

## International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy



# Not Eating the Muslim Other: Halal Certification, Scaremongering, and the Racialisation of Muslim Identity<sup>1</sup>

**Shakira Hussein**

University of Melbourne, Australia

### **Abstract**

Campaigns against the halal certification of food in Muslim-minority societies reveal the shift in the representation of Muslims from a visible, alien presence to a hidden, covert threat. This paper uses one such campaign in Australia as a point of entry for analysing the ramifications for Muslim identity of this 'stealth jihad' discourse. Muslims living in the west are increasingly targeted not for 'standing out' as misfits, but for blending in as the invisible enemy. The scare campaign against halal certification closely parallels previous campaigns against kosher certification, highlighting the increasing resemblance between contemporary Islamophobia and historical anti-Semitism.

### **Keywords**

Islamophobia; racism; multiculturalism.

### **Introduction**

In October 2014, a scare campaign against halal food certification<sup>2</sup> that had been underway for some time on social media in Australia gathered momentum to the point of being widely reported by mainstream media as well (see, for example, Fitzsimmons 2014; Masanauskas 2014). Muslim and halal food has attracted racist attention in the past, with Italian cities in Genoa and Bergamo imposing bans upon kebab shops in the name of safeguarding both hygiene and culinary tradition (Nussbaum 2012). Poynting et al. (2004: 153) describe a 2002 media scare story about a McDonald's outlet in Sydney that provided halal hamburgers. Halal as well as kosher food had also attracted negative attention on the grounds of alleged animal cruelty in slaughter practices (Lerner and Rabello 2006). In 2011, the export of live cattle from Australia to Indonesia was temporarily banned after an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) documentary screened graphic footage of the 'horrifying cruelty' inflicted during the slaughter of 'Australian cows' in Indonesian abattoirs (Fozdar and Spittles 2014). Although Australian Muslim leaders denounced such cruelty as contrary to the halal requirements for quick and painless slaughter, the practices exposed by the report were widely perceived as being a consequence of Muslim commitment to halal regulation.

However, the 2014 story focused not on issues of animal welfare, but on the halal certification of products such as dairy and bakery items. Various Australian food corporations were threatened with consumer boycotts because the fees that they pay for halal certification were alleged to be funding terrorism and campaigns to introduce Sharia law in Australia (ABC Radio National 2014; Masanauskas 2014). A South Australian dairy company targeted by this campaign cancelled its halal certification, despite the cost of losing the \$50 000 per year contract with Emirates Airlines which had motivated them to obtain it (Fitzsimmons 2014). Another food production company became the target of particular vitriol for the halal certification of its Anzac biscuits, a traditional feature of Australia's national day of remembrance for its war dead. However, perhaps the most bizarre target of the campaign was the beer maker Coopers, which found itself accused of providing halal certified beer in apparent ignorance of the Islamic prohibition of alcohol. Coopers clarified on their Facebook page that their certification was not for their beer, but for their malt extract, which they supply 'to major food manufacturers throughout Australia and the Asia Pacific. It is used in the production of foodstuff such as breakfast cereals, confectioneries and snack foods and it is a requirement of the manufacturers we sell this product to, that it have Halal accreditation' (Barila 2014).

Supporters of the campaign against halal certification described it as a 'religious tax' which effectively forced non-Muslims to subsidise Muslim dietary choices, despite clarifications from business leaders that the decision to seek certification was taken on strictly commercial grounds in order to expand their market and obtain export deals. In most cases, certification had not necessitated any change in their existing production, just an inspection to establish that their products did not contain or come into contact with any *haram* (prohibited) ingredients. 'The Halal company that certifies us is based in Sydney, they come and they audit us and then they go away again, they don't bless our foods, they don't bless our site, there's no religious context to it, they check our hygiene and they check that there's no alcohol there' (Barila 2014).

However, other companies took the opportunity to cite their lack of halal certification as evidence of their national loyalty. The Facebook page of Sunshine Coast company Maleny Dairies received thousands of messages as well as national media coverage after posting a notice stating:

Halal Certification ... its [sic] not for us. There has been a lot of talk around this issue recently and we have received many enquiries from customers concerned that we may go down this route. The answer is NO we are not Halal Certified nor will we go down this path. We do not wish to increase the costs of our products to cover the expense of Halal Certification. We prefer to make sure our local farmers receive a fair and sustainable price for their milk. We are working with nine local dairy farming families right here on the sunny coast and this is where the money stays. Thanks for your continued support. (Maleny Dairies 2014)

Dick Smith Foods (founded in 1999 in protest at foreign ownership of Australian food production, with all profits donated to charity) also advertised its lack of halal certification. '[We] would prefer to avoid unnecessarily increasing the cost of our products in order to pay for Halal accreditation when this money would be better spent continuing to support important charitable causes where assistance is greatly needed' (Dick Smith Foods c. 2014).

