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HALAL CERTIFICATION UPROAR

The Muslim scapegoat as national safety valve

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Introduction

Halal food certification is a service provided by Islamic religious authorities to food manufacturers to certify that their processes and products meet the dietary and customary standards required by observant Muslims. Such processes consist of measures to guard against the presence of pork residues in manufacturing equipment, and the use of alcohol in cleaning processes—things considered 'haram' or forbidden. By its own testimony, the Australian Food and Industry Council considers third-party certification of this kind 'very common,' and groups halal food certification in with kosher food certification and the National Heart Foundation's 'Tick' logo (Australian Food and Grocery Council n.d.).

As a typical form of food certification, the halal variety also has comparable economic benefits, not least of which is its potential to open doors for local Australian foodstuff manufacturers to major export markets in predominantly Islamic countries, an industry the Australian Department of Agriculture valued at AUD$31.8 billion in 2012–2013 (Australian Government, Department of Agriculture 2014). The world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia, is not only one of Australia's regional neighbours but also the third largest destination for Australian food exports. In 2012–2013, their combined value was AUD$2.4 billion (Australian Food and Grocery Council n.d.). Of this, live animals and wheat, traditional Australian exports, were AUD$302 million and AUD$1.2 billion respectively. The value of manufactured foodstuffs was around AUD$900 million, coming second only to wheat (Australian Food and Grocery Council n.d.). The value of the export market for Australian manufactured foodstuffs is considerable; where Muslim countries such as Indonesia are concerned, halal food certification plays a vital part (Benns 2015).

Other issues associated with traditional Australian exports further highlight the importance and potential value of halal food certification. The live export trade, for example, continues despite protracted negative publicity due to its endemic animal cruelty; critics have cited the halal slaughter of sheep and cattle as a viable alternative. The replacement of the live-export trade with halal-certified meat exports represents a potential AUD$1.5 billion addition to the

Australian GDP—40,000 jobs in the meat industry alone (Animals Australia 2015). Meriting additional consideration is the fact that this figure only refers to one country, Indonesia. Total exports to all Muslim nations including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia currently represent 16 per cent of total Australian food exports, or about AUD$5 billion. Proportionate increases in exports to these countries based on expansion of halal-certified meat exports suggest a potential overall increase in the total volume of Australian goods exports of at least AUD$1.49 billion (Australian Food and Grocery Council n.d.). Again this is only the figure for the meat industry; the total export figure of all halal-certified foods is potentially higher again.

The potential economic benefits to Australian industry from a more culturally sensitive engagement with Asia notwithstanding, halal food certification has come to be seen by some as evidence of subversion of 'the Australian way of life' at the hands of a permissive political correctness imposed on public discourse by willing dupes of creeping Sharia law, or extremist proponents of terrorism, or both. In one notable example, the Fleurieu Milk and Yoghurt Company was temporarily forced to drop a contract worth $50,000 to supply Emirates Airlines following aggressive social media campaigning (ABC News 2014, 2015). Within these discriminatory and increasingly extreme narratives, the 'Australian way of life' is necessarily defined in binary terms that exclude Islam as such, and racialise both in doing so, while those who invoke them insist unconvincingly that they are not racist. This chapter will examine such notions within the context of widening social inequality within Australian society and examine the extent to which scare mongering over halal certification plays in making scapegoats of Muslims in that context in particular.

Halal controversy

Opposition to halal food certification tends mostly to come in the form of various claims regarding the 'Islamification' of Australian society and the funding of terrorism. A good representative of such views is the website, *Halal Choices*, created and maintained by Kirralie Smith, a Pentecostal Christian whose prior claims to absolute truth deny the need for anything in the way of supporting evidence, and whose extremism draws on the most hateful aspects of the same kind of fundamentalist single-mindedness she claims to oppose in Islam. Like many who share her beliefs, Smith's approach is the logical equivalent of trying to establish the pretence that the Westboro Baptist Church are representative of all Christians:

