Donovan, 2011). Hall et al. (1978) contend that those with power and resources, more often than not, are the primary definers of news.

Media ownership in Australia is distributed between commercial, public and not-for-profit. Australian media ownership is one of the most concentrated in the world (Jones and Pusey, 2008). For instance, 11 of the 12 capital city daily papers are owned by either News Corp Australia (e.g. *The Australian*, *Herald Sun* and *The Courier Mail*) or Fairfax Media (e.g. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *Canberra Times*). Public broadcasters - ABC and SBS – own television, radio and extensive online services. Commercial players with ownership of television, radio and digital services include: Nine Entertainment Co.; Win Corporation; Southern Cross Broadcasting; Ten Network Holdings; Seven West Media; and Foxtel (Donovan, 2011).

Unlike broadcast media, the *Daily Telegraph* printed a special 2pm edition on 15 December 2014, with the headline “Death Cult CBD Attack – The instant we changed forever” (Mamamia, 2014). Without real evidence, the news story linked the black flag held by the hostages to IS or the “Death Cult”, as former Australian PM, Tony Abbott, labelled the terrorist group (Glenday, 2014).

Other Australian newspapers framed the story with headlines such as: “Islamic State-linked terror grips Sydney” – *The Australian Financial Review*; “Sheer terror” – *Herald Sun*; “Terror hits home” – *The Sydney Morning Herald*; “Free Pass to Terror” – *The Daily Telegraph*; and “Lone wolf on bail, unwatched” – *The Australian*.

The siege coverage shows that the Australian news media appeared not to be up to the task of calm, well-informed reportage of the incident. With a dearth of information from the police and the agonizingly slow events of the day, the rolling media coverage quickly surrendered to “hackneyed phrases, rampant, ill-informed speculation and rumour-spreading,

exactly like social media” (Keane, 2014). Terrorism experts were sourced to explain what was or was not happening and “blatant inaccuracies” were peddled (Keane, 2014).

In view of the non-stop coverage, the media was noted to freely give the terrorists what they wanted most – undivided attention (Birmingham, 2014). Watching looped repeats of hostages fleeing the most horrific circumstance they were likely to face in their lives, fed the notion that “if you do something horrific and grisly you will get enormous media attention” (Vanstone, 2014). It was argued that what was required was the old format of “news flash”, where normal programming would be interrupted for a couple of minutes to bring news about the event – “because two or three minutes was always enough time to let you know the facts and maybe layer on a reaction comment from the relevant authorities” (Birmingham, 2014). Vanstone (2014) stated that it is questionable whether the right to know and freedom of press should extend to being able to see in real time the authorities handling a continuing operation and lying in wait for victims for a quick photograph or news-bite. “We are just vultures preying on the vulnerable. When horrific things happen and we use them as entertainment, we diminish ourselves” (Vanstone, 2014). In this sense, one can almost detect “symbiotic relationships” between the new forms of news and entertainment genres such as reality TV, where the boundaries between fact and fiction are becoming increasingly blurred (Thussu, 2009: 16). Such fusion productions provide a “feast of visually arresting, emotionally charged infotainment that sustains ratings and keeps production costs low” (Thussu, 2009: 17).

Siege Aftermath

Speculating the identity of the hostage-taker, news media started unearthing Monis’s criminal history (e.g. Knowles, 2014). As details of his background unfolded, news media shifted its focus to how a criminal was allowed to roam free (e.g. Rajca, 2014). The question of how

someone with a dubious past could be let into the country was hotly debated. Andrew Bolt (2014a), proclaimed that “our too-lax immigration programs, multiculturalism and the much-heralded ‘refugee’ programs” have allowed people like Monis to enter the country and terrorize it”. Prominent political figures, including the former PM questioned the system (Rajca, 2014) and called for a formal review of the siege.

The Review was intended to look into Monis’s arrival in Australia and the granting of asylum, citizenship and welfare benefits to him. It was to probe how Monis obtained access to firearms; his interaction with the law; what information the federal and state agencies had on him; and how and at what stage national security powers could have been used to monitor his activities (Rajca, 2014). The Review was to examine the lessons that the NSW and Australian Federal Police (AFP) could learn from the way the siege was handled (Rajca, 2014). Yet, published in January 2015, the Review failed to fully realize any of its aims (Kenny, 2015).