Muslim community spokespeople initially attempted to allay fears by explaining the principles underlying halal observation. However, after months of halal-related scare-mongering, the head of one of Australia's halal certification authorities lodged a case for defamation with the New South Wales Supreme Court, claiming that statements by various anti-halal activists about halal certification had damaged his reputation. Mohamed El Moelhy explained his decision to SBS news: 'And me personally, my integrity is being questioned, and I don't like that. I'm an honest man' (Sutton 2015).

As in Europe and North America, previous campaigns against the Muslim presence in Australia revolved around visible signifiers such as women wearing the *hijab*, *burqa* or *niqab*,<sup>3</sup> and the building of mosques and other Muslim community facilities (al-Natour and Morgan 2012; Dunn 2009; Hussein 2007). The campaign against halal certification reveals a shift in the racialisation of Muslims in that the object of fear is not vilified for its visible transformation of the Australian landscape, it but for its near-invisibility. As the anti-halal campaigners point out, halal certification has been obtained by 'mainstream' brands such as Cadbury, Nestlé, and the iconic Australian food spread Vegemite (now owned by Kraft). Furthermore, the certification is so discreetly positioned on the label that the customer is unlikely to notice it until after the purchase and consumption of the product in question. According to the anti-halal campaigners, this illustrates the tactic of what they describe as 'stealth jihad' and 'creeping [S]haria' (GRAMFAN 2014) – the sneaky, undercover ways in which Muslims are infiltrating Australia and other western societies right under 'our' very noses without our even noticing. And what more intimate form of infiltration could there be than the smuggling of 'Muslim' food into the bellies of unsuspecting Australian non-Muslims?

### **National security, national memory and nationalist mourning**

Publicity surrounding the campaign against halal certification reached its height soon after a frenzy of concern about young Australian Muslims travelling overseas to fight in Syria and Iraq, the introduction to Parliament of new anti-terrorism legislation, and the shooting death of an Afghan Australian youth who had stabbed two police officers during an attempt to interview him about alleged terrorist connections (McKenzie-Murray 2014). *Burqas/niqabs* were also cited as a security hazard during this renewed moral panic, with the announcement of a measure (swiftly withdrawn) that 'Persons with facial coverings entering the galleries of the House of Representatives and Senate will be seated in the enclosed galleries': that is, in glassed-in areas usually reserved for parties of potentially disruptive schoolchildren (Massola with Cox 2014; see also Bourke and Massola 2014). Since both the regulation of *burqas* and the campaign against halal certification are based on the claim that Muslim religious practices are a security as well as a cultural hazard, it is unsurprising that the same politicians feature prominently on both issues, as instanced below.

Campaigners against halal certification claimed that it constituted another element of this threat to national security. A notice posted by the Facebook group 'Halal Choices', a nexus for the anti-halal campaign, warned:

My 2 cents worth: Young men don't go to Syria to 'become' radicalized, they go because they ARE already radicalized. Where did that happen – right here in Australia (or London, France, USA), most likely in a mosque. A mosque that perhaps owns and operates one of the halal certification rackets funded by your everyday grocery purchases? (Halal Choices 2014a)

Similarly, in a blog post titled 'Terror in the Tucker Box',<sup>4</sup> National Party federal MP George Christensen (who had earlier supported calls to ban the *burqa*) demanded to know: 'Are groceries in Australian trolleys funding a push for Sharia law, supporting *jihad* groups or even backing terrorist activity?' (Christensen 2014). Unrelated political events in February 2015 threw the spotlight onto Liberal Party federal MP Luke Simpkins after he moved a spill motion against his party's leadership, reviving reports of his 'astonishing' 2011 attack on Halal food (little noticed at the time), which he claimed was a means by which 'unwitting' Australians were being converted to Islam (O'Neill 2015). And claiming to be responding to 'hundreds of requests for me to investigate halal certification as a possible source of income for Islamic terrorism', high-profile Independent Senator Jacqui Lambie – another implacable opponent of the veil (Bourke and Aston 2014) – threatened to introduce a private member's bill to close the relevant 'legal loopholes':

Given that our enemies in the Islamic State, by all reports, are receiving a steady cash flow to control their caliphate in Syria and Iraq, why isn't there a legal requirement in Australia for halal certification fees to be disclosed? Given that our nation is on high terrorism alert while hundreds of Australian Islamic State sympathisers are fighting our Australian Defence Forces in Iraq, why is there no formal reporting or auditing mechanism in Australia to ascertain whether moneys paid for halal certification are misused? (Commonwealth of Australia 2015)