> A woman's testimony is worth half of a man's. You need four male witnesses to prove rape. Underage children can be married. A non-Muslim's testimony is not equal to a Muslims. You can't criticise Islam, the Qur'an or Mohammed … Reports of young couples being maimed tortured and even slaughtered because they were together in the same house without a chaperone. Child brides. Beheaded journalists. 2000 massacred.
>
> *(Smith 2015)*

Commentary of this kind furthermore tends to promote the idea that massacres, beheadings, child brides, maiming, torturing and beheading, reactionary values, misogyny, and child abuse are unique to Islam. Mountains of evidence to the contrary notwithstanding (see for example, Cohn 1993; Ellerbe 1995), Halal Choices attempts to imitate the consumer portal *Choice* by purporting to provide the public with impartial information relating to food products bearing halal certification, while lacking anything of the latter's objectivity. Noting

correctly that 'Halal simply means permitted or lawful' (Halal Choices 2011a), Halal Choices also claims incorrectly that Halal certification 'must comply with the religious ritual and observance of Sharia law' and that it is based on 'ritual sacrifice' (Halal Choices 2011a).

While the source of this notion of ritual sacrifice remains a mystery, the emotive language used conjures images of the Temple of Doom featured in the *Indiana Jones* movie franchise. Similar ideas appear via its claim that, 'all of the halal certification organisations are operating under sharia law and desire for sharia law to be accepted as a part of our mainstream society,' and that 'Money that is paid out in fees for halal certification is used to fund in part or whole the push for Sharia Law in Australia' (Halal Choices 2011b).

This latter claim is unique to the extent that Halal Choices does make an attempt to evidence it, which they do by quoting Siddiq Buckley, the secretary of the Australian Islamic Mission in Sydney:

> There are practical examples of [Sharia] here already. We have Muslim schools, mosques, funeral parlours, shops and businesses. We've got abattoirs, Islamic charities, Islamic financial institutions. There are so many things—halal meals served on airlines. This is all part of Sharia.
>
> *(Halal Choices 2011b)*

Halal Choices presents this quote as self-evident vindication, though it can just as easily be taken to mean that Islamic religious practice is evident in the variety of forms to which Buckley refers. More significantly, it can be taken as pointing out that Sharia is already present in Australian society, without any of the anticipated heinous consequences. Either way, the narrative from Halal Choices suggests that existence of Islamic communities of necessity signifies an expansionist plot, without any supporting evidence beyond the desire and will to believe. The fact that this quote is the only evidence Halal Choices bothers to present in support of its claims, coupled with the fact that it does so in such a way as to rely on the willingness of the audience to make connections that don't exist, reflects much about its attitude to facts.

Similar attitudes appear in a blog post from North Queensland Tory MP George Christensen entitled *Terror in the Tucker Box* (Hussein 2014). In this post, Christensen asks, 'Are groceries in Australian trolleys funding a push for Sharia law, supporting jihad groups or even backing terrorist activity?' (Christensen 2014), again without making any attempt to provide supporting evidence to demonstrate that his fears are grounded and that there is a tangible difference between them and scaremongering or panicked overreacting, claims that 'consumers are totally justified in calling for more information on halal certification because we need to know where the money's going' (Christensen 2014). In this instance the circular logic presumes guilt, needing to know where the money is going being a natural corollary of the reversal of the burden of proof, and thus suspicion on the basis of nothing other than sheer prejudice provides all the probable cause required for prior justification of the need for a campaign of scapegoating as a matter of definition (Kawakami, Dion & Dovidio 1998).

Christensen's own lack of respect for basic standards of evidence notwithstanding, he weighs in against 'the politically correct commentariat' who 'have gone into full outrage mode over their concerns, sneering at those worried about halal certification as unintelligent and racist'— though Christensen's own sneering at the 'politically correct commentariat' for their audacity in describing him as unintelligent and racist goes without comment, a fact that belies his playing the victim (see Bandura 1999). The circular logic upon which Christensen's attacks on the 'halal bandwagon' depend becomes even more obvious in a complaint about

the purported propensity of the media to 'point to a bumper sticker displayed by some anti-halal activists—"Halal food funds terrorism"—as proof in itself that the anti-halal movement are extremists and not worthy of being taken seriously.' The rejoinder Christensen offers adds nothing new whatsoever to the debate. 'But, seriously,' he says, 'who knows where the money from halal certification is going?' (Christensen 2014).

