Racism, Ragheads and Rednecks.

By Ryan Al-Natour

October 2007 became the starting point in a series of events that made the suburb of Camden (located in the far south-western Sydney area, Australia) known internationally. After a charity called the Quranic Society submitted a development proposal to build an Islamic school in the area, the expressions of hostility towards the proposal by local residents were overt and well-documented in the media. Petitions, flyers and anti-school bumper stickers were formed and widely circulated (Bowie 2007c:11). Anti-school rallies attracted crowds in large numbers expressing disdain towards Islam (Kinsella 2007d:1, Bowie 2007b:1). A wooden crucifix with biblical inscriptions appeared on the proposed site (Kinsella 2007b:19), and several groups within (Bowie 2007a:11) and outside of Camden, including a Nazi white supremacist group (Hildebrand 2008) became involved against a perceived Arab invasion of the Macarthur district (the Camden area). The council rejected the application and the charity appealed this decision in the Land and Environment Court, where it was rejected again in June 2009 (Bowie 2009:1).

In December 2007, a public information forum on Islam and the proposed Islamic school was organised in Camden. Outside this forum, a local resident stressed to *ABC* reporters that his opposition was 'not about racism' (*PM* 2007), yet expressed an opinion which suggested otherwise: 'If it does get approved, every ragger ["raghead"] that walks up the street's going to get smashed up the arse by about 30 Aussies' (*AM* 2007a). The offensive term 'ragger' ("raghead") used to describe Middle Eastern people – particularly of the Islamic faith – can be understood as racist, and the advocacy of violence towards a particular social group based on the imaginings of their religious beliefs or their genetic make-up further falls within the guidelines of racism. This was not the first or last time in which an opponent of the proposed Islamic school would firstly deny that their opposition was racist, and then would proceed to express a racist view.

In this article, I will firstly discuss a theoretical framework on 'race' and racism. In setting the scene for the case study of the Camden controversy, I will then briefly describe the typical hostile oppositions that Islamic development applications have faced in the Sydney area. I will then illustrate how discourses of 'race' and racism have been approached in the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden. This discussion will be based on television, newspaper and radio sources, which are media spaces used to express racist opposition. Finally, in this article, I point out the motivations and rationalisations behind the contradictory practices of denying and practising racism in light of the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden.

'Race', Racialisation and Stereotypes

According to Charles Husband, it was in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar that the term 'race' was officially recorded in the English language (Husband 1994:7). Since then, the term has been attributed a number of meanings. On conceptualising the usage of the term 'race', Miles and Brown point out how it has popularly been approached using a 'biological' lens. Biological differences are the key signifiers used to describe 'races', which, Miles and Brown correctly argue, are imagined differences. Further, the authors point out that such biological or somatic characteristics are designated to signify differences between human beings, arguing that '...biological differences are secondary to the meanings that are attributed to them...' (Miles & Brown 2003:88). Specific human characteristics such as height, weight, leg and arm lengths, shapes of ears and eyes, hair and eye colour, facial structures and even body hair have been used as signifiers to detail the imaginings of particular 'races' (Miles & Brown 2003:88). As a tool of categorisation, skin colour is a common signifier that has been used to distinguish different groups of people (or supposed 'races'), where the most common of signifiers include a popular Black/White dichotomy (Ratcliffe 2004:16). As a racial signifier, skin colour has been attributed particular meanings that are imagined in a way that creates an inferior/superior divide among social groups.

Thus, it is flawed to think of 'race' solely in terms of skin colour. Husband acknowledges that notions of 'race' are popularly based on 'colour lines', yet also points out how racial

observations are not always the case. Interestingly, Husband cites Charles Kingsley's racialised observation of the Irish in 1860, an observation which would be regarded as extremely odd and strange had it occurred in today's world. In a letter to his wife, Kingsley writes:

> But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours (cited in Husband 1994:6, originally cited in Curtis 1968:84).

