Article

Analysing the Rhetoric of Islam Needs Reforming: Tony Abbott's Political Discourse in Response to Terrorism in Australia

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Abstract: One of the significant effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York was the politics of the US-led war on terror encompassing secularism and calls for Islamic reformation. The political discourse of war on terror was not limited to the Americas but was witnessed in other Western nations, such as Australia. The discourse of "Islam needs reforming" by the Prime Minister of Australia, Tony Abbott, in response to the Lindt Café siege (labelled as "Islamic terrorism") tacitly associates Islam with terrorism and represents Muslims negatively to the wider Australian society. This paper with the research question of "How does 'Islam needs reforming' discourse perpetuate Islamophobia?" carried out critical discourse analysis on the selected speeches of Tony Abbott in response to the Lindt Café siege in 2014 to find out the context and implications of Abbott's discourse in relation to calls for Islamic revolution. The study found that Abbott through the example of al-Sisi's (Egypt's president) calls for Islamic reformation forwarded his stance of the need for change in Islam to counter terrorism. Therefore, the present paper argues that the calls for Islamic reformation in response to terrorism can associate Islam with terrorism, thus, perpetuating Islamophobia.

Keywords: Islamic reformation; Islamophobia; political discourse; critical discourse analysis; war on terror; representation

1. Introduction

The "clash of civilizations" thesis by Huntington (1993) that proposed Islam as the new enemy of the West crystalised with the September 11 terror attacks. The idea of a civilisational clash, based on orientalist perspectives, was adopted and promulgated by Bush and Clinton administrations specially after September 11 (Massoumi et al. 2017). This had a ripple effect across the globe as the discourse resonated with right-leaning political parties globally and Australia was no exception to this. The idea of a civilisational clash played an important role in the association of Islam with terrorism where the religion of Islam was linked with the actions of a handful of extremists. This association of Islam with violence and terrorism was witnessed not only in the United States' political discourse, but also in the discourse of certain Australian political figures such as Tony Abbott, in the aftermath of the Lindt Café siege, for example. In response to the 2014 Lindt Café siege, Tony Abbott as the Prime Minister of Australia targeted Islam and suggested that "Islam needs reforming", implying that Islam needs to change to address the problem of terrorism in the West. This discourse of associating Islam with terrorism not only contributes to the rising Islamophobia in Australia but also has multifaceted effects.

On one hand, this provided fertile ground for the growth of Islamophobia and Islamophobic social and political actors. Capitalising on this, the Islamophobia industry represented Islam and Islam's 2 billion adherents, in a negative light (Massoumi et al. 2017), leading to the expansion of Islamophobic networks and, thus, Islamophobia. Australia, with a history of racism against non-white minorities (Kabir 2004; Poynting 2006; Hage 2012), was not immune to this rising Islamophobia. John Howard, then-leader of the Australian

Liberal–National Party coalition, exploited the new fear of "terrorism", emphasising "national security" and "border protection" as the key issues of the 2001 elections and was returned to Federal government in a landslide victory (Anderson 2013). Through the period of the coalition government and the following years, the separate phenomena of "(Muslim) Asylum seekers and refugees" and "terrorism" became conflated in media and political discourse as a threat to Australia and "to be turned away at the border" (Anderson 2013, p. 9; Poynting 2006).

On the other hand, the Western nations' appeals for reinstatement of secularism targeted Islam calling for the reformation of this religion (Mahmood 2006). These calls for Islamic reformation were also advocated by the British Empire in the 19th century during colonisation of the Muslim world in collaboration with liberal intellectuals and Orientalists (Nakissa 2022). Nakissa points out that the emergence of Islamic reform movements by indigenous Muslims spurred as a product of encounters with the European empires. He adds that although the reformation of Islam by the indigenous Muslims was sometimes in conflict with European efforts to reform Islam, they led to cooperation between Muslim reformers and European reformers (comprising imperial officials, liberal intellectuals, and Orientalists). The Orientalist perspective, within the scholarship debates on the notion of "Islamic reform", tacitly assumes that Muslim societies are lacking in bringing new ideas and change and need to modernise (Nakissa 2022, p. 153). Said (1978) and the subsequent scholarship have mostly criticised this Orientalist perspective as ethnocentric, racist, politically motivated, and inaccurate, showing that pre-modern Muslims continuously produced and introduced new ideas and practices (Nakissa 2022, p. 153). Nakissa shows how the British Empire believed that they should restructure Islamic education and incorporate Western ideas as a model of progress and modernization, signifying secularism, through the British power and its Muslim partners. This idea was also reflected in the discourse of Australia's Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, where Abbott consistently mentioned that Islamic reformation needs to happen with the help of progressive Muslims. The discourse of Islamic reformation can be situated in the discussions of Islamic secularism termed as Islamicate secularities, thus, situating this paper in the broader scope of the special issue on "Islamicate" secularities.

This shows that the discourse of Islam needing to change and modernise is underpinned by the assumptions that terrorism is religiously motivated and that Islam is the problem. As shown by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), far-right attacks remain the most significant and frequent form of terrorism, outpacing terrorism by other ideological groups (Doxsee et al. 2022). Even then, terrorism by the Muslim terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) carries political motives under the cloak of religion. Hasan (2015) argues that according to Sageman (the former CIA officer) it is a sense of emotional and moral outrage rather than their religious faith that leads them to join the terrorist organisations. Moreover, Muslim scholars, such as Al-Qaradawi, clarified this point that even with legitimate political grievances, violence against civilians cannot be justified in Islam (Green 2018). If the use of religion is instrumental for these terrorist groups rather than motivational, then it begs the question of why the Western media and political elites refer to terrorism by these groups as "Islamic terrorism" rather than terrorist attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or Al-Qaeda. The discourse of "Islamic terrorism" (underpinned by unacknowledged assumptions and racist imperialist ideologies) which establishes a direct link between Islam and violence, extremism, radicalism, and terrorism (Jackson 2006, 2005b) was witnessed prevalently in mainstream politics of democratic multicultural Australia. It can be argued that such discourses can associate terrorism with Islam, thus, contributing to Islamophobia.