South Australian Senator Cory Bernardi is another leader of the campaign against halal certification, having described it incorrectly on his own website as a 'religious tax' (Bernardi 2015). Bernardi, whose views on Muslims and Islam are so unpalatable even for conservatives that former Prime Minister Tony Abbott felt the need to distance himself from them, complains via his website that 'it's fair to say that there is a lack of clarity about where the facts end and the fiction begins in relation to halal certification' (Bernardi 2015). In and of itself, this comment is true enough— though Bernardi reveals himself to be the primary reason for that, proceeding directly to demonstrate why by systematically misrepresenting the nature of halal certification, claiming in the first place that 'halal certification schemes have been used to fund organisations linked to proscribed extremist organisations' (Bernardi 2015). In the second, Bernardi (2015) claims that 'we also know it has operated effectively as a religious tariff in order for Australian products to gain entry into certain markets.' In the third, he claims that products certified halal have been 'subject to ritual slaughter' (Bernardi 2015). All of these claims appear in one blog post, which perhaps unsurprisingly links back to Halal Choices. This is the sum total of attempts by Bernardi to substantiate his claims with anything approaching empirical evidence; as in the case of George Christensen, they are presented as self-evidently true on the basis of a prior assumption of superior insight— so superior that it need not be demonstrated. In any event it demonstrably is not, as Bernardi's own Senate inquiry later determined (Parliament of Australia 2015). This does not stop him from continuing to publish his disproven claims on his website, which features the slogan 'common sense lives here' in large red letters.

In contrast to Cory Bernardi's highly politicised interpretation of common sense, Andrew Bolt briefly sounds almost objective. 'Some of the attacks on halal certification are ugly,' (Bolt 2015) the Murdoch columnist concedes. 'No, there is no evidence this is cash for terrorism … No, a halal sticker on a bottle of no-alcohol beer is not the start of sharia law,' (Bolt 2015) he admits. 'And,' he notes finally, 'Muslims have every right to know which foods are prepared in accordance with their faith, just as Jews are entitled to know which foods are kosher' (Bolt 2015). As it turns out, Bolt's comparison of the Islamophobic targeting of halal certification and the anti-Semitic targeting of kosher methods of animal slaughter has more than a passing relevance. Julius Streicher, editor of the Nazi tabloid *Der Stürmer*, devoted the entire May 1934 issue to the subject in an attempt to establish a link between kosher methods of animal slaughter and purported Jewish habits of ritual murder (Judd 2007; Sax 2000). He accused German Jews of using ritual murder of Christians as a means of securing their blood for use in their own religious rituals under a headline reading, 'Jewish Murder Plan against Gentile Humanity Revealed' (Bytwerk 1998; Judd 2007). Bizarrely however, Bolt backtracks despite having just made this link, as if he was only doing so to try to establish the pretence of having a handle on both sides of the debate; repudiating everything he has just said, Bolt (2015) asserts in the face of patent evidence to the contrary that he himself has just established that 'the profit-taking and the secrecy over the funds raised are unacceptable' (Bolt 2015)— because scaremongering in the present over halal certification is comparable to historical scaremongering over kosher certification.