This absurd yet fascinating account of Kingsley's 'haunted' experience illustrates the way colour is attributed in a method that assumes a moral hierarchy. As Husband (1994:6) reveals, Kinsley was not referring 'to an exotic tribe of albinos', rather a 'horrible country' where he observed the 'white chimpanzees'. Through the dehumanisation of the Irish people, and the justification of an occupied rule in Ireland, Kingsley appears disappointed that he shares his 'whiteness' with the Irish. Though colour is used as a signifier to create a moralised hierarchy of 'races', we also see that colour is one of many variables that are used in constructing and marginalising particular racialised Others. A conquest of occupation was facilitated for the English through the establishment of a racial hierarchy that placed them on top, and which demonized the Irish (despite the perceived 'colour' similarities between the two), placing them below the English.

The process of racialisation facilitates the circulation of the myth of different 'races', or what Ashley Montagu would call man's [sic] most dangerous myth' (Montagu 1974). As described in the aforementioned example, the Irish were racialised as 'white chimpanzees'. On the nature of racialisation, Miles and Brown make 3 significant points: (1) racism presumes a process of racialisation, as it represents the Other through the lens of negativity; (2) images, stereotypes and other constructions are involved in this process of representation; and (3) racism operates as a platform to interpret the actions and

operations of the world today (Miles & Brown 2003:104-105). Stereotyping further facilitates the racialisation of particular people, groups and communities and is central to the politics of representation. The politics of representation – in terms of stereotyping – concerns the constructions of the Other and how we use the Other to define ourselves. The constructed Other helps determine the Self – what we are and how they are not like the Self (Pickering 2001:55). Such stereotypes of racialised Others are used to define the Self as 'safe', conventional or normal. Further, stereotypes can serve to rationalise 'bigotry, hostility, and aggression' (Pickering 2001:48). Thus, any expressions of racist thought can be easily communicated through stereotypes.

In recent times, narratives of nationhood, patriotism and 'way of life' rhetorical strategies, have attempted to guise racially motivated perspectives. These narratives are part of what is termed the 'new racism' (Barker 1981; Dunn et al 2004). In the 'new racism', the processes of racialisation work through narratives of 'our way of life' that are designed to specifically exclude particular Others from a particular space. Further, the argument of 'genuine fears' and the protection of the nation's 'way of life' are used to justify the processes of racism. Barker argues that these discourses of 'genuine fears' and the 'common sense' approach of protecting our 'way of life' illustrate that 'racism is theorized out of the guts and made into commonsense'. Barker goes on, 'This, then, is the character of the new racism' or what he calls 'pseudo-biological culturalism' (Barker 1981:23). Dunn et al also observe how discourses of the nation and patriotism are used in the new racism, where notions of cultural diversity are seen as a threat to patriotism and the nation (Dunn et al 2004:426). Such practices of the new racism have dangerous consequences, where racism is almost normalised.

Experiences of Sydney Islamic Development Applications
Stereotypes, racialisation processes and aspects of the 'new racism' have appeared in the narratives of opposition against Islamic development applications in the Sydney area. For instance, mosque opposition has been a core display of racism against Australian Muslims. Anti-Muslim sentiment has a long history in Australia; whether against the Malay pearlers or Macassan fishers occurring approximately 200 years ago; or whether it was the stereotypical views toward Afghan workers at the time of the White Australia

Policy. Further, the events of September 11 2001 fired up existing racist attitudes towards Muslims. Throughout history, at times when Australian Muslims have tried to build their lives in this country, Islamic developments and communities have often been met with racist opposition (Dunn 2001:292).

A common approach to Islam in Australia is homogenisation, this is definitely the case in documenting opposition to Islamic development applications. Cultural variations among Muslims need to be taken into consideration. There are areas in Sydney which consist of Muslims from a variety of backgrounds: Turkish, Lebanese, Indonesian, Pakistani, Bosnian, Syrian, Indian, South African, Sri Lankan and Iranian to name a few. Numerous Islamic organisations in Australia are also varied to cater for different religious denominations, whether they are Shi'a, Sunni, or other Islamic denominations. Also, within the Sydney area, most Muslims reside in the Western Suburbs (Dunn 2004:343-344). These different ethnic backgrounds are usually dismissed and all Muslims become a monolithic entity in the course of stereotyping, and the ethnicity of 'Arab' is a usual component involved in the stereotyping of Muslims. Therefore, anti-Muslim prejudice works with anti-Arab prejudice, as though all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arab.