The present study analyses Tony Abbott's (then Australian Prime Minister) discourse of "Islam needs reforming" in response to terrorism. This paper acknowledges the nature of politics and that Tony Abbott might have positive passages in his discourse about Islam. For example, Abbott argues that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant having the name of the Islamic state is a mockery of the religion and calls them a "death cult", and in a

motion states, "…which is a travesty of religion and governance and which should never be dignified with the term 'Islamic State'" (Tony Abbott, Motions—Martin Place: Siege, 12 February 2015). On another occasion, Abbott said, "I don't believe that it (ISIL) is Islamic in any meaningful sense" (Tony Abbott, Sky News Interview, 5 February 2015). However, this study focused on Abbott's negative discourse and its consequences and effects on the Australian society. With the research question of "How does 'Islam needs reforming' discourse perpetuate Islamophobia?", I carried out critical discourse analysis on the selected speeches of Tony Abbott in response to the Lindt Café siege in 2014 to find out the impact of Abbott's discourse on Australian societies. This is not to dismiss any of Abbott's positive comments but rather to analyse Abbott's negative comments on Islam and its effects. This paper argues that calls for Islam to reform to counter violent extremism and terrorism associates Islam with terrorism. In this paper, I present a contextual background on Tony Abbott followed by the examination of the relevant literature on Islamophobia and Australian political discourse on the war on terrorism. Then, I state my research method followed by data analysis and discussion.

2. Contextual Background on Tony Abbott

Tony Abbott, as a member of the Liberal Party of Australia, was a member for Warringah in the Australian parliament from 1994 to 2019 and served as Australia's Prime Minister from 2013 to 2015. The Liberal Party of Australia, a centre-right group, is one of the two largest political parties in Australia and is often in government in coalition with the National Party. This coalition was in government for the period of this study. Following the two incidents of MV Tampa and the attacks in the USA of 11 September 2001, the Liberal–National Party coalition government not only constructed national security and border protection as key problems but also contrived political maneuvers about issues pertaining to Muslims/Islam, leveraging fear of terrorism for electoral benefits (Anderson 2013). In his 2017 Daily Telegraph (a tabloid which has a history of explicit representations of negatively constructed images of Muslims (Pisani 2019)) publication, titled "Why we must never ignore evil threats from extremists—and never treat terrorists with kid gloves", Abbott links terrorism with the Islamic holy book, the "Koran" (*Quran*). Abbott, in this publication, claimed that there is some sort of inherent link between Islam and violence which circulated in political debates and media (Tony Abbott, Daily Telegraph, 1 June 2017).

3. Islamophobia and Australian Political Discourse

Islamophobia, a highly contested term (Felepchuk et al. 2022; Gravelle 2021; Hafez 2020; Hafez and Bayrakli 2019; Lean and Shaheen 2017; Lean and Esposito 2012; The Runnymede Trust 2017; Zia-Ebrahimi 2018; Kapoor 2018, 2013; Kapoor and Narkowicz 2017; Sheehi 2019; Sheehi 2010), was initially defined by the Runnymede Trust report in 1997 as a "useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam—and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims" (The Runnymede Trust 1997, p. 1). Despite the diversity of Muslims belonging to at least 183 countries (Hassan 2018), closed views consider Islam as one homogenous religious group that is irrational and violent. At the international level, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's Observatory on Islamophobia forwards the definition of Islamophobia as "an irrational or very powerful fear or dislike of Islam… Islamophobia incorporates racial hatred, intolerance, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping. The phenomenon of Islamophobia in its essence is a religion-based resentment" (All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims 2018, p. 23). While some academics describe Islamophobia as "anti-Muslim racism" and "new racism" manifested in "othering" based on religious and cultural difference (following the concept of "Orientalism", see: Said 1978. See also: Cheng 2017; Kundnani 2007; Poynting 2020; Poynting and Perry 2007), others object to referring to Islamophobia as racism, claiming that Muslims are not a race (The Runnymede Trust 2017). Jackson (2005b) writes that when Islamophobia is defined as akin to racism, critics argue that "Muslims are not a race" and that adherence to any religion is by choice rather than biologically determined. This can be a trope for racists to

avoid being called racist as some anti-Muslim individuals claim that they are not racist on the grounds that Muslims are not a race.