Its logical shortcomings notwithstanding, Cory Bernardi was able in 2015 to establish on the basis of the above trains of thought a Senate inquiry into third-party certification of

foodstuffs, which as the ABC noted 'unleashed a torrent of hate' (ABC News 2014) in the form of 220 submissions containing what they describe as 'vicious attacks on Muslims and the Islamic faith' (Gartrell 2015). This inquiry concluded (Parliament of Australia 2015), having found 'insufficient evidence' that halal certification drives up food prices, that there is no imposition of religion on consumers because halal certification involves no religious rituals, and confirmation via the Australian Crime Commission of 'no direct link between halal certification in Australia and the funding of terrorism' (Brull 2015). As Charlie Pickering put it on *The Weekly*, 'the people who you pay to tell you if something is a terrorism, say this is not a terrorism' (cited in Chalmers 2015). *New Matilda* summarises this episode as the 'Little Halal Truther Campaign That Couldn't' (Brull 2015).

The national safety valve

Historian Frank Van Nuys describes institutionalised racism of the kind that became the impetus for the Bernardi-led 2015 Senate inquiry as a 'national safety valve'—one that has functioned historically to neutralise class antagonisms within capitalism (Van Nuys 2002). As Van Nuys (2002) points out, the utility of the 'national safety valve' derived in the main from its potential as a means of shifting the blame for the tensions produced by such things as increasing wealth inequality, and the ability of moneyed cliques to dominate the political process and turn it ever more to the service of their own vested interests, onto minorities too numerically weak to organise effective opposition.

The dynamics of the national safety valve are visible throughout Australian history, especially in terms of what Roediger (1991) refers to as 'the wages of whiteness.' This phenomenon references a comment by famed black abolitionist W.E.B. Du Bois regarding a 'public and psychological wage' paid to white majorities amongst subject classes (Roediger 1991). Such privileging of dominant ethnicities offset resistance to class rule through the age-old social engineering strategy of divide and conquer, favouring white workers ahead of their nonwhite counterparts with token privileges to encourage loyalty to class-based social hierarchy. As a means of shifting the blame for the injustices associated with the European colonisation of Australia, it was in the interests of the colonists to assume along with Daisy Bates that their fundamental role was to 'smooth the pillow of a dying race.'

In this respect, the racism that manifest as benevolent paternalism greased the wheels of land theft and genocide by enabling the racist myth that the inhabitants were racially inferior heathens and savages who needed saving from themselves and 'civilising'; white supremacy enabled the white invaders to morally disengage from their historical crime and reconstruct their theft of the land as a moral action carried out in the best interests of its victims. To this way of thinking, it was the fault of the original inhabitants for not having taken the land as property and cultivated it that entitled Europeans to apply their morality selectively (Davies, Nandy & Sardar 1993; Deckard 2009). Bringing civilisation to the Australian continent meant killing and enslaving the Indigenous inhabitants, usurping their sovereignty, destroying their culture and civilisation, stealing the land, and inventing a racist ideology to justify it by way of blaming the victims after the fact (Connor 2002; Pascoe 2014).

Historically speaking, however, appeals to whiteness through racism and xenophobia had not always been the foremost means of guaranteeing the stability of the class order. In the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, westward expansion into frontier territory was represented as (and did indeed represent) a far more attractive proposition to many European settlers than protracted labour disputes in the East. As long as workers subject to the autocratic hierarchies inherent to capitalist relations of production still had other options and could

retain their economic independence, the steam could be taken out of class conflict. As long as land was available this arrangement worked well enough, but westward expansion was ultimately finite. As the availability of frontier territory fell into decline towards the end of the nineteenth century, so too did its capacity to function as the 'national safety valve,' and a marked increase in labour struggles resulted (Van Nuys 2002; Brecher 2014).

The switch to racism was, in that sense, inevitable. If subject populations of black people, collectively subject historically to crimes against humanity such as the institution of chattel slavery, were poor, according to this mentality, it was because they were lazy and stupid. In such notions was a 'public and psychological wage' for every white worker, permitted credulity, negativity, hatefulness, slavishness, sanctimoniousness, and cruelty in the name of a pious moralistic vanity (Harris 1993). Similarly, in the case of what might be termed 'the wages of patriarchy,' and just as the minority of the opulent could pay a 'public and psychological wage' to the white working class, so too could they pay another to the male working class, regardless of ethnicity, thereby dividing it along the gender line as well as the colour one. The 'wages of patriarchy' paid to male workers in the idea that women were subordinate to men, served just as well as those of 'whiteness' to encourage an abusive relationship of emotional and psychological codependency and capture bonding within a system of class domination and exploitation.

