THE RACIST 'NOT RACISM' NATURE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA WITHIN THE RECLAIM AUSTRALIA MOVEMENT

Ryan AL-NATOUR
School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University,
Bathurst (Wiradjuri Country), Australia

This article tracks the Islamophobia within the Reclaim Australia movement. The movement organized several anti-Muslim rallies in regional and urban areas across Australia. The formation of this movement in 2015 was entirely based on anti-Muslim racism, as the movement's pioneers gained traction through their interactions with white supremacist groups. The nature of the movement's Islamophobia had illustrated how Reclaim Australia's proponents saw their racism as indistinguishable from celebrating Australian patriotism. This article uncovers how an explicitly racist movement commonly argued that their anti-Muslim positions were 'not racism', revealing how denial is at the heart of contemporary Islamophobia. Within these 'not racism' narratives, Reclaim Australia enthusiasts utilized strategies that both mobilize notions of race and then denied such mobilization.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, a movement called 'Reclaim Australia' organized anti-Muslim rallies that took place across several capital cities and regional centers. These rallies involved activism from a variety of diverse stakeholders and extreme right groups who united under a similar Islamophobic chant. The genesis of this movement was inspired by a social media page created by three white Australians who shared several racist interpretations of the Lindt Café Siege of 2014.[1] Whilst there has been a history of sieges within the Australian context, the trio claimed that the events at the Lindt Café introduced a unique form of violence into the Australian landscape as a result of Islamic immigration.[2] The trio created a social media page called 'Reclaim Australia' which attracted the attention of a notorious white supremacist named Shermon Burgess who led a far-right group called the United Patriots Front (UPF). Burgess circulated Reclaim Australia's social media page among several neo-Nazi and white supremacist circles, and the movement gained immense traction as proponents joined and

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even organized rallies in their towns/cities. The movement had successfully assembled in several areas, including Adelaide, Bendigo, Brisbane, Cairns, Canberra, Darwin, Gold Coast, Harvey Bay, Melbourne, Milton, Newcastle, Perth, Rockhampton, Sydney, Toowoomba, and Townsville. Rally participants waved patriotic items such as the Australian flag and similar paraphernalia in a bid to narrate their protest as an act of nationalism in response to a perceived Islamic invasion. Each rally resembled an Australia Day celebration that was flavored with fierce expressions of anti-Muslim racism. The signs at these rallies usually featured statements such as 'Ban Islam', 'Ban the Burqa', 'Ban Sharia law' 'Ban Halal foods', 'Right wing resistance', 'Assimilate or leave', 'It's not racist to criticize Islam', 'Love Australia or leave it' and 'Islam is not a race.' Hussein noted how protestors argued that this supposed invasion was occurring through: Muslim immigration; the establishment of mosques and Islamic schools; the existence of halal foods in Australia; a perception that Muslims planned to implement Sharia law, beheadings, and force all women to wear 'burqas.'[3] Morsi argued that the sentiments of this movement originated from 'a social imaginary of Australia under attack, which is inundated with images of a violent Islam', enabling the dominant white nation to articulate its power and sense of self.[4] Evidently, several racist stereotypes about Muslims informed the ways enthusiasts would narrate their protest.[5] Participants were a diverse group of stakeholders ranging from passionately anti-Muslim lone self-describing 'apolitical' individuals, political candidates and politicians from the center right to ultraconservatives, community organizations that were set up to protest mosques and Islamic schools, a culturally diverse Evangelical Creationist group, and neo-Nazi and white supremacist splinter groups.[6] While the movement dissolved within a year, some Reclaim Australia enthusiasts had sent out death threats to people in the Muslim community. Anti-Islamic activist Paul Barnes who organized a rally in Darwin had sent a death threat to a Sydney Muslim Human Rights lawyer, Mariam Veiszadeh. Also, one of the participants at the Sydney rally was charged with threatening to slit Veiszadeh's throat.[7] Veiszadah wrote of how Reclaim Australia's participants harassed and tried to intimidate her:

Whether it was the images of me cuddling a decapitated pig's head, with a message that they'd behead my mother and me and busy us with pigs, or the one that depicted me being stoned to death, alone with a cropped image of me lying dead on the floor, with rocks surrounding me and photoshopped blood dripping down my cheeks, they were utterly sickening...Following the rise of the Reclaim Australia movement, my name, images and tweets were increasingly being used in their propaganda. Suddenly I had become the epitome of the Australian Muslim...in the lead-up to the second round of Reclaim Australia rallies across the country, a self-declared Reclaim Australia supporter sent me death threats.[8]

In spite of the ample evidence of blatant anti-Muslim racism, the overwhelming majority of participants insisted that their motivations were 'not racist', rather merely 'patriotic' – which is of interest in this paper.