Contemporary scholars define Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism that refers to the exclusion and marginalisation of Muslims based on their religious and cultural differences (Aslan 2009; Cheng 2017; Allen 2020; Poynting and Mason 2008). Through Islamophobic lenses, Islam is viewed as a violent political ideology (rather than a genuine religion) and a security and civilisational threat that supports terrorism and threatens the Western liberal and democratic values (Kundnani 2016; Kumar 2010; Kabir 2007; Aslan 2009). For example, Pauline Hanson, an Australian far-right politician, has repeatedly called Islam a political ideology and has called for a Royal Commission to investigate this (Dorling 2017). Islamophobia existed before the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001; however, it took off in the post-September 11 world with the US-led "war on terror" (Aslan 2009; Kabir 2006; Kumar 2010, 2020; Jackson 2005b). In the post-September 11 world, the global landscape changed not because of the terrorist attacks of September 11 but because of the US-led "war on terror" (the United States' response) (Esch 2010). The "war on terror", a seemingly timeless and borderless war defining both domestic and international political climates, has multiple dimensions: there is a military dimension, involving covert assassinations, military expansion with overseas presence, and two major wars; a security dimension, including intelligence gathering and extreme interrogation (torture); a diplomatic dimension, with the use of foreign aid to gain support of other countries; and a domestic dimension with institutional practices and associated political narratives (Esch 2010; Jackson 2005a; Kapoor 2018).

The "war on terror" discourse continuously reaffirmed September 11 as the representative of exceptional grievances and the signifier 9/11 was instantly iconised as the symbol of the sufferings of the United States (Jackson 2005b). The language of the "war on terror" is deliberately constructed to make this war seem responsible, reasonable, and "good" rather than an objective reflection of terrorism, undermining democratic values (Jackson 2005a). The President George W. Bush, with a vision of a polarised world, set the terms of this language along the lines of "good" and "evil" with the construction of a new (Muslim) enemy that has an ideology "opposite to what we think" and a goal "to build a radical Islamic empire" (Kumar 2010, p. 259). This political rhetoric was not limited to the Americas and was adopted by other Western nations, such as the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia.

After the federation, Australia was explicitly and officially determined to elevate "whiteness", banning immigration from non-white nations and conforming to white supremacist practices and ideologies (Kabir 2007; Abdel-Fattah 2017; Akbarzadeh 2016; Kabir 2013; Poynting et al. 2004). This was followed by the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, which introduced the White Australia Policy; this was eventually replaced by multiculturalism in 1973 partly to encourage labour immigration from Turkey and Lebanon. Abdel-Fattah (2018) argues that Islamophobia must be understood as racial exclusion in "White" Australia rather than a fear of Islam. Studying the Islamophobic events that have occurred in Australia, Abdel-Fattah explains how these understandings reveal that Islamophobia is associated with the racialized thinking at the heart of Australian national culture. Thus, the political vision and ideology of "multicultural" Australia projected in institutions, and widely held in culture, arts, politics, and media, are actually "White" (Abdel-Fattah 2018; Forrest and Dunn 2007; Hage 2012).

This kind of racist paradigm can be witnessed in the "othering" that blames Asian communities for living in distinct cultural groups; this has shifted focus to Muslims, who are instead blamed for living in accordance with distinct values (Poynting et al. 2004). As Kundnani (2007) notes, in the context of state racism, on one hand, the state laws on racism forbid hostility to people known by their ethnicity, but, on the other hand, hostility to the same people known by their Islamic faith is legitimised in the "war on terror" discourse. In the same manner, if these people are labelled as "asylum seekers", hostility towards them is legitimised by official discourse. In 2001, John Howard, after rejection of the

MV Tampa (just before September 11) and intensifying border protection in the name of national security, referenced "Australian values" in terms of a Judeo-Christian model, a religio-political category to oppose Muslims in Australia in the context of the "war on terror" (Abdel-Fattah 2018). In the "war on terror" discourse, "Australian values" were deployed as a discourse of power, with which the Howard government tried to instruct and school the Muslim population by positioning Muslims as subjects of investigation and discipline (Abdel-Fattah 2018). The "Muslim" subject was disciplined through sexualised and racialized narratives that constructed the Muslim "other" as pathologically violent, misogynistic, anti-democratic, backward, and "unAustralian" (Abdel-Fattah 2018). Thus, Australia is in a conflicting situation of multiculturalism co-existing with different kinds of racism, including antagonism towards some cultural groups, Anglo-Celtic cultural dominance, and xenophobia (Fozdar and Low 2015; Abdel-Fattah 2018; Forrest and Dunn 2007; Hage 2012). In Australia and across the world, Islamophobia is increasingly preserved in racist ideologies and incited, including by rising far-right groups, by associating Islam with terrorism (Briskman et al. 2017).

This review of the relevant literature shows the importance of the issue in relation to state Islamophobia and the US-led "war on terror" discourse and identifies the need for research that investigates Australian anti-Muslim political discourse with its broader implications (Akbarzadeh 2016; Kumar 2010; Poynting 2020; Poynting and Briskman 2018). This literature shows that the discourse of Islam needing revolution and reformation stems from the prejudiced views against Muslims and seeing Islam and Muslims as old-thinking and backward people that need to change and modernise in order to adapt to Australian values. Therefore, this paper argues that Abbott's discourse of "Islam needs reforming" can associate Islam with terrorism and represents Islam and Muslims in a negative light which perpetrates and perpetuates Islamophobia.

4. Research Method

To analyse Tony Abbott's political discourse, I used critical discourse analysis on Abbott's selected parliamentary speeches and media releases pertaining to the rhetoric of "Islam needs reforming". I obtained Abbott's political speeches and media releases from Hansard and media, downloaded from the Capital Monitor database (https://www-capitalmonitor-com-au.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/LeftMenu.aspx, accessed on 20 August 2023), available at the University of Sydney's online library with member access. This comprehensive database provides up-to-date transcripts of State and Federal parliamentary speeches of Hansard, media releases, and interviews of the politicians. These transcripts are available with library access, thus, there are no ethical concerns regarding the data collection or publication. I searched the "Capital Monitor" database with the keywords of "Islam OR Muslim" (with its derivatives), then selected Abbott's speeches that discussed Islamic reformation. In qualitative research, the methodologies differ based on the focus of the research; however, critical discourse analysis is one of the prominent methodologies in the research of issues of racism, representation, political, and social discourses (Wodak and Meyer 2001; Weiss and Wodak 2007).