Apart from Camden, the most recent controversies over local council Islamic development applications include the controversy over an Islamic Prayer Centre in Annangrove, the proposed school in Bass Hill, and proposed Islamic schools in the suburbs of Hoxton Park and Austral. Poynting et al discuss the controversy over an Islamic Prayer Centre that was proposed in the Sydney suburb of Annangrove in 2002, located on the far western fringe of the Sydney area. Annangrove is described by the authors as a 'strongly middle class, Anglo-Celtic Hills district' (Poynting et al 2004:222), and is described by an ABC radio journalist as 'the Bible Belt area of the Hills district' (*PM* 2008a). Similar to the proposed Islamic school in Camden, the Prayer Centre received a considerable amount of hostility from certain local residents, and even the local Mayor had expressed a bizarre concern over the welfare of women in the area in his own opposition to the proposal. Also, certain local residents claimed that a prayer centre

would be incompatible with the 'quiet community' of Annangrove, which was supposedly threatened by outsiders. Locals would even assert that Muslims should 'stay in Muslim areas', referring to Sydney areas with concentrated Arab populations such as Bankstown and Punchbowl (Poynting et al 2004:222-3). The Annangrove proposal received up to 8000 letters of objection, the site was vandalized on numerous occasions and severed pigs' heads were placed around the property in an attempt to contaminate the site (*AM* 2007b). After being rejected by the local council, this application entered the Land and Environment Court and the council's decision was overruled.

Even in the Bankstown region (located in south-west of Sydney), an Islamic development application was the subject of overt racist hostility, but not to the same extent as in the case of Camden or Annangrove. Opponents of a proposed school in Bass Hill, a suburb located within the Bankstown vicinity, had cited numerous objections against the school. Some objections would cite traffic concerns, others asserted that the establishment of a Muslim school would increase 'sectarian and social tensions' among children due to their religious differences (Gilmore & Price 2007). As one local resident expressed 'It's not traffic. This is how I see it: it's the religion. But unfortunately, they said, "Don't talk about religion." I have to talk about it.' (*Lateline* 2009). The resident was obviously referring to the planning regulations which would ignore racist objections towards the proposal. The Bankstown City Council rejected the application for the school, yet at the same meeting, approved the expansion of a brothel. One of the applicants who attended the meeting interjected 'You support the brothel and reject our school'. After he was threatened that he would be removed from the meeting, a number of Muslims who were also present walked out (*Four Corners* 2008). The case then entered the Land and Environment Court, and the Council's decision was overturned. The Court's judgement mentioned 'the elephant in the courtroom', a reference questioning 'whether the Council would have raised quite as many contentions as it did if the application had been for an Anglican school' (Murray 2009).

Also, in recent times, opposition towards Islamic development applications occurred in Hoxton Park, a suburb within the Liverpool district (also in the South Western Sydney

region). Protests against a Muslim school in Hoxton Park were minimal in comparison to the attention drawn to the Islamic development applications in Camden, Bass Hill and Annangrove, where only 100 people attended a public rally against the school. Campaigns against the school had even reached cyberspace, where an anti-school website had listed traffic and pollution concerns, and even suggested that such increases in traffic would make the area 'not safe' for children (Long 2009). The Liverpool Council approved the school for Hoxton Park in June 2009. Also, the Council rejected a different development application for an Islamic school in Austral, also located under the Liverpool jurisdiction. The Austral application, which also inspired local opposition and campaigns of protest, was rejected based on rural zoning issues (McLean 2009). In recent years, it is as though hostility towards Islamic development applications in the Sydney area – whether based on traffic concerns or racist objections – has become a predictable response by any local community.