In this atmosphere of paranoia and conspiracy-mongering, the Byron Bay Cookie Company's halal certified Anzac biscuits were regarded as little short of treasonous. Anzac biscuits were concocted during World War I as a nutritious snack that could survive the long voyage from Australia to the war zone in Europe and the Middle East. Originally known as Soldiers' biscuits, they were renamed Anzac biscuits after the 1915 landing at Gallipoli which is now commemorated on Anzac Day (ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee Qld (Incorporated)). The term 'Anzac' (Australian and New Zealand Army Corp) is regulated under the *Protection of the Word 'ANZAC' Act (1920)*, with permission from the Minister of Veterans' Affairs required for any commercial use of the word. Penalties of up to 12 months imprisonment or up to \$10 200 for a natural person and \$51 000 for a corporation may be imposed for serious breaches of the Act. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) website notes that 'Applications for Anzac biscuits are normally approved provided the product generally conforms to the traditional recipe and shape, and are referred to as "Anzac Biscuits" or "Anzac Slice"' (Department of Veterans' Affairs nd).

In launching their Anzac biscuits in 2013, Byron Bay Cookies noted that they had obtained the necessary approval from the DVA and proclaimed:

These biscuits date back to World War I and represent more than a biscuit and a recipe as they are an iconic tradition that has been passed down through generations of Australians and New Zealanders. Leave it to Byron Bay Cookies to bring back the old with a twist of the new! (Byron Bay Cookies 2013, quoted in iLSuL6ana website)

The company announced that it would send cookies to Australian troops stationed overseas for Anzac Day and offered to include messages of support from its customers, as collated from its Facebook page. However, it was instead inundated with angry messages accusing it of dishonouring the names of Australian troops past and present:

My family fought and died in these wars and how dare you use the word ANZAC next to 'halal'.

Halal certified cookies which finance the spread of the very ideology that motivates the killers of our sons and daughters? Your moral compass needs a serious re-adjustment.

New South Wales police eventually launched an investigation after Byron Bay Cookies reported receiving a barrage of abusive and threatening phone calls and emails. The company also received messages of support from those who sought to distance themselves from the racist campaign and denied that it represented Australian values and norms. Byron Shire Mayor Simon Richardson wrote a letter stating that '[Byron Bay Cookies], like the Byron community, believe in inclusivity, respect for all cultures and all people ... As Mayor, I am proud that they have not responded to bigots pretending they are for our nation' (Kachor 2014).

Unsurprisingly, when in December 2014 a gunman held staff and customers hostage at the Martin Place Lindt cafe in Sydney's central business district, forcing them to hold up a black flag emblazoned with the *shahada* (the Islamic declaration of faith, initially misreported as being the ISIS flag) at the window, anti-halal campaigners concluded that the cafe had been targeted because it had refrained from obtaining halal certification. A notice on the Halal Choices Facebook page pronounced:

Lindt chocolate is a beacon for the non-halal movement. Not a coincidence this has been targeted. So HORRIFIC! Let's hope against hope they are not waiting for the world to be watching before they do something unspeakable. The flag is the boast of Islam. Trains and public transport are being shut down, buildings evacuated. (Halal Choices 2014b)

Anti-halal activists voiced similar sentiments on the Lindt Facebook page.

I feel the place this terrorist chose is a little less 'random' than everyone may think. Yes, I maybe [sic] a conspiracy theorist, but it wasn't a Byron Bay Cookies or Cadbury cafe that was targeted. It was a company who is proud to not be halal certified, and it was well publicised that they are doing a roaring trade because they are not halal certified. (Lindt Australia 2014)

In the United Kingdom, the right-wing political movement Britain First endorsed this conspiracy theory, urging its supporters to buy Lindt chocolate 'to honour the memory' of those killed and 'to show support for Lindt for refusing to become halal certified' (Withnall 2014). The campaigners against halal certification, then, position themselves not only as guardians of national security but also as bastions of national honour and as a channel for national and international mourning.

### **Muslims and Jews as visible and invisible enemies**

Halal certification is not the first issue to attract attention as an example of hidden rather than overt Islamisation of the west. Arun Kundnani notes the 'double aspect' inherent in descriptions of racialised outsiders: 'they both refuse to integrate into our society while also secretly infiltrating it' (Kundnani 2014: 11). Martha Nussbaum points out that Muslims are moving into the space that Jews have long occupied as the abhorrent 'hidden enemy' within Western societies, all the more foul and disgusting for their ability to conceal themselves (Nussbaum 2012). United States President Barack Obama's 'secret Muslim' identity is a prime example of the 'hidden Muslim threat', as is the entire discourse around *taqiyya*, or dissimulation, the supposed Islamic doctrine commanding Muslims to lie to non-Muslims in order to further the agenda of their religious community (Hussein 2015). *Burqas* hide the identity of the person who wears them only at the expense of rendering them highly visible. In the words of Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, they are 'confronting' in their capacity to conceal (Bourke and Massola 2014).