Critical discourse analysis focuses on the relationship between language and power to identify social problems and reveal the social structures that are upholding unequal power relations thus contributing to the (re)production of discrimination and racism and other forms of unequal power relations (Wodak and Meyer 2001; Weiss and Wodak 2007). Thus, the main goal of critical discourse analysis is to examine the relationship between the use of language and social practice with the focus on discursive practices and its role in maintaining social order or social change (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). Critical discourse analysis has been employed by researchers to investigate social issues such as racism (Van Dijk 1993; Wodak and Meyer 2015; Wodak and Dijk 2000). Because Islamophobia is a form of racism, critical discourse analysis is a suitable approach for this study which aims to investigate anti-Muslim racism/Islamophobia in political discourse. For critical discourse analysts, discourse is a form of social practice which both constitutes the social

world and is constituted by other social practices (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). These authors add that discourse not only contributes to the (re)construction and (re)shaping of social structures but also reflects/reproduces them. In this research, I draw on Van Dijk and Wodak's critical discourse analysis framework which considers the position of those who suffer and questions those who have the power and means to solve such social problems and are responsible for it.

With this in mind, I have chosen the critical discourse analysis method for my data analysis as it is the most useful approach for navigating the method of my study to assess ways in which influential social actors such as politicians use discourse to marginalise the "target group" due to the crucial link between language, discourse, power, and ideology. Fairclough describes critical discourse analysis as an approach which thoroughly and analytically tries to investigate often-blurred relationships of determination and causality between discourse (discursive practices, texts, and events) and social norms (broader cultural and social structures, processes, and relations); how such discourse ascends out of and is ideologically fashioned by relations of power and struggles over power; and how the opaqueness of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (Fairclough 1993, p. 135).

I employed Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis as a methodological framework of data analysis. According to this model, "Every instance of language use is a communicative event consisting of three dimensions: ● it is a text (speech, writing, visual image or a combination of these); ● it is a discursive practice which involves the production and consumption of texts; ● it is a social practice" (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, p. 68). These authors point out that discourse shapes the (re)production of knowledge and meaning, thus contributing to the construction of social relations and identity. Thus, this model offers an analytical framework for critical discourse analysis which is based on the notion that text cannot be analysed on its own and has to be studied in relation to the social practice and context (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). I used this model to analyse (point out the discursive elements of the text), interpret (analyse the meaning and functions of these texts), and explain (discuss the implications and effects of these discursive texts) the data. For the in-depth analysis of the data/text excerpts within each empirical chapter, I followed Fairclough's 3D critical discourse analysis model combined with Van Dijk's (1997, 2006a, 2006b) listed in Table 1. Van Dijk has detected the following macro- and micro-strategies that are utilized to legitimize the self and de-legitimize the other (with the epistemic underpinning of "self-other/us and them" binaries):

Table 1. Macro- and micro-discursive strategies (Van Dijk 2006a, 1993, 2006b, 1997).

Macro-Strategies	Micro-Strategies	
Positive self-presentation	categorisation	hyperbole
Negative other-presentation	generalisation	irony
Denial of Racism	comparison	national self-glorification
Justification: the force of fact—Justifying through facts	consensus	implication
	disclaimer	number game
	counterfactual	norm expression
	argumentation	polarisation (us and them)
	example/illustration	vagueness
	metaphor	populism
	presupposition	victimisation

5. Data Analysis

Data analysis shows the strategy of associating Islam with terrorism in Tony Abbott's discourse of "Islam needs reforming" in the aftermath of the Lindt Café siege. In December 2014, a self-claimed Muslim cleric known as Man Haron Monis held hostage eight employees and ten customers of the Lindt Café in Sydney, Australia, leading to the killing of two people and injuring three of the hostages. The evidence showed that Monis was not a terrorist as he did not have terrorist demands; rather, he was a malicious narcissist and his act can be defined as a "lone-actor grievance-fuelled violence" (Scott and Shanahan 2018, p. 1). Although contested in the academic literature, the incident of the Lindt Café siege did not fit the technical definition of a terrorist attack (Scott and Shanahan 2018). Yet, certain political actors categorised it as a terrorist attack and subsequently branded it as "Islamic terrorism", blaming Islam and the Muslim communities. In response to this notion of "Islamic terrorism", Abbott offered that "Islam needs reforming" on multiple occasions and in the context of national security and counter-terrorism. While on one hand Abbott argues that ISIL having the name of Islamic state is a mockery of the religion and calls them "death cult", on the other hand, he repetitively suggests that Islam needs to change to avoid extremism and terrorism. For example, in his Sky News interview, Abbott said:

> We had President al-Sisi of Egypt in a remarkably courageous speech earlier this year called for a **religious revolution in Islam and the jettisoning of centuries old ways of thinking** which are causing **grave damage to Islam** and, indeed, **to the wider world.**
>
> <div align="right">(Tony Abbott, Sky News Interview, 5 February 2015)</div>

Abbott commending al-Sisi's call for "religious revolution in Islam" reveals his own stance on Islamic reform with the presupposition of "centuries old ways of thinking" within Islam. Abbott uses the premise of "centuries old ways of thinking" and "causing grave damage to Islam and, indeed, to the wider world", with the implication that the existing religious norms have contributed to conflict and tension with the broader world. This also implies a call for a significant change within Islam in order to address the problems of extremism and terrorism, with the construction of the term "remarkably courageous speech", praising the move and acknowledging the potential backlash within the Muslim communities.