Anti-Muslim sentiment, as displayed in opposition to Islamic developments in Sydney, has led to the homogenised image of all Australian Muslims as the Other. In some cases, opponents of mosque development applications would stereotype Muslims as 'fanatical beings'. Kevin Dunn researched the various opposing views towards mosque development applications, as they were documented in the archives of local Sydney councils and letters to local papers, and he observed: 'The stereotype of the fanatical Muslim was present in the discourses of opposition to mosques or Islamic centres throughout Sydney. Opponents of mosque development applications made reference to Muslims having a fanatical belief in their faith' (Dunn 2001:297). Dunn also linked the common media stereotypes to the views of these opponents, which usually regurgitated these media stereotypes. Common phrases in the media such as 'Islamic fundamentalism' or 'fundamentalist Muslim' include stereotyped images of 'militancy, intolerance and violence' (Dunn 2001:297). In the news media, such representations are successfully communicated through the promotion of fear which 'helps sell papers' (Poynting et al 2004:237), playing a crucial role in shaping public opinion (Hall et al 1978:63). Yet these anti-Muslim stereotypes (which are almost identical to anti-Arab stereotypes) also emerge from sources other than news media – such as the entertainment media. The

research of Jack Shaheen explored the representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood films. Shaheen examined over 900 films and found that the vast majority would vilify Arabs and Muslims through popular stereotypes. Upon reflection on the various stereotypes that depicted Arabs as fanatical terrorists, Shaheen writes '...(T)he time is long overdue for Hollywood to end its undeclared war on Arabs, and to cease misrepresenting them and maligning them' (Shaheen 2001:34). Parts of the news media and the entertainment media have played a role in stereotyping Arabs and Muslims. These mediums have such strength that they have crossed over into the domain of public opinion and have become present in the opposition towards Islamic development applications in the Sydney area.

As a form of racism, anti-Muslim expressions are becoming increasingly frequent, particularly in the post-9/11 world where such stereotypes are widely held and expressed. A report on the discriminatory practices towards Arab and Muslim Australians, as conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, highlighted that hostile acts of verbal abuse and physical violence towards Arabs and Muslims increased after September 11th 2001 (HREOC 2004). No doubt, the role of stereotypes constantly played out in the media was one of many contributions to such an increase. Yet such racist expressions are also becoming normalised. Dunn et al report on the normalcy of racism in this context and the dangerous nature of this normalisation process. If such racist views become common and normalised, these views then remain unquestioned and much more difficult to challenge. In the case of the frequent opposition documented against Sydney Islamic development applications, Sydney itself becomes an urban context where 'racial hatred is insidiously normalized.' (Dunn et al 2009:3). In examining the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden, I documented numerous efforts of certain opponents of the school who would attempt to normalise views that are usually considered racist.

Narrating Racism in Camden
Given the long history of hostility towards Islamic development applications, it was perhaps no surprise that the proposal of an Islamic school in Camden also received a hostile response. A variety of public spaces were utilised to express narratives of 'race'

and racism involved in the issue of the proposed school. Through television, newspapers and radio media sources, I have documented how certain opponents of the proposed Islamic school in Camden have transformed and modified their definitions of racism to suit their interests. The sources analysed in this article consist of letters to the local paper, election platforms, an anti-school flyer and interviews conducted by journalists.

At various points throughout the Camden controversy, certain opinions in the 'Your Say' pages of the local paper (the *Camden Advertiser*) narrated racism in a method that attempted to support their argument. One Camden resident expressed concern that the school had a hidden agenda – to bring an influx of Muslims who 'hate our way of life' with a desire to change it. The resident admitted, 'I will probably be called a racist but it is not racism, it is fear of the unknown' (Stewart 2007:6). Another attempted to justify a view that singled out Muslims by demonising young Muslims. 'Of all migrants that have come to Australia, young Islamic people seem to have more trouble integrating into society than other new migrants'. This was followed with the denial of racism and the assertion that suburbs with concentrated Arab populations were dangerous as a result of their presence. 'I am not a racist person – far from it as I too come from a migrant background.' (Bennett 2007:2). Another resident also denied that opposition towards the proposal was based on racism, rather a form of patriotism, arguing that '(B)ecause we uphold our traditions, morals, heritage and Christian culture, the media choose to report us as being "rednecks". I ask these reporters: where is your loyalty? We are passionate, trustworthy Australians with a sense of loyalty' (Yewen 2008:2). The moral barricades of this society were aligned with constructions of mainstream national identity. Notions of 'our way of life', traditions, and Christianity had built this construction, allowing the opponent of the proposal to dodge (or attempt to dodge) the label of 'racist'. Interestingly, one opponent of the proposal from Camden Park mentioned that she was frustrated with the outbursts of racism in the area to the point where she felt ashamed of telling people that she resides in Camden. This resident argued that the media was presenting the Camden community 'as a bunch of racist redneck hicks' and expressed that she was not surprised considering the large amount of objections on religious grounds. She questioned why these opponents would base their opposition on racist

ideologies (Lysaught 2007:18). Even though this resident was opposed to the school on environmental grounds, she was still able to distinguish her own opposition from other opponents.