Soon after the publication of the Review report, the Lindt Café siege inquest (a mandatory legal procedure in the event of a fatality during a police operation) commenced. The inquest, run in four blocks of two-weeks each, commenced on 29 January 2015, where more than 100 witnesses were interviewed (Lindt Café Siege Inquest, 2016).

At the inquest, terrorism experts agreed that Monis’s mental health played a significant role in his decision to attack. One expert, Clarke Jones told the inquest that he believed Monis was acting out of a need to belong and had demonstrated this desire when he tried to join the biker gang in the months before the siege (Kidd, 2015). Jones said that Monis may have claimed to be attacking on behalf of IS because “he saw Islamic State as the one organisation that might accept him” (Kidd, 2015). Similarly, Greg Barton, a counter-terrorism expert, told the inquest that compared with other lone-wolf terrorists such as the Norwegian

gunman, Anders Breivik, or the American Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, Monis was not "consistent in articulating a manifest or position" (Kidd, 2015). Nevertheless, the Australian government pronounced the siege as a terrorist attack for insurance purposes (Wroe and Hutchens, 2015). The former Treasurer, Joe Hockey, declared the event an act of terrorism under the Terrorism Insurance Act to ensure businesses that suffered damages from the incident would not be denied claims due to "terrorism exclusions in their insurance policies" (Wroe and Hutchens, 2015) and unwittingly gave way to Monis's demand of the siege being acknowledged as an act of terror.

In the aftermath of the siege, tougher gun and bail laws were introduced by the then Abbott government. An accused person's association with persons or groups advocating support for terrorist activities and/or violent extremism would be taken as part of the "unacceptable risk" test for bail (ABC, 2015). Likewise, Illegal Firearms Investigation and Reward Scheme offered rewards of up to \$10,000 for information leading to a conviction for possession and use of illegal firearms (ABC, 2015). Further, offenders could face a maximum 14-year imprisonment for gun-related offences (Chang, 2015).

A program was announced to combat terrorist propaganda online which would include real-time monitoring of social media (Welch and McGregor, 2015). The Australian Attorney General said that real-time monitoring of social media was not cause for "privacy concern" and that "Australia would treat jihadist propaganda on the internet the same way it treats child pornography" - monitoring the sites and taking down offensive material (Knight, 2015).

The government also unveiled a legislation to arbitrarily strip citizenship from dual nationals accused of involvement in a wide range of anti-government or terrorism-related activities either at home or abroad (Head, 2015). Several constitutional law experts have warned that despite a number of revisions, the bill remains deeply flawed (Keany, 2015).

Following the introduction of the government's earlier controversial anti-terror measures to counter internal threats, both real and perceived, and the resultant rise in anti-Muslim sentiments (Kenny, 2014), Australian Muslims braced for a backlash after the siege. Several anti-Muslim attacks, including physical and verbal abuse against women wearing the hijab, threats of violence against senior clerics and damage to mosques were reported across Australia (Aston, 2014). Hence, when media linked Monis and the attack with IS, no amount of backtracking could remedy the damage already done (Hamad, 2014). By this time, the fact that Monis was a Muslim seemed enough for some commentators to challenge the "apologists" by asking how could anyone "dismiss the faith of Monis as just a coincidence" and why there still exists a denial about Islam – "specifically about its role in this attack?" (Bolt, 2014b). It was said that Islam contains a "strong streak of violence and intolerance" for other faiths and that "mass immigration from the Middle East has left us in greater danger than before" (Bolt, 2014b). Milani (2014) argued that "there needs to be an honest conversation about the association between Islam and violence...once you take into account the broad sweep of history, it makes no sense to separate political terrorism from Islam entirely". But Milani failed to acknowledge that a broad sweep of history would reveal how all prominent religions indulged in wars and violence, spanning centuries.

Posetti (2014) cautioned against stereotyping Muslims, suggesting that inflammatory media coverage of Muslims gives "licence" to acts of violence against innocent members of the community". Police confirmed that there had been dozens of hate crimes against Muslims since the siege, while the number of people reporting suspicious behaviour or security concerns had also risen considerably (Simmonds, 2014). In this atmosphere of simmering tensions, ex-PM Tony Abbott, raised concerns about the "worsening" threat to Australia from the growing number of "sympathisers and supporters of extremism" and "potential home grown terrorists" (The Sydney Morning Herald, 2015). Ignoring the fact that the Muslim