Either form of 'public and psychological wage' or both in combination were often effective in neutralising constructive responses to class antagonism that, channelled into labour organising and social struggle, could have produced meaningful change. In this way did payment of the 'wages of privilege' provide a strategy for the political establishment to avoid accountability for its leading role in creating and exacerbating wealth inequality and all that encompassed in terms of social misery. By creating scapegoats out of the greatest victims and privileging various groups within the subject classes along multiple fault lines of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability, amongst others, political classes ruling in the name of defending the minority of the opulent could, in the words of Cheryl Harris (1993: 1742), utilise the great national safety value in 'evading rather than confronting class exploitation.' It could provide a safe outlet for passions that otherwise threatened to undermine the stability of the class-based system and motivate slaves both owned and rented to revolt against their masters, while encouraging them to identify with them on the basis of superficial characteristics rather than their fellow workers on the basis of concrete material interests (Marx 1849).

Viewed from this perspective, the enduring value to societies riven by class tensions of an entire spectrum of prejudices that would eventually also come to take aim at Islam and halal food preparation is more apparent. The bribes for the white working class in the form of token privileges from the white ruling class are not and can never be enough to constitute their emancipation from the alienating character of a society divided into classes of haves and have-nots. Nevertheless, issues such as the continuing gap in living standards and life expectancy between Indigenous and European Australians can be explained away as personal shortcomings rather than the products of the historical legacy of dispossession, genocide, and oppression which also accounts in the intersection of privileges and oppressions for their own misery, alienation, and oppression— another example of blame-shifting that feeds into the collective vanity of Anglo-capitalism.

The national safety valve and authoritarian psychology

The willingness of the white working class to perpetuate the basic assumptions on which European settler colonialism was founded and is perpetrated, even when it meant colluding in

their own exploitation and helping those responsible 'evade rather than confront class exploitation' is a question that has fascinated social psychologists for decades. In trying to come to terms with the dynamic of the 'national safety valve,' they have sought to understand not only what motivates some individuals to construct authoritarian systems, but what also motivates others to support them. In trying to develop a response to this question, Wilhelm Reich, a former student of Freud's in Germany and a practising psychoanalyst in Austria, prepared a number of treatments of the subject, most notable amongst which was *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (Reich 1970).

Something of a mechanist, Reich (1970) argued that moralistic repression of all the personal drives towards individual assertion and self-fulfilment, be they physical or existential, diverted such energies instead into service of the totalitarian state. For the loyal subject of the Nazi state, Reich (1970) declared, the stereotype of the Jew provided a suitable scapegoat for its destruction of their individuality, and war a suitable outlet for otherwise frustrated energies (ideas adroitly conceptualised in the song *Wargasm* by US rock band L7). With these aspects of Nazi social engineering taken care of and the bread and circuses arranged to keep the peasants from revolting, Hitler was able to bring the entire nation of Germany behind a militaristic project that resulted comprehensively in its destruction.

More relevant today than the more mechanistic of Reich's theories was his observation that the dynamics driving the Nazi war machine were anything but limited to Germany in the 1930s. They were, on the contrary, he argued, a dangerously acute example of psychological and emotional tendencies far more pervasive in individual human subjectivity. 'Fascism', Reich (1970: ix) wrote,

> is the only politically organized expression of the average human character structure … In this characteristic sense, 'fascism' is the basic emotional attitude of man in authoritarian society, with its machine civilization and its mechanistic-mystical view of life.

There was, in other words, a little bit of Hitler in all of us— various attempts to portray the Nazi leader as somehow something other than human, as opposed to someone who was in reality all too human, notwithstanding.