The campaign against halal certification is another manifestation of the ways in which racism against Muslims has increasingly come to resemble historic patterns of racism against Jews as a hidden threat. The anti-halal campaigners claim that their concern does not extend to kosher food, since Jews do not pose the same level of hazard as Muslims. However, the scare-mongering against halal certification follows a precedent set by anti-semitic scaremongering about kosher certification (or the 'Jewish tax', as it is referred to by white supremacists). Members of racist organisations are urged to purge their pantries of any products bearing the tiny 'K' or 'U', the insignia of the rabbinical councils which impose the certification scheme, described by one notorious leaflet as the 'Kosher Nostra Scam' (Mikkelson 2007).

The anti-halal campaign illustrates the shortcomings of government-sponsored attempts to enhance the social inclusion of Muslims living in Australia by 'normalising' their presence against the Australian landscape in the expectation that this will lead to greater levels of community harmony and acceptance. Substandard English-language and media skills by Muslim spokespeople and community leaders have been seen as a barrier to social inclusion, hindering Muslims' ability to adequately communicate 'the Muslim issue' to 'mainstream' audiences. Community organisations have invested in media training for spokespeople and religious leaders, in some cases with the help of government funding – or under the threat of its withdrawal (Poynting and Mason 2008: 230).

However, these presentable 'mainstream Muslims' are regarded by hardcore anti-Muslim racists as far more dangerous than the unassimilated 'misfit Muslims' because of their enhanced ability to infiltrate Australian society in order to undermine it from within. Projects intended to integrate Muslims by helping them to attain signifiers of mainstream success and inclusion cannot adequately address this form of racism, which hinges not around what Muslims say or do, but around their suspect presence, however discreet.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott underlined government expectations of the Muslim community as well as his perception of the untrustworthy nature of their community leadership in a February 2015 statement on national security in which he said: 'I've often heard Western leaders describe Islam as a religion of peace. I wish more Muslim leaders would say that more often, *and mean it* [emphasis added]' (Grattan 2015). Political analysts as well as Muslim spokespeople responded by citing the numerous occasions on which Muslim leaders had described Islam as a religion of peace (Medhora and Safi 2015) but of course the crucial words in the Prime Ministerial statement were 'and mean it'. An apparently straightforward and unambiguous statement of belief can still be a source of suspicion if the audience does not believe the speaker to be trustworthy enough to really mean it.

There are mounting levels of frustration among Muslims at the apparently Sisyphean task of community reassurance and reconciliation in the face of both national and international moral panics and relentless daily microaggressions. In bringing his case against the anti-halal lobby, Mohamed El Moelhy made it clear that he had no interest in performing the well-established role of the accommodating, peace-loving Muslim.

Muslims ... 90 per cent are meek and mild. I am neither meek nor am I mild. And anybody who touches me with the finger, I touch them with the full hands. Those who touch me with the full hand, I touch them in the face. And I'm not a person who is backwards in coming forwards. (Sutton 2015)

### **Consumption and disgust**

While members of the anti-halal lobby claim to be addressing an issue of national security, they also describe the act of consuming food that has been screened by a Muslim organisation as a physically repulsive and disgusting experience from which non-Muslims should be protected. Just as we do not regard food designated for pets or livestock to be fit for human consumption, food that has been officially designated as religiously acceptable to Muslims is to be regarded as abhorrent by non-Muslims. We may buy it, cook it, smell it, eat it and digest it without realising that anything is amiss, but once we are alerted to its true nature, we are sickened by the realisation of what we have consumed.

'Ethnic' food has long been used in the performance of cosmopolitanism and tolerance, as well as a teaching resource in what Flowers and Swan refer to as 'the public pedagogy of multiculturalism' (Flowers and Swan 2012: 1). However, the encroachment of alien food cultures, flavours and odours has also been an object of disgust and fear. Most notoriously,

historian Geoffrey Blainey's anti-immigration tract *All for Australia* included a section with the subheading 'The Sky is Filled with Greasy Smoke' which described a 'traditional' Anglo-Saxon Australian woman's repulsion at the odour of unfamiliar cooking. 'They cook on their verandahs, so the sky here is filled with greasy smoke and the smell of goat's meat' (Blainey 1984: 132). A decade after 'the Blainey affair', the persona of right-wing anti-immigration politician Pauline Hanson was heavily based around her background as a suburban fish-and-chip shop owner, and thus provider of a wholesome 'Australian' family meal.