Similarly, in his national security statement, Abbott states the following: "In January, President al Sisi told the imams at Egypt's al Azhar university that **Islam needed a 'religious revolution' to sweep away centuries of false thinking**" (Tony Abbott, National Security Statement, 23 February 2015). Here, Abbott calls for Islamic revolution with the claim "to sweep away centuries of false thinking", suggesting not only old but also false thinking within Islam. In one interview, Abbott praises the idea of Islam needing a religious revolution, responding:

> The interesting thing about the whole Daesh death cult phenomenon is that it seems to have **prompted quite a re-think amidst wide sections of the Muslim world**. We have had the really very heroic stand that President al-Sisi of Egypt has adopted. . .and said that **Islam needed nothing less than a religious revolution that rejected centuries of wrong thinking which had caused this needless conflict in the minds of some between Islam and the rest of the world**. So, I think there are **signs of hope** and **encouragement** as well as obviously **continuing signs for concern.**
>
> <div align="right">(Tony Abbott, Doorstop Interview, 21 April 2015)</div>

Tacitly referring to the phenomenon of "Islamic terrorism", Abbott suggests that this phenomenon "has prompted a rethink of Islam", positioning Islam as the source of ISIL terrorism. Advocating for Islamic revolution and emphasising the need for a significant change in Islam, Abbott presents al-Sisi's stance as "very heroic". This position's al-Sisi as a positive and courageous leader who takes a strong stand against extremism, suggesting admiration for al-Sisi's actions and the perceived difficulty of his position. Emphasising the calls for Islam needing a religious revolution, Abbott attributes conflict to "centuries of wrong think-

ing," positioning historical Islamic religious thought as problematic. Also, in his address to Australia's Regional Summit to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE), Abbott states:

> I salute Egypt's President al Sisi who recently told the imams of Al Azhar University in Cairo that **Islam** needed nothing less than a "**religious revolution**" to **reverse centuries of false thinking**. This country of ours has an indigenous heritage, a British foundation and a multicultural character. Yet the tentacles of the death cult have extended even here, as we discovered to our cost with the Martin Place siege last December.
>
> <div align="right">(Tony Abbott, Regional Summit to CVE, 11 June 2015)</div>

Abbott starts by expressing admiration for President al-Sisi's remarks about the need for a "religious revolution". The term "salute" implies a show of respect and endorsement, aligning his own views with al-Sisi's views, a prominent leader in the Muslim world. By mentioning that al-Sisi spoke to the imams of Al Azhar University, Abbott highlights the credibility and influence of this institution in Islamic scholarship. This reference emphasizes that the call for a religious revolution comes from within respected religious circles, stressing the need for a significant shift in religious thought and practices, reinforcing the idea of change being essential to address extremism. The phrase "reverse centuries of false thinking" suggests that a historical correction is needed. It portrays the existing religious ideas as inherently flawed, potentially oversimplifying complex historical and ideological factors that have contributed to extremism. Abbott brings in the identity of Australia, mentioning its indigenous heritage, British foundation, and multicultural character. This juxtaposition serves to highlight Australia's diversity and historical background. Abbott states that the "tentacles of the death cult" have reached Australia, referencing the global spread of extremist ideologies. The use of the metaphor "tentacles" indicates the over-reaching and over-spreading nature of the problem, which functions to amplify and exaggerate the reality and create fear. Thus, Abbott's discourse here implies that the extension of "the tentacles of the death cult" is because of Islam's "old...false...and wrong thinking". By mentioning the tragic hostage crisis of the Martin Place siege, Abbott personalises the issue and stresses the local impact of global extremism. Consequently, Abbott suggests that Islam needs a "religious revolution" to remove centuries of "old thinking", "false thinking", and "wrong thinking" that have caused "grave damage" and "conflict" to Islam and "the rest of the world", where Abbott associates the statements used by the terrorists with the religion of Islam. The claim that "old thinking" causes "grave damage" to Islam and "the wider world" not only justifies Abbott's argument about Islam needing to change but also implies that Islam is the cause of the problem at hand, terrorism.

Additionally, Abbott used his Magna Carta lecture to indulge in positive self-presentation, stating that Magna Carta is the "greatest constitutional document of all time in pluralist democracies such as **ours**" (Tony Abbott, Magna Carta Lecture, 24 June 2015). The speech included further statements with similar effects:

> ...in Australia the right to speak your mind is taken for granted. "Death to the infidel" has never had any currency here in Australia. We have become appalled at the very idea of killing in the name of God...An Australian, for instance, could freely **echo** President al Sisi of Egypt's warning that **Islam needs a religious revolution**, **without fear of official persecution** or need of police protection. **In Australia**, and other western countries, along with everyone else, **Muslims are entirely free** to proselytise for their beliefs... If **Islam** is to further **develop an appreciation of pluralism**, it may need **Muslims** protected by the rule of law and the other principles of **liberal democracy**...**Australians could help to encourage the easy-going versions of Islam that the world so hopes for.**
>
> <div align="right">(Tony Abbott, Magna Carta Lecture, 24 June 2015)</div>