A crescendo of anti-Muslim racism in recent decades had foreshadowed the formation of Reclaim Australia. Within this movement, the expressions of Islamophobia involve exercises of celebrating white colonial patriotism while championing anti-Muslim hatred. Within this terrain, I argue that proponents of the Reclaim Australia movement mobilized narratives

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of 'not racism' to legitimize destructive and incorrect definitions of race and racism in ways that pursue to normalize anti-Muslim hatred. These 'not racism' narratives involve several 'gotcha' strategies that function to inject the movement with Islamophobic agency, enabling Reclaim Australia enthusiasts to misconstrue what race is, and further racialize Muslims while denying this process. I firstly unpack how Islamophobia played out within this movement as an expression of white colonial patriotism. Secondly, I explore how 'not racism' narratives seek to redefine anti-Muslim racism as mere patriotic expressions and 'genuine' concerns. In the final section, I use the term 'gotcha' strategies to describe how the movement's 'not racism' involves several simplistic-based understandings of racism that uphold Islamophobia.

ISLAMOPHOBIA AS A CELEBRATION OF COLONIAL PATRIOTISM

The above description of Reclaim Australia's genesis highlighted how rally participants responded to a perceived threat of an 'Islamic invasion' by expressing themes of colonial patriotism. The demonization of Muslims as a threat to Australia exposed how the movement's Islamophobia also involved the affirmation of settlerhood. Before exploring the particulars involved in this celebration of colonial patriotism and commemorating white Australian settlerhood, it is important to investigate what is Islamophobia and the particular shapes it took within the movement. As Abdel-Fattah (2018) argues, Islamophobia needs to be understand within the 'context of Australia's histories and logics of racial exclusion, thinking and expression.'[9] It is common to find scholarly and leftist arguments that define anti-Muslim violence, rhetoric and actions as Islamophobia, and in the post 9/11 era there is an increasing scholarly investigation commonly exploring how Islamophobia manifests itself in various ways across the world today.[10] Many scholars and commentators use the term Islamophobia in the broad and literal sense as 'fear of Muslims' or 'fear of Islam', and others reject the term or its narrow usage as merely a 'fear.'[11] There is a consensus that Islamophobia (whether it be a mere general 'fear', explicit hatred, brutal violence or everyday racial vilification) can severely impact Muslim communities within Australia,[12] furthering their experiences of isolation and rejection.[13] Islamophobia in recent times has occurred during a political and social shift in the Australian political landscape away from 'multiculturalism and an embrace of conservative messages of national belonging.'[14] Dunn and Kamp argue that Islamophobia is commonly conceptualized with a focus on culture, ethnicity and religion rather than biological notions of race.[15] Similarly, Aslan defines Islamophobia as a cultural-focused form of contemporary racism that marginalizes Muslims based on cultural and religious differences,[16] though several other scholars have noted the unification of notions of biology with cultural narratives of race.[17] Yet Aslan rightly points out that Islamophobia involves homogenizing Muslims in Australia as one group that overlooks cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences.[18] The fear and hatred of Muslims as displayed by Reclaim Australia's enthusiasts is marked by several racialised ideas of Muslims as supposed newcomers who threaten the West and specifically white Australian national belonging within the colony. Islamophobia is produced through narratives of Islam 'as a violent and aggressive political ideology rather than a genuine religion, that