However, 'ethnic food' has become a core element of everyday multiculturalism, knowingly consumed, enjoyed and appropriated by white chefs and home cooks who have discovered its pleasures. Disgust arises from the discovery that the Muslim Other has infiltrated and usurped our food without our knowledge and consent. While culinary multiculturalism takes the form of tangible tastes and odours, halal certification mimics poison by staying invisible and tasteless in order to avoid detection by unwitting consumers. This response to an apparently familiar and innocuous products is a manifestation of the type of disgust described by Martha Nussbaum: 'Disgust is very closely linked to fear: indeed it is a shrinking from contamination that is a type of fear, or at least fear's first cousin' (Nussbaum 2012: 36).

The campaign against halal certification, then, utilises the language and instruments of consumption and consumer rights. It repurposes retail catchphrases and values such as 'everyday grocery purchases' and customer choice, an entitlement which it claims is being denied to non-Muslim consumers. Writing for the right-wing magazine *Quadrant*, Antonia Newton describes being treated 'quite rudely' after asking her local supermarket to provide non-halal options. 'At first I was told it "didn't make any difference", then that I should "tell the manufacturers" and finally, "well, this is Brunswick!" as if Brunswick, with a growing number of Muslim residents, were already under unassailable [S]haria law' (Newton 2014).

Newton's description of an expanding Muslim community imposing its demand for halal food upon a conquered Melbourne neighbourhood feeds into the 'creeping [S]haria' conspiracy theory. This international discourse claims that the growing presence of Islamic norms in the West is a form of infiltration which will lead to the eventual conquest of entire societies. Bill Muehlenberg's article 'Creeping [S]haria law in Australia' cites incidents such as the hosting by local councils of female-only functions to celebrate the end of Ramadan (events permitted when challenged in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal) and lobbying by a Muslim organisation for a separate Muslim prayer room in a hospital in Perth as examples of this incremental conquest (Muehlenberg 2011: 9). Once complete, this process of Islamisation will reduce non-Muslims to the status of *dhimmi*, or second-class citizens forced to live under the rules and regulations imposed by their Muslim neighbours, including of course their dietary regulations.

Given that it revolves around the purchase and consumption of food, it is unsurprising that the campaign to boycott halal products is highly gendered. Kathleen Blee's study of women in the organised hate movement in the United States notes the important role played by women racists in strategically deploying their control of family consumption, including boycotting items certified as kosher (Blee 2003: 129). A similar role is exemplified by the most prominent figure in the Australian anti-halal certification campaign, Kirralee Smith. The founder of Halal Choices Australia, Smith is described in her biographical notes as 'first and foremost a wife and home-schooling mother of three who holds a Bachelor of Theology and a Diploma of Ministry'. In a lecture delivered at a conference for the far-right Q society (self-described as 'Australia's leading Islam-critical organisation') and made available on Youtube, she describes how, after being alerted to the role played by halal certified food in funding Sharia law, she realised that 'As a wife and a mother of three who does the shopping, I thought I could do something. I could take some form of responsibility for what we bring into our household' (Smith 2014). A banner photograph on her website shows an attractive young white woman standing before a grocery

shelf as she reads the label of the product held in her hands, the embodiment of the ideal responsible female household consumer.

And as feminist scholars such as Susan Bordo (2003) have highlighted, women are expected to exercise control over the products that enter their bodies as well as their home. In so doing, women are urged to deploy the same qualities of self-restraint and discipline in abstaining from halal-certified food as those needed for any other dietary regime, and are tantalised by the possibility that they may reap a similar reward as a side-effect. A 'humourous' post circulated on the Boycott Halal in Australia Facebook page and other anti-halal certification websites showed a slender female torso encircled by a tape measure, under the slogan 'I LOST 4 KILO'S [sic] by saying NO To halal certified foods. Boycott Halal in Australia and watch the kilo's [sic] come off'. And in fact some of the apparently female participants in anti-Halal discussions on social media claim to have achieved gratifying levels of weight-loss by eliminating this ideologically tainted food from their diets. Like the diets promoted by the weight-loss industry, boycotting halal certified products has made them more mindful of their food consumption, reduced their intake of off-limits and 'suspect' processed food, and increased their intake of fresh, non-halal and incidentally healthier food.

A new trend? The HCF DIET –

HCF = Halal Certified Free!

So many of us have seen the kilos come off since we have not bought halal certified products – BOYCOTT HALAL!

Since starting my HCF diet (halal certified free) 2 months ago I have lost 11 kg. I know [sic] fit into these jeans I couldn't even pull over my hips let alone button up

Amazing how better quality food when you don't buy the mass produced food from supermarkets. Found some great local products non-halal certified. Thanks for the push to really have a good look at what we are eating. (Boycott Halal in Australia 2014)

Abstaining from the consumption of halal-certified food, then, allows women to attain the ideal of a pure, slender body, untainted by the corruption of foreign signifiers. And, like other right-wing movements including Islamist movements, the anti-halal lobby provides women with the opportunity to participate in public discourse through the public performance of their roles as home-makers and guardians of domesticity.