Another German, Erich Fromm, reached similar conclusions. A student of Jung, Fromm (2001) took a far less mechanistic approach to studying authoritarian psychology. He argued in books such as *The Fear of Freedom* (2001) that the power of totalitarian regimes derived in the main, not so much from the repression of personal physical drives, but from the inculcation and development of a relationship of emotional attachment to and dependence on authority. Many, Fromm (2001) found, had essentially the same kind of relationship with the state and with religious hierarchies that they had with abusive codependents in the personal sphere—a kind of capture-bonding or 'Stockholm Syndrome,' in essence. 'Frequently, and not only in the popular usage, sadomasochism is confounded with love' (Fromm 2001), he observed.

> Masochistic phenomena, especially, are looked upon as expressions of love. An attitude of complete self-denial for the sake of another person and the surrender of one's own rights and claims to another person have been praised as examples of 'great love'. It seems that there is no better proof for 'love' than sacrifice and the readiness to give oneself up for the sake of the beloved person. Actually, in these

> cases, 'love' is essentially a masochistic yearning and rooted in the symbiotic need of the person involved.
>
> *(Fromm 2001)*

This was as true where love of the fatherland and the spiritual father was concerned as in the case of dysfunctional personal relationships. Not only were these kinds of codependent political relationships ruinous of happiness, well-being, and the capacity of people to function effectively as individuals, Fromm (2001) argued, but they were also destructive of their ability to function outside of them. The longer they lasted, the harder it was to leave; subjective dynamics of this have in more recent times been studied in the form, on the one hand, of prison institutionalisation, and on the other, in anthropological studies of slave psychology. In his summary of the nature of prison institutionalisation, Craig Haney (2003) notes that

> in the course of becoming institutionalized, a transformation begins. Persons gradually become more accustomed to the restrictions that institutional life imposes. The various psychological mechanisms that must be employed to adjust (and, in some harsh and dangerous correctional environments, to survive) become increasingly 'natural,' second nature, and, to a degree, internalized … The process of institutionalization is facilitated in cases in which persons enter institutional settings at an early age, before they have formed the ability and expectation to control their own life choices. Because there is less tension between the demands of the institution and the autonomy of a mature adult, institutionalization proceeds more quickly and less problematically with at least some younger inmates. Moreover, younger inmates have little in the way of already developed independent judgment, so they have little if anything to revert to or rely upon if and when the institutional structure is removed. And the longer someone remains in an institution, the greater the likelihood that the process will transform them.

Along similar lines, Wyatt-Brown (1988) noted of slave psychology that 'Internalization of the master's values was often so complete that slaves ignored opportunities to escape.'

> Josiah Henson, a slave who eventually escaped to freedom, lamented that in his youth he, like other country blacks, had long assumed the legitimacy of his own bondage. Moving his property prior to a sheriff's sale, his master had assigned Henson to guide some eighteen slaves from Virginia to Kentucky. 'My pride was aroused in view of the importance of my responsibility, and heart and soul I became identified with my master's project of running off his negroes.' Even though they floated past the wharves of Cincinnati, where crowds of free blacks urged them to flee, Henson suppressed excited talk of freedom. As he sadly recalled, he 'had a sentiment of honor on the subject'. Accustomed to obedience and 'too degraded and ignorant of the advantages of liberty to know what they were forfeiting', the crew heeded his orders, and the barge journeyed southward.
>
> *(Wyatt-Brown 1988: 1237)*

In both cases, the result was repressed, dogmatic, rigid, and inflexible personalities, people who were fearful of their own shadow, paralysed by terror in the face of meaningful freedom. For them, real freedom was tantamount to rejection or abandonment from their codependent idol, and no less painful a prospect. Nevertheless, and despite its patent dysfunctionality, this

condition also had its uses insofar as 'the more the drive toward life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive toward destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destructiveness' (Fromm 2001: 207). The fact that 'destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life' was a potential source of all sorts of energy for someone who knew how to channel it.