A local political candidate of the Christian Democratic Party echoed the political ideologies of his party colleague, the Reverend Fred Nile. Using the issue of the proposed school as an election platform, the candidate promised that if he were elected, he would change the current anti-discrimination legislation to restrict the rights of Muslims to build schools and mosques, further proposing a moratorium on Muslim immigration. When a journalist asked the candidate whether his views were bigoted, the candidate was quick to dismiss the idea: 'We're not intolerant, we actually love Muslims but we don't like what they practise and some of their beliefs, because they're not favourable to our society and community harmony' (Kinsella 2007a:10). Again, the discourses of nationalism and the functioning of society were used to justify policy platforms that singled out Muslims. Under the guise of patriotism, the racial vilification of Muslims worked with the construction of the national Self. The candidate had such 'love' towards Muslims that he felt the need to racially vilify them.

An anonymous Camden resident told the *Camden Advertiser* that he would print 16,000 anti-school flyers. One of them read: 'What's wrong with the schools that are already established in the local area? It is ABOUT TIME Aussies stand together whatever religion or race of people' (Bowie 2007c:11). The author of this flyer made a conscious effort to represent Australians as racially and religiously 'diverse' in calling for opposition against the school. The denial of racism and the patriotic opposition towards the school worked together here, and the call for racial and religious harmony was used in the recruitment of opponents of the school.

The views that appeared racist towards the school attracted the attention of the mainstream media. *The Daily Telegraph* picked up on rumours of a possible anti-Muslim riot that was to occur in Camden on Australia Day, 2008. Based on these rumours that predicted an event of public disorder that would mirror the Cronulla riot of 2005

(Hildebrand 2008), Camden hosted a heavy media presence on January 26th 2008 and no such events occurred. The editor of the *Camden Advertiser* expressed disappointment in that the reporting on Camden by the mainstream media was disproportionate to the amount of media in Camden anticipating a race riot, she writes: '...the Sydney media is giving Camden the Campbelltown treatment: it only rates a mention if something has gone wrong' (Senescall 2008:4). Here, racism is also identified in terms of its newsworthy appeal.

On the ABC's *Q&A* program, a resident asked whether it was fair for people to quickly put the 'racist tag' on his views, asking the panel: '...is it a particular race we oppose here, or is it something like the impact that this school will bring upon Camden and the possible influence it will have on the Camden culture?' (*Q&A* 2008). A fellow audience participant proposed that local councils should have the right to stop an 'invasion by Muslims', further opposing the idea that such a view could be racist, arguing that 'Islam is not a race, so it's not racist to oppose Islam'. A different resident who supported the proposal argued that some of the opposition on environmental grounds was 'poorly hidden racism' (*Q&A* 2008). These three different views outline three various dimensions in the discourses of racism in relation to the proposal. According to the first, the term 'racist' was a label unfairly applied to a view that desired to preserve the contemporary Camden culture from a Muslim school. In this view, it was not racist to preserve the existing Camden culture by excluding a social group based on their religious and ethnic backgrounds. The second had defined racism as discriminatory treatment based on the perceived biological differences among humans, and had neglected other definitions of racism, such as the adverse treatment of an individual/social group based on their cultural/religious backgrounds. By limiting the definition of racism, this audience participant was attempting to justify a racist view. The third view identified the insidious operations of contemporary racism in Australia, where other concerns such as 'town planning' and 'environmental laws' are utilised to raise objections against the school.