## Conclusion

The campaign against halal certification has steadily gained momentum throughout the process of researching and writing this paper. A couple of days before its final submission, I attended a rally in Melbourne's Federation Square, one of sixteen 'Reclaim Australia' rallies held across Australia on Easter Saturday 2015 to protest against 'halal tax, [S]haria law and Islamisation'. Placards proclaimed that 'Islam is the enemy of the West', 'Halal is Sharia law', and 'Reclaim food free of [S]haria'. When I asked Reclaim Australia supporters what they meant by their 'Stop Sharia law!' slogan, they cited beheadings and the wearing of *burqas* but also angrily complained that Sharia was 'in our food' because of halal certification. 'It's hidden inside the cheese packet – you can't see it until you open it!' In less than six months, a movement that had initially come to public attention via its Facebook campaign was featured in the lead story of Melbourne's premier daily newspaper, as Reclaim Australia supporters clashed with anti-racist protestors in what *The Age's* crime correspondent described as 'trench warfare' (Elder 2015). Guy Rundle noted the high profile of the halal certification issue in the rally, as well as its particular prominence in Australian discourse on Islam: 'The halal thing has become obsessive

in a way that it isn't anywhere else. It is a purity obsession, of course – a ghost fear of contamination attaching to an object, atavistic in form' (Rundle 2015).

Another one of the Reclaim Australia placards proclaimed: 'We're not racist, just concerned'. After all, as they loudly and repeatedly stated, 'Islam is a religion, not a race'. The racialisation of Muslim identity centres round this claim that it is a critique of behaviour rather than a biological prejudice. However, with Muslims increasingly represented as an all-pervasive, hidden threat rather than as a visible alien presence, the types of behaviour under scrutiny are broadened to the extent that all Muslims are rendered inherently suspect.

Few of the anti-racist protestors who participated in the physical confrontations with Reclaim Australia were visibly Muslim but, in the days following the rally, Muslims from across the religious and political spectrum expressed their fears through both social and mainstream media. The sense of stigmatisation portrayed by the rally's anti-halal scaremongering was detached from any personal commitment towards observing a halal diet. For some Muslims living in Australia, the idea of consuming food that falls short of the requirements for halal certification evokes a similar level of disgust as the anti-halal lobbyists describe over unwitting consumption of halal products. However, for most Muslims living in Australia, maintaining a halal diet simply means abstaining from forbidden items such as pork and alcohol (regulations which they may or may not follow) rather than scanning every item in their grocery carts for the halal certification stamp. Yet the campaign against halal certification impacts on the lives of such Muslims, too. Its message is that, however discreet their presence, however well integrated they may believe themselves to be, they are not welcome here. The anti-Muslim racists behind the campaign want Muslims to know that their absorption into Australian society makes them gag. They must be rejected – spat out, vomited – from the body politic.

*Correspondence:* Dr Shakira Hussein, Honorary Researcher, Asia Institute, Sidney Myer Asia Centre, 761 Swanston Street, The University of Melbourne, Parkville 3052 VIC, Australia. Email: shussein@unimelb.edu.au

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper expands on ideas previously explored in articles for the ABC Religion and Ethics website and *Crikey*. It has benefited from discussions with Helen Pringle and Geoffrey Brahm Levey and beyond-the-call-of-duty editorial support from Scott Poynting.

<sup>2</sup> Halal is an Arabic word means permissible under Islamic law. Companies wishing to label their goods as halal may pay a fee to one of several Islamic organisations in Australia in order to have their products inspected and certified as meeting the required standards.

<sup>3</sup> *Niqab* and *burqa* are terms used to describe forms of face-veiling. Their precise definitions vary by region, with the term *burqa* more commonly used in South Asia than in the Middle East.

<sup>4</sup> Tucker is an Australian slang word for food. The term 'tucker bag' appears in *Waltzing Matilda*, Australia's unofficial national song about the iconic 'jolly swagman'. The term 'tucker box' thus evokes nostalgic imagery of a white Australian landscape and masculinity thought to have been lost to immigration and urbanisation. The image of 'the dog and the tucker box' is immortalised in a bronze statue erected outside the town of Gundagai in honour of the area's early bullock drivers and pioneers. The bush ballad *Five Miles from Gundagai*, doubtless well known to the National Party MP, refers laconically to a particular 'terror' in the tuckerbox – a turd: '... me dog shat in me tuckerbox, five miles from Gundagai'. See: <http://mainlynorfolk.info/trevor.lucas/songs/fivemilesfromgundagai.html>.