For political manipulators who stood to gain from taking advantage of the capture bonding potentialities associated with authoritarian psychology, the logical move was to encourage them as much as possible; but they were missing a way to 'hook' potential victims. This was the point at which they discovered the utility of appeals to whiteness, arguably the basis of racism and the value of the national safety valve historically and in the present day. In geographically isolated Australia, the appeal to whiteness historically speaking took the form of xenophobia and a bellicose nativist movement demanding assimilation into a white Christian monoculture. In this instance, the right to invade the Australian subcontinent and impose an alien culture on the locals is reserved exclusively for white Europeans, a fact that serves to account for the cognitive dissonance surrounding the campaign against halal certification in that respect in particular.

Whiteness and moral panic

Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (2013) argue that misinformation campaigns of the kind developed around halal certification are indicative of the dynamics associated with moral panics, or episodes when society is overwhelmed by fears of one or another 'existential threat' to its existence (Cohen 2011). Relying for justification on prior attachment to prejudice to give weight to overblown fears and the irrational attitudes of attachment to authority to encourage cognitive biases (Kawakami et al. 1998; Bess 2016), these campaigns against immigrants act 'as a perverse legitimation of inexpressible fear and anguish … What is taking place is only secondarily an expression of prejudice' (Seabrook 1973: 57).

> It is first and foremost a therapeutic psychodrama in which the emotional release of the protagonists takes precedence over what is actually being said. It is an expression of their pain and powerlessness confronted by the decay and dereliction, not only of their familiar environment, but of their own lives too—an expression for which our society provides no outlet. Certainly it is something more complex and deep-rooted than what the metropolitan liberal evasively and easily dismisses as prejudice.
>
> *(Hall et al. 2013: 158).*

In this sense, the anti-halal campaign in particular, in addition to being a particularly demonstrative example of the absurd extremes of Islamophobic prejudice, is also indicative of what sociologists call the 'production of deviance,' the core principle behind moral panic (Cohen 2011; Oplinger 1990). Deviance being subjective, and what is regarded as deviant socially is a result of who has the power to define the meaning of the term and impose that definition on public discourse, not of any attribute of anyone thus labelled. Therapeutic psychodrama cum production of deviance over halal certification demonises Muslims for existing and aims to polarise public opinion in the interests of establishing a pretext for ideologically driven scapegoating and persecution. Muslims are blamed for things like high food prices and the unresponsiveness of purportedly democratic governments, real problems created by a neoliberal economic regime that serves the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the rest of us, but for which the former do not find it convenient to be accountable.

As is typical of moral panics, the perceived problem of halal food certification is linked to xenophobic fears of creeping Sharia law—a textbook example of 'convergence' or 'stereotype

priming' (Blair & Banaji, 1996; Sassenberg & Moskowitz 2005), another moral panic-associated phenomenon, the wedge issue becomes an ideological justification for bigotry via the whiteness-based binary between 'Islam' and 'the Australian way of life.' Blair and Banaji (1996: 1158) find that 'automatic processes may be involved in stereotyping is disturbing because such processes reveal the potential to perpetuate prejudice and discrimination independently of more controlled and intentional forms of stereotyping.'

> For example, because people may be either unaware of the automatic influences on their behavior or believe that they have adequately adjusted for those influences, they may misattribute their (stereotypic) response to more obvious or seemingly justifiable causes, *such as attributes of the target*.
>
> *(Blair & Banaji 1996: 1159 [emphasis added]).*

Such is a classic form of deviance production, the building block of moral panics. In a similar vein, the Murdoch press in particular does this by using emotive language ('evil,' 'vile,' 'menacing,' 'wicked') to demonise Muslims and turn them into deviants for propaganda purposes, using the mechanism of 'convergence' to link 'folk devils' to perceived threats to a racially charged status quo and build momentum behind a scare campaign (Morgan & Poynting 2016: 258). Journalist Neil Doyle, whom the UK *Sun* described as a 'terrorism expert,' primes readers to accept further stereotyping by scaring them with language such as the following: 'Abu Hamza [an Egyptian imam imprisoned in the United States on terrorism charges] might be out of action but in many ways, he's already completed his mission … there's a jihad army in this country and that's thanks to Hamza and others like him' (quoted in Morgan & Poynting 2016: 266).