community in general and Muslim leaders in particular had been expressly condemning terrorism, particularly the Lindt Café siege, Abbott further stated that everybody, “including Muslim community leaders, need to speak up clearly because...violence against innocents must surely be a blasphemy against all religions” (Khan, 2015). He further urged Australians to stop apologizing for Western values, stating that Islam needs to “modernise from the kill-or-be-killed milieu of the Prophet Mohammed” (Cox, 2015). Islamic and non-Islamic sources agree that in his lifetime, Prophet Mohammad participated in 100 expeditions – out of which only three were full-fledged wars (Hisham and al-Malik, 2001; Gabriel, 2007). Many of these encounters were single combat battles, most of which saw no fighting at all (Hisham and al-Malik, 2001). Moreover, the total number of casualties in all 100 expeditions, on both sides, was less than a thousand (Hisham and al-Malik, 2001). Abbott remains on record as Australia’s shortest serving Prime Minister.

A direct consequence of the Sydney siege was Reclaim Australia (RA). The group describes itself as a “grassroots movement” that was formed by everyday “mothers and fathers” to stop “halal tax, sharia law and Islamisation” (Reclaim Australia, 2015; Aly, 2015). In an exclusive interview with Channel 7, one of the founders of RA said that she had never been politically active, but that the 2014 Lindt Café siege in Sydney was a turning point for her and she decided to “do something about it” (Dye, 2015). While the group claims that it is not against Islam, RA’s narratives refer to followers of Islam as “dangerous”, “threatening” and “morally corrupt” (Aly, 2015). Morsi (2015) argues that “reclaiming Australia from Islam is really about reclaiming whiteness” and that RA rallies are not about Islam, but a “clash of different ideas about being Australian”. Political scientist, Frank Mols believes that the real danger of these movements is not the movements themselves, but the “normative hardening that happens through alignment and the gradual shift on issues like border protection, immigration and asylum seekers” (cited in Robertson, 2015).

Moral Panic Globalized

The Lindt Café saga was captured by news media across the globe. Emulating Australian news were headlines such as “Sydney siege sparks terror fears” – *The Wall Street Journal*; “Islamists seize hostages in Sydney” – *The Times*; “Sydney siege reveals the hidden face of Islamic extremism down under” – *The Daily Mail*; “Australia has been struck by the act of terror it feared” – *The Guardian*.

The world media also speculated about the identity of the hostage-taker and the motivation behind the attack. Once the identity of the perpetrator was revealed by Australian authorities, the media dug into Monis’s past to create a picture of who he really was. Questions such as “How can someone who has had such a long and checkered history not be on the appropriate watch list?” were posed (Burke 2014).

Right-wing groups around the world used the Lindt Café siege to voice their opinions about Islam and Muslims. For example, the leader of UK’s right-wing political movement, Britain First, along with social media users, blamed the attack and future “threat of jihad” on “mass immigration” (Withnall, 2014). A series of social media posts attempted to link the attack to the fact that the Café does not carry “halal certification” (Withnall, 2014). It was reported that Australia’s “sense of invulnerability” has been shattered, for now even the “innocuous act of fetching a takeaway coffee seems fraught with danger” (Marks, 2014).

Interestingly, in the East or Muslim-majority half of the world, there was not much media speculation about the identity of the hostage-taker. The hostage-taker was referred to as “gunman”, until his identity was revealed by the Australian police, after which he was mostly referred to as the “Iranian-born extremist” or “Monis” (e.g. *The Nation*, 2014; AFP, 2014).

However, it was noted that media reportage of news events can lead to marginalisation of certain communities. Qazi (2014) argues that media offers selective news to manipulate the public's view, for while the Lindt Café siege was underway, four non-Muslim men took a man hostage in Belgium for several hours. The siege in Sydney was widely reported, while the other in Belgium largely ignored – “Such media manipulation is the root cause of Islamophobia, as a viewer gets the impression that crimes are committed only by Muslims” (Qazi 2014). Moreover, it was implied that perhaps the Australian government's focus on national security and war-on-terror to tackle Islamist extremism, rather than “social cohesion and inclusion within the country” was responsible for creating an “environment for radicalized Muslim youth to emerge in disproportionate numbers” (Reuters, 2015).

Discussion

Although conflicts mostly tend to originate outside of the media, Cottle (2006) argues that it is through the different media platforms that they come under public scrutiny. It is in the media that conflicts are “defined, framed and visualized; elaborated, narrativized and evaluated; moralized, deliberated and contested; amplified and promoted or dampened and reconciled; conducted and symbolized; enacted and performed. In a word: mediatized” (Cottle, 2006: 185). The speed at which news of the siege travelled from one platform to another and took on particular meanings in the global sphere is described further here as ‘trans-mediatized’.