*Please cite this article as:*

Hussein S (2015) Not eating the Muslim other: Halal certification, scaremongering, and the racialisation of Muslim identity. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 4(3): 85-96. doi: 10.5204/ijcjsd.v4i3.250.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence. As an open access journal, articles are free to use, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings. ISSN: 2202-8005

## References

- ABC Radio National (2014) 'What's the big fuss about Halal certification?'. *ABC*, 27 October. Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bushtelegraph/halal/5843904> (accessed 25 July 2015).
- Al-Natour RJ and Morgan G (2012) Local Islamophobia: The Islamic school controversy in Camden, New South Wales. In Morgan G and Poynting S (eds) *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West*: 101-118. Farnham: Ashgate.
- ANZAC Day Commemoration Committee Qld (Incorporated) (nd) *ANZAC Biscuits*. Available at <http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/anecdotes/bikkies.html> (accessed 25 July 2015).
- Barila G (2014) Coopers defends Halal accreditation for malt extract products. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 11 February. Available at <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/coopers-defends-halal-accreditation-for-maltextextract-products/story-fni6uo1m-1226823960243?nk=060b674e327dba633efe213c37c64683> (accessed 25 July 2015).
- Blainey G (1984) *All for Australia*. North Ryde: Methuen Hayes.
- Blee KM (2003) *Inside Organised Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Bordo S (2003) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Bourke L and Aston H (2014) Senator Jacqui Lambie posts far-right anti-burqa image, raising fears MPs are assisting Islamic State recruit terrorists. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 September. Available at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/senator-jacqui-lambie-posts-farright-antiburqa-image-raising-fears-mps-are-assisting-islamic-state-recruit-terrorists-20140919-10j74z.html> (accessed 13 March 2015).
- Bourke L and Massola J (2014) Tony Abbott says people need to be identifiable in secure buildings. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October. Available at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/burqa-debate-tony-abbott-says-people-need-to-be-identifiable-in-secure-buildings-20141001-10oio5.html> (accessed 25 July 2015).
- Boycott Halal in Australia (2014) A new trend? The HCF diet. *Boycott Halal in Australia* Facebook page, update 10 December. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/BH.Australia> (accessed 10 December 2014).
- Christensen G (2014) *Terror in the Tucker Box* Available at <http://www.georgechristensen.com.au/terror-in-the-tucker-box/> (accessed 28 November 2014).
- Commonwealth of Australia (2015) Senate, Official Hansard, 10 February: 387. Canberra: Parliament of Australia.
- Department of Veterans' Affairs (2015) Protecting the word ANZAC. *VETAFFAIRS* 31(1): Autumn. Available at [http://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/about%20dva/vetaffairs/2015/vetaffairs\\_vol\\_31\\_no\\_1\\_2015.pdf#page=6](http://www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/about%20dva/vetaffairs/2015/vetaffairs_vol_31_no_1_2015.pdf#page=6) (accessed 25 July 2015).
- Dick Smith's Aussie Grown Foods (c. 2014) *Halal Certification on Our Foods*. Available at <http://www.dicksmithfoods.com.au/media/news/halal-certification-our-food> (accessed 25 July 2015).

- Dunn K (2009) Public attitudes towards hijab-wearing in Australia: Uncovering the basis of tolerance. In Dreher T and Ho C (eds) *Beyond the Hijab Debates: New Conversations on Race, Gender and Religion*: 31-52. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Elder J (2015) So this is Easter: Melbourne faces off at anti-Islam rally as police on horseback hold factions apart. *The Age*, 5 April. Available at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/so-this-is-easter--melbourne-faces-off-at-antiislam-rally-as-police-on-horseback-hold-factions-apart-20150404-1mel68.html> (accessed 25 July 2015).
- Fitzsimmons C (2014) Fleurieu ditches Halal certification after social media 'bullying'. *Business Review Weekly*, 10 November. Available at [http://www.brw.com.au/p/marketing/fleurieu\\_ditches\\_halal\\_certification\\_7wEk9yoCF65uve4UHvs0OL](http://www.brw.com.au/p/marketing/fleurieu_ditches_halal_certification_7wEk9yoCF65uve4UHvs0OL) (accessed 29 November 2014).
- Flowers R and Swan E (2012) Eating the Asian other: Pedagogies of food multiculturalism in Australia. *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 9(2): July. Available at <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/portal/article/view/2370/3288> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Fozdar F and Spittles B (2014) Of cows and men: Nationalism and Australian cow making. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 25(1): 73-90.
- GRAMFAN (2014) Kirralie Smith: Halal certification is all about stealth jihad and creeping shar'ia. *1389 Blog: Counterjihad!*, 26 April. Available at <http://1389blog.com/2014/04/26/kirralie-smith-halal-certification-is-all-about-stealth-jihad-and-creeping-sharia/> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Grattan M (2015) Abbott's message to Muslim leaders: Speak up and mean it. *The Conversation*, 23 February. Available at <http://theconversation.com/abbotts-message-to-muslim-leaders-speak-up-and-mean-it-37901> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Halal Choices (2014a) My two cents worth. *Halal Choices*, Facebook update 4 September. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/halalchoices> (accessed 4 September 2014).
- Halal Choices (2014b) Breaking News. *Halal Choices*, Facebook update 15 December. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/halalchoices> (accessed 15 December 2014).
- Hussein S (2015) The Myth of the lying Muslim: 'Taqiyya', dhimmitude, and the racialization of Muslim identity. *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 28 May. Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2015/05/28/4244447.htm> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Hussein S (2007) The limits of force/choice discourses in discussing Muslim women's dress codes. *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 2(1). Available at <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/TfC/article/viewArticle/612> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- iLSuL6ana (2013) ANZAC Biscuits ... From Australia to Kuwait. *iLSuL6ana*, 17 February. Available at <http://www.ilsul6ana.com/2013/02/17/anzac-biscuits-from-australia-to-kuwait/> (accessed 25 July 2015).
- Kachor K (2014) Police step in over cookie abuse. *ninemsn*, 3 November. Available at <http://finance.ninemsn.com.au/newsbusiness/aap/8925447/police-step-in-over-cookie-abuse> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Kundnani A (2014) *The Muslims are Coming!* London and New York: Verso 2014.
- Lerner P and Rabello AM (2006) The prohibition of ritual slaughtering (kosher shechita and halal) and freedom of religion of minorities. *Journal of Law and Religion* 22(1): 1-62.
- Lindt Australia (2014) Facebook comment, 17 December. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/lindtaus> (accessed 17 December 2014).
- Maleny Dairies (2014) Maleny Dairies will not certify their products Halal. Maleny Dairies, Facebook update 2 November. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/MalenyDairies> (accessed 2 November 2014).