When the Camden Council unanimously opposed the Quranic Society's application, various opponents expressed a variety of opinions. While one resident asserted that

Australia was an 'Anglo-European society' exclusively for Christians, another resident claimed he was not racist, it was 'just all the crime and stuff that other foreign people bring into the town' (*AM* 2008). Both these views exclude minority groups, whether they were recent migrants or a population that resided in Australia 40,000 years prior to European settlement. Here, notions of the Self were Anglo-European law-abiding Christians, and the Others were criminalised 'foreign people'. By dismissing racism, the opponents of the school were able to construct the racial and religious characteristics of the mainstream Self, while portraying the racial and religious identities of the Others in a negative light. One local resident, Kate McCulloch, temporarily became a Sydney household name once she exited the council meeting and vented a monologue of racist propaganda that she felt was acceptable and patriotic. Dressed in an akubra hat with multiple stickers of the Australian flag, McCulloch's monologue vilified Arabs and Muslims in multiple ways. McCulloch argued that some 'take our welfare', oppress women, cannot assimilate into the Australian way of life (Dart & Creagh 2008), and were suicide bombers (Murphy 2008). From the decision to reject Muslims on a local level, McCulloch's monologue further advised that she did not want Muslims in Australia arguing they were a 'dictatorship' (*ABC News* 2008). Further, 'scores of people' approached her with support because they felt they were restricted due to the racial vilification laws in Australia (Murphy 2008). Not surprisingly, her activism against the application led to her interest in a political career with a notoriously xenophobic political party. Anointed by the media as the 'next Pauline Hanson', McCulloch planned to stand for the One Nation Macarthur Seat in the next federal election (Ramachandran 2009). Even though McCulloch's views were racially vilifying Muslims from so many angles to the point where she admitted that the existing racial vilification laws needed to be changed to accommodate her views, she still made the effort to dismiss the view that she could be racist, advising that it was '...just a word. I have many English, Irish, Greek and Italian friends.' She further claimed that she even had a Turkish friend who doesn't want anything to do with Muslims (Dart & Creagh 2008). By establishing that she had a Turkish friend, and friends of other European backgrounds, McCulloch attempted to remove the tag 'racist' from her overtly racist views. In the course of expressing racism, McCulloch discussed topics of nationalism and the presence of Muslim in Australia. By

taking a 'patriotic' stance against the school, McCulloch treated a local council issue as though it affected the entire nation.

Yet one of the most contradictory expressions of racism surfaced when a plan to build a Catholic school in Camden received the support of a local residents' group that had marketed anti-Islamic school t-shirts with the slogan 'Keep Camden Rural'. The president of the Camden/Macarthur Residents' Group rejected the idea that his opposition was racist:

> 'Why is that racist? Why is it discriminatory? It's very simple: people like some things but don't like other things. Some of us like blondes, some of us like brunettes. Some of us like Fords, some of us like Holdens. Why is it xenophobic just because I want to make a choice? If I want to like some people and not like other people, that's the nature of the beast' (Creagh 2008).

The media spokesperson for this group quickly denied that they were racist, arguing that he would support a Muslim school if it was on a different site; he was sick of the opposition being branded as 'racism' (*PM* 2008b), and that Muslims, the Greens and the 'politically correct' owed the people of Camden an apology (Dart & Creagh 2008). Yet only months earlier, this spokesperson denied that any Muslims lived in Camden and raised concerns that Muslims will be the majority in Camden should an Islamic school be established. 'Only a town with no self-esteem or pride in its cultural and community past would not greatly resist a "Muslim takeover"' (Wannet 2007:8). The arguments of 'keeping Camden rural' did not apply to a proposed Catholic school in the area, only a Muslim school received such opposition.

Radio shock-jock Alan Jones had denied racism in discussing the issue of Camden after reading about a ten year study conducted by Professor Kevin Dunn that exposed NSW to be the most 'racist state' in Australia. The article featured Professor Dunn commenting on the Camden controversy, mentioning that according to the research results, there was nothing different about the Camden area in comparison to other parts of NSW. The article also featured a young Muslim girl discussing an experience of racial discrimination, where she had been physically assaulted at Town Hall station (Price