While some balanced media coverage of the siege prevailed, overall media and political reaction centred on hysteria. In itself, the Twitter #illridewithyou campaign was an inspiring movement, but the fact that such show of solidarity was required in the face of an isolated incident perpetrated by a deranged man, reveals the tenuous relations between Australian Muslims and the rest of Australia. As Tabbaa (2014) notes, while the Twitter

campaign was a truly “human gesture” and a “breath of fresh air”, it was also a clear “acknowledgement of racism”.

Media sensationalized the incident, as though Sydney itself was under siege. The event was described as Australia’s ‘9/11 moment’ and ‘the day Australia lost its innocence’, as if Sydney had never witnessed such things before (Keane, 2014). During the initial, information deficient hours, media succumbed to the 24/7 news cycle pressure and filled space with speculation. In the frenzy to produce news, inaccurate reports were touted (Keane, 2014), fuelling hysteria. Similarly, sensationalist headlines and images of hostages standing against the Café windows or fleeing for their lives exasperated the situation. The initial interpretation and presentation of an event by the media is of special interest, as it is in this form that people get a picture of the disaster or deviance. The public becomes afraid, indignant or insecure as a result and formulates views that tend to be based on exaggerated half-truths than real facts. Moreover, as noted by Birmingham (2014) and Vanstone (2014), watching looped repeats of distressing events such as the hostages fleeing for their lives, tends to feed the notion that the best way to get undivided media attention is through horrific deeds – the more terrifying or grisly the deed, the more chances of 24/7 media coverage.

Manufacturing news to feed the non-stop ‘live update’ format, several media outlets distorted facts through gross exaggeration. In fact, IS, previously oblivious of Monis’s existence, picked up on the siege news and endorsed his actions. Australian media started publishing excerpts of IS’s *Dabiq* magazine, eulogizing Monis and associating him with militant Islamism – a trend set for world media. In this way, media moved the focus from the reality of who Monis actually was to what he potentially represented – militancy - and created a moral panic about the imminent threat posed by ‘enemies’ of the Australian way of life. Moreover, media effectively gave protracted publicity to a terror act and a terrorist

organization by over-reporting. In this sense, media do seem to be “collaborators of terrorism” (Virilio cited in Volkmer, 2008: 96).

The politics of fear (Furedi, 2005-2007) propagated by news media seems to have been validated by State elites. Despite expert testimonies at the Lindt Café siege inquest regarding the mental state of Monis, his long history of criminal offences, and importantly, no evidence to prove his association with any terrorist group, the Australian Government labelled Monis a terrorist, in a sense, yielding to Monis’s demand. In this regard, the Australian government and media, slipped into the “white-against-everyone-else paradigm”, where non-whites are lumped together and presumed to be generally wicked with no justification for their behaviour (Baynes, 2002: 8). Hence, regardless of mental health or other mitigating circumstances, any deviance by non-whites, especially if it results in violence, makes them suspected and/or confirmed terrorists.

Preoccupied with security threats and “contemporary folk devils” (Mythen and Walklate, 2008: 229), the Australian law enforcement authorities were stalking the Muslim community during and after the hostage crisis. At the same time, the media, political elites and the public were demanding a more robust reaction from the Muslim community against the attack despite the fact that not only did the Muslim community leaders offer their assistance during the siege, but the entire community unequivocally condemned the attack over and over again.

Debates around immigration policies added to the fear of the unknown and demonized Muslims by linking them with extremism and violence. Statements by right-wing journalists and independent organizations, and the emergence of the belligerent group, RA, give credence to Beck’s (2006) claim that the lines of conflict are no longer drawn along East and West geographies but along racial, cultural and religious ones.

The 2014 Sydney Lindt Café Siege is an excellent case of media association of Muslims and Islam to terrorism, best described here as an Islamophobic moral panic. Using Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994) five indicators of moral panic – concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility – an Islamophobic Moral Panic Model (See figure 4) is invented in this article for a rethink of the various stages of a moral panic. With the view that moral panic related to Islam has a tendency towards apparent permanence in the form of improvised legislations, anti-Islam social movements and police surveillance power, a sixth indicator, ‘institutionalisation’, has been added. Further, the model identifies an ever-present quality of this brand of moral panic by introducing the concept of ‘omnipresence’. As the case study clearly shows, moral panic associated with terrorism and Islam does not seem to fade away even after a resolution has been reached. In fact, it tends to keep pulsating in the background, ready to resurface on the slightest provocation.