Abbott invokes national self-glorification (Van Dijk 1993), with the words "an Australian could freely echo" the message of reformation of Islam "without fear of official persecution". Such positive constructions of "us" imply that Australia has freedom of speech and

expression and an "appreciation of pluralism...protected by the rule of law...of liberal democracy..." which makes Australia "easy-going", whereas Islam is the opposite of all this. The articulation of Australia as an "easy-going country" reinforces an "us versus them" binary, positioning a positive construction of Western democracies/civilisation as superior and the "ruthless" and "unprincipled" other (implied to be Islam) as inferior. The idea "that the world so hopes for" an "easy-going version" of Islam implies that this does not yet exist, i.e., all Islamic teaching and philosophy is *not* "easy-going" but is in fact the opposite (strict, uptight, hard work). Also, the use of "easy-going" has a unique resonance in the Australian context because of the national self-image (relaxed, laid-back, committed to a "fair go", etc.) implying that, unless it changes, Islam is un-Australian. Abbott lends authority to his claim with words like "that the world so hopes for". To avoid possible objections or doubts based on civic rights and religious freedom, Abbott utilises self-defence tactics by glorifying Australia and encouraging Australians to support him in this idea. Again, rather than focusing on individual terrorist groups, Abbott engages in a cultural comparison with a positive self-presentation of Australia and a negative presentation of Islam. The deployment of strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Van Dijk 1993) has been observed in most of Abbott's speeches/texts such as praising Australia as "easy-going" with "liberal democracy" and the "appreciation of pluralism" while calling for Islam to change. This constructs the religion of Islam as inherently violent and a safe harbour fostering terrorism, while the West spreads democracy.

After the Liberal–National leadership spill of September 2015, which saw Malcolm Turnbull elected as the Prime Minister and Tony Abbott take up a position as a backbencher in parliament, Abbott was more vocal about his message:

> All of those things that **Islam has never had; a reformation, an enlightenment**, a well-developed concept of the separation of Church and State—**that needs to happen** but we can't do it, Muslims need to do it for themselves, but **we should work with those who are pushing in that direction**. The other thing that is needed I think is a **restoration of cultural self-confidence in those who are supporters of Western civilisation**. All **cultures are not equal**. And frankly, a culture that believes in **decency and tolerance is much to be preferred to one which thinks you can kill in the name of god**.

> (Tony Abbott, Sky News Interview, 8 December 2015)

With the use of "a reformation, an enlightenment, a well-developed concept of the separation of Church and State" which are signifiers of secularism (Mahmood 2006) and modernisation, Abbott suggests that Islam needs to reform or modernise. Being an advocate of Western civilisation, Abbott positively represents the "in-group/us" Western civilisation with the construction of "restoration of cultural self-confidence in...Western civilisation", while negatively presenting the "out-group/other" Islamic civilisation as violent forces that "can kill in the name of god". Abbott claiming the superiority of Western civilisation with the use of "All cultures are not equal... a culture that believes in decency and tolerance is much to be preferred" implies the inferiority of the other culture in discussion, i.e., Islam. Abbott not only represents Islam as the opposite of decency and tolerance but justifies his push for Islam's reformation. Moreover, Abbott says the following: "I think if there is a problem today it's not just the **problem within Islam**, which is **very serious** indeed, it's also the problem of a lack of cultural self-confidence" (Tony Abbott, Sky News Interview, 8 December 2015). Abbott contrasts a culture that "believes in decency and tolerance" with one that "thinks you can kill in the name of god". Conflating ISIL's terrorist ideology with Islamic teachings and calling it Islamic culture, Abbott compares it with the Western culture. This contrast serves to emphasize his view that certain cultures are more morally superior based on their values and behaviours. Although terrorist groups misrepresent Islam as their depictions of Islam are contrary to Islamic teachings, certain political actors portray the religion of Islam in line with the terrorist representation of Islam. Such views of Islam perceive terrorism as "religiously motivated", justifying the call for Islamic reformation. This combination of statements confirms both Abbott's view of Islam

as a "very serious problem" and his perception of Western cultural superiority, projecting his solution for the "problem of Islam" to change and assimilate to this "preferred" culture. As reported by the Islamophobia register of Australia, "Islamophobia is increasingly enshrined in racist ideologies and spurred on by the conflation of Islam with terrorism" (Iner et al. 2017, p. 20).

6. Discussion

In highlighting the absence of a reformation, enlightenment, and separation of Church and State within Islam, Abbott engages in a critique of certain aspects of Islamic culture. The implication is that these cultural deficiencies are responsible for some of the challenges faced by Muslim-majority countries, including issues related to extremism and governance. By presenting al-Sisi's stance as heroic and emphasising the need for Islam to reform, Abbott aims to influence perceptions and potentially advocate for similar approaches. Abbott's analysis can be seen as positioning al-Sisi's views as a model for tackling extremism, suggesting that President al-Sisi's approach is a solution that should be considered. By referencing a global leader's call for reforming Islam and relating it to domestic events, he aims to strengthen his argument for the need to address extremism through change in Islam by the Muslim partners, implying support for reforming Islam as a countermeasure to extremism. Abbott implies that the conflict is a result of an inherent flaw in Islamic thought. This might serve his political agenda, promoting certain strategies or leaders as effective in addressing global security concerns.