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supports terrorism and threatens the Western societies and their democratic and liberal values.'[19] Such Islamophobia plays out within Reclaim Australia, as one of the movement's protest banners was 'Reclaim Democracy' and the movement's interpretation of the Lindt Café Siege capture how it racializes Muslims as 'violent.' Morsi argues that contemporary Islamophobia comprises of a 'body of racial ideas that echoes through the centuries of the modern era, and is found alive and well today in the most popular genres of cultural communication, there always to tell the West's story.'[20] A close investigation of the Reclaim Australia movement reveals how expressions of Islamophobia are almost an opportunity to uphold narratives of white Australian history, culture and accomplishments within a colony founded upon continual Indigenous dispossession. Building on these discussions, this section identifies how white patriotism is central to the expression of Islamophobia as it plays out within the movement. Muslims are not only racially vilified by Reclaim Australia's proponents, but rallies are further an opportunity for (usually) white Australians to uphold certain narratives of Australia in ways that; revisit and celebrate Australia's participation in wars, white Australian historical figures, music produced by white musicians and general themes of nationalism.

The protest items and chants at demonstrations reveal how previous moral panics and racist events inspired Reclaim Australia to frame its rallies as an opportunity to center and celebrate white colonial patriotism. The movement's Islamophobia is further shaped upon previous local and global events involving Arabs and Muslims that occurred before the Lind Café Siege. While many observers would conclude that the events of 9/11 had kick-started Islamophobia, in reality anti-Muslim racism predates these events. For instance, Kabir's work on Muslim history in Australia identifies how anti-Muslim racism was common within early European colonies. At the time when Australia federated as a Commonwealth within the British Empire in 1901, the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act – or what was colloquially termed the White Australia Policy – restricted the migrations of Muslims to only Europeans (though non-British immigrants formed a minority of all migrants during this period).[21] Decades before 9/11, Islamophobia played out with an anti-Arab focus. The emergence of what Poynting et al called the Arab Other surfaced in the late 80s and 90s.[22] The Arab Other is a societal folk devil manufactured by racists that creates several social anxieties about Muslims and Arabs.[23] While in the 90s, the focus of media, policing and social commentary excessively demonized Arab communities, there has been a shift in narratives that racially profile 'Muslims' broadly. Australia's participation in the Gulf War was accompanied with an increase in anti-Arab racism, inflamed by the commercial media and politicians who questioned the commitment of Arab and Muslim communities to Australia.[24] The mid to late 90s, Lebanese youth were demonized heavily in both Sydney and Melbourne, as police increasingly profiled young people 'of Middle Eastern appearance.' This was accelerated further with moral panics over a drive-by shooting incident at Lakemba police station in Sydney's south-west and the Sydney gang rapes of 2002, where public commentators and the media sought to demonize Arab and Muslim men as violent thugs and sexual deviants. Poynting and Mason argue that before 9/11, Islamophobia is apparent in the 'upsurges in anti-Muslim racism in the media and in populist political rhetoric… [accompanied by] outbreaks of anti-Muslim racism in everyday life in public spaces and institutions.'[25]

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Reclaim Australia's Islamophobia operates in the shadow of these anti-Muslim and anti-Arab events, and indeed informs how protestors racially profile Muslims. Yet what needs to be interrogated further is the nature of the moment's protest that clearly emphasizes Australian patriotism and settlerhood through flag waving and costumes usually involving 'Australiana' sporting outfits. In recent history, three significant events mirror this nature of Islamophobic protest that include the Cronulla pogrom, the uproar over a proposed Islamic school in Camden and the establishment of a mosque in Bendigo. These events collectively demonstrate how the Reclaim Australia movement, while supposedly 'solely' inspired by the Lindt Café Siege, is an extension of previous Islamophobia that marks itself as a celebration of Australian patriotism. The Cronulla pogrom of December 2005 was arguably one of the first of several recent events which saw Islamophobia expressed through celebrations of white Australian patriotism. This pogrom occurred in a southern Sydney beachside community of Cronulla and was kick-started by a popular shock jock radio host who urged the Cronulla community to take a stand against people of Middle Eastern decent. About 5,000 mostly white males gathered, armed with Australian flags and dressed in Australian-themed clothing. Several participants violently assaulted men and women they deemed to be 'of Middle Eastern appearance.' Participants spoke frequently about how they framed this event as though it were a celebration of Australia Day. Crowds sang the national anthem and chanted 'Aussie Aussie Aussie, oi oi oi' which is usually heard at sporting events.[26] Two years later, these 'protest' scenes were almost replicated in a semi-regional town of Camden located on the south-western fringe of the Greater Sydney area. After news of a proposed Islamic school in this area, locals mimicked the pogrom by sporting Australian flags and similar items in their rallies against the proposal. This sort of Australia-Day-themed protest occurred at two anti-school rallies in 2007, and again at a Council meeting announcing the rejection of this proposal where several opponents wore Australian flag stickers on their clothing. The proposed site of the school was vandalized with an Australian flag sandwiched between two decapitated pigs' heads. A far-right political candidate visited Camden at the time and asked local residents to fly the Australian flag as a method of protest against the school.[27] The demonstrations in Bendigo (a regional town in Victoria) against a proposed mosque in 2015 displayed similar themes where Australian patriotism was celebrated in opposition to Muslims. Local anti-Mosque groups networked with the UPF and organized rallies against this proposal, including a local Councilor who wore the Australian flag across her shoulders as a method of protest. Members of the UPF staged a mock beheading in Bendigo while one wore a sheet over their head, attempting to mimic what they saw as 'Muslim clothing.' Afterwards, they drove around the streets shouting Australian sporting chants while waving Australian flags from their cars.[28] In light of this protest, the Cronulla pogrom and the Camden protests; the use of patriotic symbols and narratives as explicit at the Reclaim Australia rallies – commonly informs Australian Islamophobia and is unoriginal.