The anti-halal campaign performs the same role, linking food labelling to economic aid for 'terrorism' amongst a population already on edge. The degeneration of popular fears into moral panic reflects the deployment of whiteness narratives associated with the national safety valve on the one hand, and the dynamics of capture bonding associated with those narratives, themselves born of authoritarian psychology, on the other. The resulting power relationship is not substantially different from a standover racket. On the one hand, the population is told a threat to their safety exists. On the other, the violent ideology of racism and white supremacism menaces anyone who dares to challenge its fundamental precepts, which being rooted in authoritarianism are incapable of tolerating doubt or free discussion, while offering 'protection' to those who accept them unquestioningly. Rather than freeing themselves from fear, they become permanent prisoners of it.

Conclusion

Australia, like the rest of the world, faces increasingly dire social, economic, and environmental crises as varied as the widening gap between rich and poor and its damaging effects on Australian democracy, trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, our victimisation of refugees, the ever-increasing threat of runaway climate change, and the bleeding sore of race relations in Australia stemming from white invasion. In the face of these issues, scapegoating by opinion makers in government and the corporate media derails rational and dispassionate public debate, and imposes a false binary between the Australian way of life and Islam, as noted above.

This strategy invariably racialises both and undermines democratic norms. Ironically enough, people who buy into this false binary and the bizarre conspiracy theories associated with it, almost uniformly fail to notice all the support they give to extremists like the

Wahhabist Saudi Royal Family every time they fill up their car at the petrol station (Butt 2015). Such facts only draw into relief the pettiness and vindictiveness of the reaction to halal food certification, demonstrating not only the resounding ignorance informing the campaign but also its terminal hypocrisy. The need of its defenders to make use of the 'national safety valve' to defend their way of life only reveals in the latter the abandonment of reason, respect for the rights of others, and democratic values of pluralism and freedom of conscience in defence of class privilege.

Furthermore, and no less significantly, it also highlights the specifically Australian context for the authoritarian dynamics underwriting the anti-halal campaign—what is generally referred to as 'dog-whistling.' The prevalence of this kind of capture-bonding politics seems more appropriate for Australia of the penal colony period; if Australia as a penal colony was essentially an open-air prison, and the early convicts were subject to the same authoritarian dynamics of brutalisation, institutionalisation, and emotional dependence on authority, then this would seem to account at least in part for the virulence of racism as expressed in things such as the anti-halal campaign. Merely federating and declaring a democracy does not make such dynamics go away, any more than it does the crimes that accompanied European colonisation. On the contrary, the existence of the campaign against halal certification as a national safety valve and a public and psychological wage to the white working class, suggests that, as a populace, we are institutionalised, yet it also suggests that the bars of the penal colony remain—the only real difference being that they have migrated into our heads. The greatest difference between past and present prisons, where the white working class is concerned in particular, is the amount of space, as it were, between the bars.

If all of this follows, the great irony of the scare campaign against halal certification as a manifestation of the 'national safety valve,' and as an expression of capture bonding and authoritarian mass psychology expressed in the language of moral panic, derives from its great potential to do damage to growth industries that might be a source of employment for many of those who respond to the politics of scapegoating. By giving in to the politics of scapegoating and crisis leverage, those who embrace the anti-halal scare campaign and others like it bring about themselves the damaging outcomes they are told will happen if halal certification is allowed to go ahead. Having so much at stake demonstrates something of the danger posed by the baseless conspiracy theories promoted by the likes of Smith, Christensen, Bernardi, and others of their ilk. Their scaremongering over halal food certification, deployed as national safety valves using the dark arts of capture bonding and stereotype priming, ultimately benefits only them insofar as it serves their privilege, while their underprivileged supporters amongst the general population are forced to bear the consequences of social injustice, the victims of all of the above in Muslim Australia doubly so.

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