Abbott brings in the identity of Australia, mentioning its indigenous heritage, British foundation, and multicultural character. This juxtaposition serves to highlight Australia's diversity and historical background. The use of "conflict in the minds of some between Islam and the rest of the world" suggests that Islam is incompatible with Australian values, implying that this conflict and damage can be solved by the assimilation of Islam and Muslims to Australian way of life, which is why it needs to change. These views are mainly based on the Orientalist (Said 1978), Eurocentric prejudice against Middle Eastern-Islamic culture (Kumar 2012, 2010, 2020; Kundnani 2016, 2007; Poynting and Briskman 2018; Poynting and Mason 2008; Poynting et al. 2004) and Islamophobic nature of the "clash of civilisation" framework (Huntington 1993; Quinn 2017; Aslan 2009; Massoumi et al. 2017), which analyses the relationship between Islam and the West in a simplistic manner. Through the lens of Islamophobia, Islam is viewed not as a genuine religion, but as an aggressive and violent political ideology that threatens Western democratic values and supports terrorism (Esposito 2019; Esposito and Kalin 2011; Green 2019; Lean and Shaheen 2017; Lean and Esposito 2012).

In his CVE speech, Abbott, amplifying the fear of "Islamic terrorism", states that "it is coming for everyone" because it is "not political violence over a local grievance" but has "global ambitions", contradicting the fact that Islamist terrorists are usually driven by political grievances (Jackson 2005b; Hasan 2015). Ignoring complex historical, social, and political factors that contribute to conflicts and presenting the issue in a simplistic manner, Abbott casts the idea of conflict between "Islam and the rest of the world". This binary framing oversimplifies the relationships between Islam and other cultures, perpetuating an "us versus them" discourse. Abbott's assertion that "all cultures are not equal" raises important questions about cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. This perspective can be seen as an expression of Western centrism, where Western values are positioned as superior to others. With a reductionist approach, Abbott portrays Western values as universally superior and, as a result, Islam as inferior, thus the need to change this religion. Comparing Western and Islamic cultures and claiming that Western culture believes in decency and tolerance while portraying Islam as a culture that can kill in the name of God is in fact comparing terrorist ideology with Western culture. Contrary to Abbott's comments and terrorist claims, the central points of the true teachings of Islam are mercy, honesty, decency, and forgiveness (Absattorov Bakhtiyor 2022). The implication of such discourse is that cultures adhering to Western values are more advanced, just, and peaceful,

oversimplifying and overlooking Islam and Muslim communities' diversity, histories, and contributions to humanity.

This choice of language portrays extremism as a pervasive and invasive force, invoking fear. Abbott's speech is likely intended to emphasise the gravity of the situation and the importance of combating violent extremism. When the nation's leader talks about Islam needing to change in the national security statement and speeches about countering violent extremism, it sends a message that the problem is Islam itself and the solution is to change Islam, problematising Islam itself rather than the individual terrorist or terrorist groups such as ISIL. This association of Islam with terrorism and violence has only continued in the political discourse, particularly in the war on terror discourse (Kazi 2021; Poynting and Mason 2006; Poynting and Perry 2007). According to Kundnani (2016), racist Islamophobic ideology rests on the idea that Islam and Muslims are extremists and that both the faith and individuals are full of anger, intolerance, and suppression of free speech. Islamophobia frames Islam and the Muslim mind as lacking reason and rational thinking, engaging in violence, and being prone to terrorism (Massoumi et al. 2017). This explains the mindset that Islam is inherently violent and needs to change or assimilate to Australian values to be able to coexist in a pluralistic society. It implies that Islam itself is inherently susceptible to violent extremism and, thus, Islam's adherents (of 2 billion population (Zouiten 2023)) are allegedly susceptible to violence and terrorism. In reality, "Islamic terrorism" is carried out by a tiny group of desperate people that commit symbolic acts of violence in the name of Islam; however, it is depicted as an ongoing threat challenging national security and Western civilisation in the "war on terrorism" discourse employed by certain political actors (Jackson 2005b). This discourse of Islam needing to change to counter terrorism in Australia has a huge impact on the public, as it constructs a link between the religion of Islam and terrorism, and some may simply equate Islam with terrorism.

Such discourse employed by political leaders, such as Abbott, can shape public opinion and influence policy decisions and social practice. Abbott's views could resonate with segments of the population that share concerns about extremism, alienating Muslim communities. This perpetrates and perpetuates negative stereotypes contributing to the rising Islamophobia by fuelling the belief that Islam is inherently problematic and requires external intervention for reform. It can also lead to increased scepticism among Muslims about the intentions of Western leaders in engaging with their religious beliefs, affecting the relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Such a hierarchical view can lead to a sense of superiority among Western populations and, therefore, contribute to xenophobia, racism, and discrimination against cultures that are not seen as "equal". It can also create resistance and backlash from those who oppose such a divisive worldview, fuelling debates about multiculturalism, integration, and the role of Western heritage in a globalised world. The oversimplification can hinder nuanced discussions about the root causes of extremism and can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes and biases, further leading to policies based on simplistic solutions that fail to address the multifaceted nature of the problem.