The designs of Reclaim Australia's rally logo evidently exhibit a trend of Islamophobic-centered celebrations of Australian settlerhood. The movement's created logo, costumes and music playlists further epitomized how Islamophobia was an opportunity to uphold white Australian achievements within the colony. Reclaim Australia's webpage reflected a typical 'imagined political community'[29] that featured a map of Australia meshed with an

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Australian flag and imprinted with the question 'Will you help protect the Australian way of life?'[30] Reclaim Australia's official logo featured a combined letter R (Reclaim) in blue and letter A (Australia) in red to reflect the Australian flag colors. An imprinted Southern Cross symbol also appeared on these letters. Further, Reclaim Australia's website outlines that the 'A' in its logo mimics a folded red ribbon based on the Red Ribbon Rebellion of 1853. The logo information section outlines that this event happened in the Victorian gold fields, when workers protested against government rulings. Reclaim Australia argues that a red ribbon was a symbol of silent protest against the government that 'marked our "road to democracy" as a nation.'[31] This red ribbon association is an attempt to create historical links with typical white Australian iconic colonial moments. Other items that epitomize Australiana were explicit at some rallies. For example, some rally participants either dressed as Ned Kelly or wore t-shirts with 'Ned Kelly' on them whilst protesting.[32] At the rally in Adelaide, a participant dressed as a jar of vegemite.[33] At the Gold Coast rally, a participant protested the presence of Muslims in Australia by creating a song for Australian war heroes.[34] The created Reclaim Australia music playlist was composed of songs written by white Australian males including: Cold Chisel's 'Khe Sanh' and Red Gum's 'I was only 19' which are about Australian soldiers in Vietnam; John Farnham's 'You're the Voice' which is celebrated as one of the first times that Australian music was recognized globally; John Williamson's 'True Blue' which includes references an Australian native bird and vegemite; Midnight Oil's 'Short Memory' which is interestingly a song against imperialism and colonialism by a white Australian band; and the national anthem. The aforementioned musicians, upon hearing that these songs were used at Reclaim Australia rallies, expressed disappointment and publicly asked participants not to use their music in future rallies.[35] A prominent Reclaim Australia rally organizer who was also a neo-Nazi attached to the UPF, reacted with hostile claims that these artists were now 'leftists' and victims of 'political correctness.'[36]