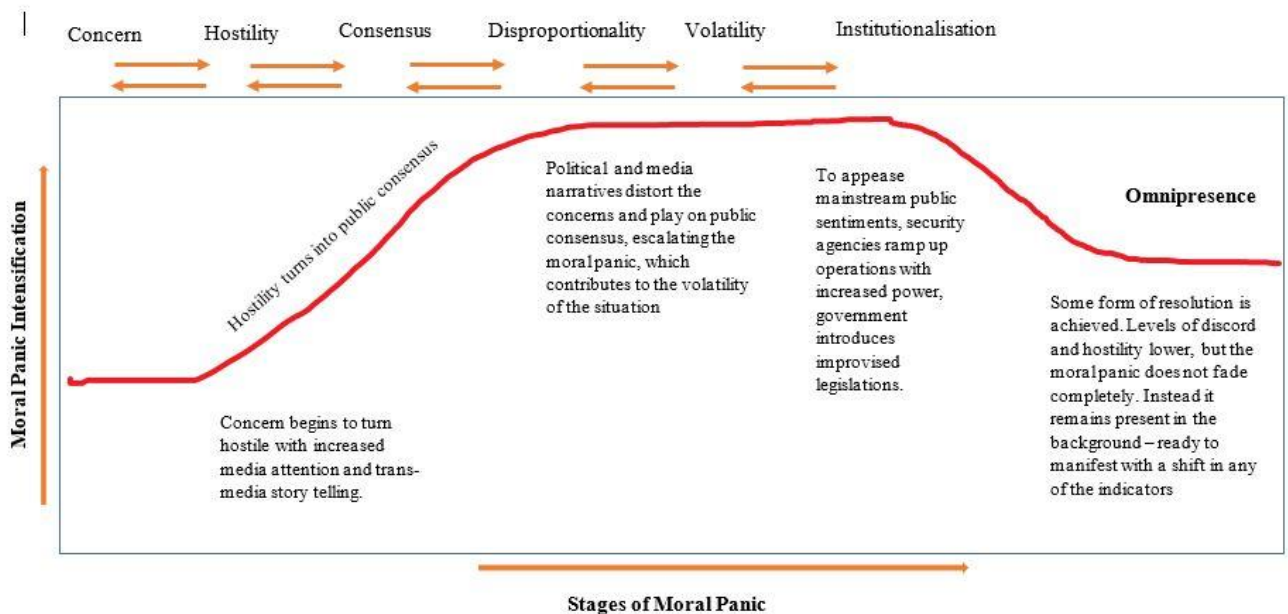


Figure 4: Islamophobic Moral Panic Model

Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) five indicators of moral panic, along with the additional indicator, 'institutionalisation', were identifiable in the case. For example, there appeared to be heightened level of *concern* over the behaviour of Muslims, as being detrimental to Australian lifestyle. This concern was often voiced through social and news media, legislations and the emergence of social movements such as Reclaim Australia. The aftermath of the siege reflected increased levels of *hostility* towards Muslims and their beliefs, as the NSW police acknowledged a rise in hate crimes against the Muslim community. A *consensus* in the form of anti-Islam protests prevailed in Australia, concerning the 'real' threat to Australian values by Islam and Muslims. Immense *disproportionality* was evident between the fear of Muslims in Australia and the reality of the threat they present(ed). The degree of concern over one man's actions, the problems it posed and the conditions it created, seemed far greater than necessary. There was a considerable degree of *volatility* during and after the siege. Immediately after the sighting of the black flag with the Arabic inscription, there were concerns about opening up old prejudices and a backlash against the Muslim community. The intensity of the volatility did not diminish after Monis was identified as a deranged criminal. Finally, *institutionalisation* was achieved via inflammatory commentaries, anti-Islam rallies, police raids and stringent legislations. Australian Muslims now seem trapped in a punitive environment.

As this paper is limited to one case study, future research would benefit from a comparative project applying the invented Islamophobic Moral Panic model to other incidents of terror in Muslim-minority states such as Britain or France. It would also be interesting to see how this particular kind of moral panic manifests in Muslim-majority states such as Indonesia or Pakistan.

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