Detrimental Effects of Such Political Discourse

The negative representation of a certain social group in political discourse not only has a priming effect, or other contextual effects, but also shapes realities and our perceptions of these realities (Enfield 2022). To this effect, negative sentiments towards Muslims and backlash towards Muslim immigration are reflected in Australian public sentiments (Dunn et al. 2021; Hassan 2018). The Islamophobia Register Australia (IRA) recorded the number of anti-Muslim incidents published in three reports. The first report captured 243 verified incidents that were reported from 2014 September to 2015 December (Iner et al. 2017). The second report recorded 349 anti-Muslim or Islamophobic verified incidents in the years 2016 and 2017 (Iner et al. 2019), while the third report recorded 247 verified incidents in the years 2018 and 2019 (Iner 2022). In Australia, the New South Wales Police Force found that religiously biased hate crimes were the largest category

of recorded hate crime in NSW and Muslims are the most common victims targeted for religious hate crimes (73% of those victimised) (Iner et al. 2019). Given this rising issue of Islamophobia in Australia, this paper investigated the political discourse of "Islam needs reforming" and its effects on the Australian social fabric. Negative representation and hate speech are like a disease that can cause severe damage, affecting a variety of minority and indigenous communities (Benesch 2014). Describing hate speech, Benesch (2014, p. 19) states that "hatred, discrimination and dehumanization are steps in the process that can lead to violence". For example, months of hate speech before the 2007 presidential election in Kenya ended up in violence after the election outcome was disputed (Benesch 2014). Consequently, Tony Abbott's discourse, particularly his comments in response to terrorism and his views on Islam, can have multifaceted effect on Muslim communities in Australia, contributing to Islamophobia. To highlight the importance of pointing out these effects and their influence on Australian Muslims and wider communities, some of these effects are listed below:

1. Increased Marginalisation and Stigmatisation: Abbott's discourse, especially when it emphasises the need for a "religious revolution" within Islam and highlights deficiencies in Islamic culture, can contribute to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of Muslim communities. Such discourse might make Muslims feel like they are being collectively blamed for acts of terrorism and reinforce negative stereotypes.

2. Feelings of Alienation and Exclusion: Muslims in Australia might feel alienated and excluded when they perceive that their religion is being singled out for negative scrutiny. This can create a sense of isolation and estrangement, potentially leading to feelings of resentment and a decreased sense of belonging.

3. Impact on Identity and Integration: Abbott's discourse can affect how Muslims in Australia perceive their own identities and their integration into the broader society. If they perceive that their religion is constantly under suspicion, it can hinder their willingness to integrate and engage with the larger community.

4. Impact on Mental Health and Well-being: Negative discourse and the sense of being collectively targeted can have detrimental effects on the mental health and well-being of Muslim individuals and families. Experiencing discrimination and prejudice can lead to stress, anxiety, and even depression.

5. Perception of Bias in Government Policies: Abbott's comments can lead Muslim communities to perceive government policies related to counterterrorism as biased or unfairly targeting their communities. This perception can erode trust between Muslims and government institutions.

6. Response to Counterterrorism Measures: Abbott's discourse might influence how Muslim communities respond to counterterrorism measures. If they perceive such measures as driven by a negative view of their religion, there might be resistance or a lack of cooperation, hindering the effectiveness of these efforts.

7. Interfaith Relations and Social Cohesion: Abbott's comments can affect interfaith relations and social cohesion in Australia. Negative discourse about Islam can strain relationships between religious groups, making it challenging to foster understanding and collaboration among different faith communities.

8. Empowerment of Extremist Narratives: Abbott's statements that emphasise the need for reform within Islam can inadvertently empower extremist narratives that claim that Islam is under attack from the West. Such narratives might be used by extremists to recruit individuals by presenting themselves as defenders of Islam against perceived threats.

9. Civil Society Engagement: Abbott's discourse can impact how Muslim organisations and leaders engage with civil society initiatives. If they perceive negative biases from political leaders, they might be less inclined to collaborate on projects aimed at social integration and countering extremism.

While Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism can have multiple causing factors, Islamophobic political discourse can be a key contributing factor. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight Islam-

ophobic political discourse, recognise the potential negative consequences of such discourse, and to work towards fostering an inclusive, respectful, and understanding environment that does not contribute to the marginalisation or stigmatisation of any community.

7. Conclusions

Overall, Abbott's discourse serves to position President al-Sisi's call for reforming Islam as a notable and impactful approach to countering extremism. The language choices, references, and framing of the issue contribute to his persuasive message about the necessity of addressing violent extremism from Muslim groups through a significant change in Islam which can perpetrate and perpetuate Islamophobia. Tony Abbott's comments reflect a particular perspective on cultural values, religious reform, and global dynamics. They carry implications not only for international relations, multiculturalism, and perceptions of different cultures, but they also negatively affect the image of Islam and the identity of Muslims. Such discourse by the Prime Minister in response to terrorism in the context of national security and countering violent extremism constructs Islam as a violent and extremist ideology and a civilisational and security threat. Labelling the Lindt Café siege as "Islamic terrorism" has only served to further associate Islam with fundamentalism, extremism, radicalism, violence, and terrorism. Calls for reforming Islam in response to terrorism not only contribute to the rising Islamophobia but also have a multifaceted impact on Muslim communities and their relationship with wider Australian communities. Thus, when politicians exploit cultural stereotypes and associate violence and terrorism with the religion of Islam through their dog-whistle politics, it not only negatively represents and impacts the target group, Muslims, but also brings division in society by creating fear and hate of the "other" which can provoke hateful acts and violence against them.

8. Limitations

This paper employed critical discourse analysis on the selected text to analyse discursive political discourse that could potentially negatively represent the minority group of Muslims and affect societies. Qualitative research of this type strives for deeper understanding of selective data (discourses/experiences). Countering criticism, critical discourse analysts argue that critical discourse analysis does not seek to meet the standards of objectivity as they are understood in quantitative research (Sengul 2019, 2020), but it rather seeks a deeper understanding of a particular social phenomenon or human experience. For instance, the works of Ruth Wodak, Teun A. van Dijk, Scott Poynting, Deepa Kumar, Arun Kundnani, Todd Green, Randa Abdel-Fattah, and several others have focused at length on the negative discourses in the studies of racism, fascism, populism, sexism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

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