Yet the movement's thirst to mobilize the flag, Australiana themed songs and other references to Australia's colonial identity, further exhibits how white Australian settlerhood was centered in its Islamophobic protest. In contextualizing how Reclaim Australia mobilized settlerhood on invaded and unceded Indigenous lands, an invasion paradox within the movement's aspirations becomes clear. Whilst the movement's name of 'Reclaim Australia' was informed by a myth of an imminent 'Islamic invasion', the movement conducted rallies on an already invaded continent and its Islamophobic protest was indistinguishable from the way participants celebrated white colonial themes. The paradox of invasion is further evident in not only the context in which protestors organized their rallies on stolen land, but also the way protestors were upholding colonial items/themes that are produced as a result of this invasion. Indigenous criticisms of this movement further affirm this paradox, as epitomized in a sign held by an Aboriginal counter protestor at the Canberra rally that read 'Not Yours to Reclaim.'[37] This sign along with several other Indigenous critiques of Reclaim Australia reveal that a movement fighting an 'invasion' is actually fighting for an ideal of Australia as a settler-colony founded upon the invasion of Indigenous lands. It is important to situate Islamophobia as taking place in a colonial context, whereby Reclaim Australia's enthusiasts express their anti-Muslim racism by upholding settlerhood with a distorted imminent-invasion narrative.[38] Here, it becomes clear that there is a deep knowledge of settler illegitimacy on stolen Indigenous lands that further exposes this invasion paradox,

yet, as the next sections explore, this upholding of colonial patriotism is tied to declarations that it is 'not racism' to celebrate this colony.

'NOT RACISM' IN RECLAIM AUSTRALIA'S ISLAMOPHOBIA

The Reclaim Australia rally in Newcastle (located 2 hours north of Sydney) attracted 700 participants which included one local resident, Nathan Paterson, who became known in the media as the 'face' of the movement. An image of an Australian-flag caped, Eureka singlet-wearing, heavily tattooed Paterson with his fist pumped in the air circulated news and social media spaces. Paterson expressed racist views about Muslims and subsequently complained that people had labeled him a 'racist pig', a 'bogan' and a 'toothless tattooed freak.' Paterson denied he was racist and referred to his frequenting of a local kebab shop owned by a Bangladeshi man as proof of his 'not racism.' When he was asked about this friend, Paterson explained that he did not know this man's name and therefore nicknamed him 'Bangladesh.'[39] Also, Paterson also framed his 'not racism' as a celebration of Australian identity:

'[Paterson] wanted to get involved in the movement "because I don't know what kind of country I'm leaving for my kids". He believes he's one of a growing contingent of people who are "standing up" for "Australian values", and insists he 'isn't a racist.' "At the rally I was chanting 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi', which is something every Australian chants at sporting matches against other countries, so is every Australian a racist now?"[40]

Paterson's argument of 'not racism' was not an isolated case among rally enthusiasts as several participants presented similar narratives to legitimize their Islamophobia. One local speaker at the Newcastle rally characterized the event as 'not racist' even though it featured a political candidate from the extreme-right Christian Democrats Party who advocated for the bulldozing of mosques. In Perth, Paula Giffen was a local president of an Islamophobic group the 'Wanted – Australian culture and Australian values' group and managed to attract 300 supporters to her Reclaim Australia rally outside of Western Australia's Parliament House. Giffen complained that she was sick of being called a racist, claiming that it was 'not racist' to uphold Australian values.[41] In Adelaide, a local lawyer named John Bolten spoke at a rally of how 'Australian culture' was at odds with a homogenous, violent 'Islamic culture' and the organizer of this rally argued 'we are not racists. We love our country and love our children.'[42] National parliamentarian George Christenson was an invited speaker at the Reclaim Australia rally in Mackay (located 970kms north of Brisbane) and he denied claims that white supremacists were part of the movement. Christenson was fiercely dedicated to his participation at this rally, asserting patriotic themes that it was his right to celebrate Australian democracy and Western civilization, even stating that 'hell will freeze over' before he canceled his attendance.[43] At the rally, Christenson warned 200 attendees of 'radical Islam.' Upon hearing that white supremacists and neo-Nazis were at other rallies, Christenson argued that every movement has 'fringe dwellers'[44] as an attempt to distance himself from 'racists' while participating in a racist movement.