2008). Without even examining the findings of the *Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project*, Jones immediately jumped on the defensive arguing that Australians are tolerant, ethnic groups weakened Australia, and claimed that certain migrants did not respect the Australian flag. According to Jones, the 'poor taxpaying Australian' in areas such as Camden was called a 'racist' for opening 'his [sic] mouth'. Here, the typical 'Aussie Battler' appeal that reflects exclusively masculine dimensions is posited against an image of the 'lazy migrant'. Jones concludes, '...that's not racism. That's called defending your own patch' (Jones 2008). The tone in this opinion piece was typically populist, designed to influence his audience. The contradictory position put forward by Jones vilified Muslims while he simultaneously claimed that he was tolerant. Mainstream Australians are disadvantaged, according to this view, because they are unable to react in a hostile and racist manner to minority groups without being accused of racism. Jones demonstrated an understanding that racism is something evil, and transformed an understanding of racism into defending the 'national interest'. Had Jones read the report, he would have perhaps understood the serious operations of racism in Australian cities. The findings of the study found that cities, which are areas of cultural diversity, are also places where racism is frequent. Such racisms are 'everyday' to the point where they are becoming a normalised practice, something 'expected or normal' (Dunn et al 2009:8). Perhaps the denial of racism, or the enthusiasm to deny racism, shadows the normalisation of racist views.

'I'm not a racist, but...'

As a concept, 'racism' carries negative undertones and any accusations of racism are not taken lightly. Also, the concept of racism has interchangeable moral and political undertones, where the claim that a view is racist denounces the view as 'immoral and unworthy' (Miles & Brown 2003:3). Being identified as 'a racist' is unattractive, so phrases like 'I'm not a racist, but…' are followed with a racialising perception. In the case of the United States an example would be '…I really resent it that all these Mexicans come up here to have babies so that American taxpayers will support them' (Hill 1998:683). Phrases such as this become clichéd to the point where the users of the phrase attempt to communicate something positive in defining a particular social group as a

problem (Hage 1998:184). In the aforementioned example, the 'something positive' is communicated through the phrase 'I'm not a racist, but...'. It is an attempt made by the speaker to establish a 'good character' before they vent out what could even be a soliloquy of racial hatred or perceptions. Also, it is an attempt to justify and normalise a racist view.

Charting the arguments of racism in the rhetoric opposing the proposed Islamic School in Camden is a complicated process. As a local resident expressed on *Q&A* that some of the environmental and planning objections against the school were covering racially motivated perspectives (*Q&A* 2008). The slogan 'Keep Camden Rural' used by the local residents' group was placed within a broader argument of environmental and town planning objections in order to dismiss racially motivated opposition. Interestingly, a Macarthur 'Greens' representative had assessed the proposed site and found it suitable, claiming that other groups overstated their environmental concerns (Bowie 2008:11). Yet various political actors from other parties, including Kevin Rudd in his election campaign before he became the current Prime Minister, opposed the proposal on environmental grounds (Kinsella 2007c:9). Since rumours of a proposed Catholic school in the same area circulated, the residents' group that upheld the 'Keep Camden Rural' slogan shifted their position on development applications in Camden (Creagh 2008). In light of this new proposal, the maintenance of Camden's semi-rural characteristic was not a priority any longer. The sudden disappearance of the need to 'Keep Camden Rural' highlights the perspective of the aforementioned local resident, where planning and environmental concerns appear selective, depending on the religious and racial background of the applicant. Here, there is no explicit racial vilification, what we see is differential treatment where one proposal sparks numerous petitions, 2 rallies, and over 3000 letters to the local council, and the other does not have such an impact.

In a context where anti-racism federal legislative measures override the powers of the states (Fenna 2004:179), racist attitudes have persisted despite the legislative anti-racism achievements. Several examples of the 'new racism' are identifiable in the case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden. Firstly, through the resurrection of stereotypes:

Muslims and Arabs have been constructed as incompatible with the existing White majority in Camden. Secondly, by couching their opposition within a 'nation's interest' rhetorical strategy, opponents have rejected a communal Australian identity that deviates away from an Anglo-European Christian mainstream. And thirdly, by asserting that such views have been 'unfairly' attacked as racist, the issues of existing mainstream privileges are overlooked with efforts to change the existing anti-vilification laws to remove any the legislative possibility of branding their views as racist. These adjustments have defined the concept of racism in a way that renders meaning as consisting of overt practices of discrimination, as highlighted in the White Australia policy era.