- Masanauskas J (2014) Halal food outrage from anti-Islam critics. *Herald Sun*, 18 July. Available at <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/halal-food-outrage-from-antiislam-critics/story-e6frf7jo-1226992523050> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Massola J with Cox L (2014) Burqa crackdown: 'Facial coverings' restricted in Parliament House public galleries. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 October. Available at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/burqa-crackdown-facial-coverings-restricted-in-parliament-house-public-galleries-20141002-10p8pl.html> (accessed 25 July 2015).
- McKenzie-Murray M (2014) Inside the terror of the suburbs. *The Saturday Paper*, 27 September. Available at <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2014/09/27/inside-the-terror-the-suburbs/14117400001035> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Medhora S and Safi M (2015) Muslim leaders outraged by Tony Abbott's chiding over extremism. *The Guardian*, 23 February. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/23/muslim-leaders-outraged-by-tony-abbotts-admonishment-over-extremism> (accessed 27 July 2015).
- Mikkelson B (2007) The Kosher Nostra. *snopes*, 3 May. Available at <http://www.snopes.com/racial/business/kosher.asp> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Muehlenberg B (2011) ISLAM: Creeping sharia law in Australia. *News Weekly*, 15 October.
- Newton A (2014) Halal's hard-to-swallow offensive. *Quadrant*, 3 May. Available at <http://quadrant.org.au/opinion/qed/2014/05/halals-hard-swallow-offensive> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Nussbaum M (2012) *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- O'Neill M (2015) MP who filed leadership spill motion, Luke Simpkins, has bizarre fear of Halal meat. *news.com.au*, 6 February. Available at <http://www.news.com.au/national/mp-who-filed-leadership-spill-motion-luke-simpkins-has-bizarre-fear-of-halal-meat/story-fncynjr2-1227210615145> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Poynting S and Mason V (2008) The new integrationism, the state and Islamophobia: Retreat from multiculturalism in Australia. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Social Justice* 36(8): 230-246.
- Poynting S, Noble G, Tabar P and Collins J (2004) *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other*. Sydney: Institute of Criminology Series No. 18.
- Rundle G (2015) How to defeat Reclaim Australia. *Crikey*, 5 April. Available at <http://www.crikey.com.au/2015/04/09/rundle-reclaim-australias-secret-communist-origins/> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Smith K (2014) Kirralie Smith at the 1st International Symposium on Liberty and Islam in Australia. Q Society of Australia Inc, 10 May. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSP47FAtn6U> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Sutton R (2015) Rows over halal and terrorism linkage. *SBS*, 13 February. Available at <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/02/13/rows-over-halal-and-terrorism-linkage> (accessed 26 July 2015).
- Withnall A (2014) Sydney cafe siege: Britain First blames Australia terror attack on 'mass immigration' and fact Lindt isn't Halal-certified. *The Independent*, 16 December. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/sydney-cafe-siege-britain-first-blames-australia-terror-attack-on-mass-immigration-and-fact-lindt-isnt-halalcertified-9929224.html> (accessed 26 July 2015).