Ghassan Hage observes how racism operates as a nationally inclusive and exclusive practice. Views that are often understood as racist, such as a person labelling others 'wogs', telling them to go back to their own country, illustrate how a 'racist' attempts to 'direct traffic' within the national space, determining who is included and excluded (Hage 1998:17). By calling for a halt of Muslim immigration, or expressing a fear of an increase in the number of Arabs in the Macarthur district, certain opponents of the proposal have operated in the same way. As Hage observes, the practice of exclusion allows the patriotic nationalist to hold a superior position, perceiving themselves as 'spatial managers' who attempt to maintain a 'homely nation' (Hage 1998:47). By constructing the threat to Camden as an imminent 'Muslim takeover', Arabs and Islam were defined as 'Them', while the 'Us' associated themselves with mainstream Australia, holding a special position due to their religious backgrounds and racialised identities. This practice of directing traffic was achievable through the deviant constructions of 'Them' – the target of hostility

At the heart of the denial of racism in Camden were the stereotypes that made up the perceived threat. As various opponents draped themselves in the Australian flag and called for an end of Muslim immigration, hostile opinions towards the school relied on stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs that are not new within the Australian context (as explored by Poynting et al 2004 and Collins et al 2000). By constructing and stereotyping the Other as a dangerous patriarchal terrorist posing a threat to the Camden lifestyle, the

dismissal of racism was strengthened by these negative stigmatizations. Stereotypes benefit those who are not on the receiving end of stereotype-driven judgement. They also offer simplistic methods of judging people, allowing decisions to be made with minimal effort (Locke & Johnston 2001:109). Thus, the usage of stereotypes in the case of the Camden controversy allowed the opponent to both deny racism and demonise Muslims at the same time. Rumours that the proposed Islamic school in Camden is part of an attempt by Muslims to invade Camden, where crime rates were set to rise as a result of an increasing Arab and Muslim presence; and rumours that terrorist attacks were likely to occur, were clearly fuelled by stereotypes and the intensification of Islamophobia since the events of September 11th 2001. To be a non-prejudiced person means that one 'must exert mental energy to consciously inhibit the stereotype which has been automatically activated' (Locke & Johnston 2001:112), therefore the adherence to stereotypes in constructing the Muslim Other is a lazy approach to dealing with social differences. Certain opponents of the school made the effort to declare they were not racist, yet did not make the effort to question or rethink the logic of the stereotypes that shaped their opposition towards a school that would cater for children and youths.

Conclusion

The purpose of this investigation was not to encourage the stereotyping of all Camden residents as racists, rather, it was to analyse how racism was narrated in this recent controversy. Arguably, the absurd views expressed about the proposed school could be found in other parts of Australia. The case of the proposed Islamic school in Camden details how certain opponents of the proposal have either denied racism or have changed the meaning of racism to suit their views that appear to racially vilify Arabs and Muslims. The complexity and confusion within these arguments shows that the consequences of being overtly racist would discredit a particular view, yet little do such opponents of the proposal know that denying racism at the same time as being racist only discredits their arguments further. Thus, phrases such as 'I'm not a racist, but...' were commonly utilised in two methods attempting (1) to protect the opponent of being branded a naughty label – 'a racist', (2) to justify the racial and religious vilification of Muslims in Australia.

Only one media source shows an alternative racialised view in Camden. In arguing against the proposal, a local resident told a *Triple J TV* reporter that Australia is an easy going country and Muslims had no place here. When the reporter questioned whether the contents of her opinion were racist, the resident shrugged her shoulders and agreed that it was 'probably racist, yeah, but that's just the way it is' (*Hack TV* 2008). Unlike other arguments, this straight-to-the-point view was a minority view amongst the dominant views that attempted to dodge racism on this issue. The resident did not feel the need to protect herself from a 'naughty label', nor did she feel the need to establish that she had friends of different backgrounds to herself. While we assume that such blunt racism is becoming 'rare', we need to acknowledge that the insidious practices of new racisms are becoming much more frequent and dangerously normalised.

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