Contemporary Islamophobia involves the denial of racism with accompanying phrases such as 'I am not a racist but…I don't like such-and-such a group' or 'that such-and-such group does not fit in.'[45] The aforementioned accounts illustrate how the movement's Islamophobia; involves affirmations of colonial nationalism and several opinions among enthusiasts of what constitutes 'racism.' In each of the accounts, accusations of racism were not only denied but participants were offended that they were called 'racist.' Commonly within the Australian context, accusations of racism are often denied and deemed to be more offensive than the actions of racial hatred,[46] and Reclaim Australia's participants were no exception. Denial of Islamophobia[47] among those who express it is almost a predicable feature in contemporary times. Nelson's ideas of place-defending are relevant in marking out how the movement attempts to 'reclaim' Australia as a space in ways that deny racism. Place-defending is defined as a 'desire to protect one's local area from being branded a racist space [which] can lead to the denial of racism or a reluctance to acknowledge racism within a particular place.'[48] Paterson, Giffen, Bolton and Christenson each exhibit how the movement inspires them to simultaneously claim that they are defending 'Australia' as a place from Muslims while denying that racism informed their activities. The frequent denial of racism within the Reclaim Australia movement reveals that Islamophobia operates as an opportunity to celebrate white colonial identity in ways that sustain 'not racism' arguments. Further, the aforementioned examples of how proponents operationalize 'not racism' function to place the movement's Islamophobia as being indistinguishable from their celebration of white colonial patriotism. My interrogation of this 'not racism' factor is largely informed by Lentin's work, who identifies how 'not racism' exhibits the euphemizing of racism, where both conservatives and white left attempt to redefine what constitutes racism.[49] Lentin historicizes how 'not racism' is premised on Eurocentric notions of what constitutes 'racism', which consequently enables the normalization of white supremacy. In summary, at the heart of 'not racism' is denial, which attempts to redefine racism in a Eurocentric lens that excludes the perspectives from Indigenous peoples and other racialized groups.[50] Lentin points out how 'not racism' involves both denial and redefinitions of racism which 'has become a central formulation for the expression and legitimation of racism.'[51] This process of redefining what constitutes racism, as Lentin argues, exhibits the hegemonic Eurocentric efforts to frame racism as a debatable idea that treats it as another viewpoint or a matter of opinion. The aforementioned examples demonstrate how Reclaim Australia's proponents attempt to characterize their actions as 'not racism' while upholding anti-Muslim racist ideas and white supremacy. This approach to suggesting that racism is a debatable concept[52] fuels a denialist argument. In the context of the Reclaim Australia movement, this 'debatability' was echoed by several Queensland newspapers, each running polls asking readers whether Reclaim Australia was racist or promoting racism. According to one poll, 47% voted no and a larger 73% voted no on another,[53] both affirming populist views that anti-Muslim racism does not constitute 'actual' racism. The Cairns rally in North Queensland attracted 300 local residents and footage revealed that a speaker stated their movement couldn't be racist as three of their members were married to Asian women.[54] A journalist for the local paper, the Cairns Post, wrote an initial opinion piece affirming that the event was peaceful and not anti-Muslim, rather protesting 'extreme Islam.'[55] Another local journalist of this same paper, Julian Tomlinson, wrote a follow-up opinion piece claiming that not only

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was this movement not racist, but the 'real bigots' were counter protestors.[56] Considering how often accusations of racism are deemed more offensive than actual racism,[57] perhaps it is no surprise that proponents of this movement attempt to characterize those challenging Islamophobia as true 'racists.' This was further epitomized on a sign created by a participant at the Canberra rally that attracted 250 residents, which read 'antiracist is code for anti-white.'[58] Proponents of Reclaim Australia operationalize 'not racism' narratives not only as a method to rescue this movement's reputation as a racist organization, but further functions to enable these proponents to position themselves as mere patriots that are victims of an unfair smear campaign.

THE FUNCTION OF 'NOT RACISM' 'GOTCHA' TACTICS IN ISLAMOPHOBIA

The expressions of 'not racism' within Reclaim Australia's Islamophobia were simplistic tactics that involve misconstruing and denying how race operates to inform the movement's bigotry. The first common expression involved predictable chants that a protestor engaging in a process of racially vilifying Muslims was 'not racist' because 'Islam is not a race.' The second involved attempts to shift a perception that the movement's issues were not specifically about 'Muslims', rather notions of 'radical Islam' or 'Islam as an ideology.' As captured in Christenson's previously mentioned defense of this racist movement where he was allegedly protesting 'radical Islam' as opposed to 'Islam' at the Mackay rally. Similarly, the organizer of the Gold Coast rally, Charlie Reed, attempted to fend off criticisms of racism by shifting the focus to 'radical Islam.' Reed argued it was 'not anti-Muslim or racially driven'[59] even though several speakers racially vilified Muslims. These situations are in fact common 'gotcha' strategies aiming to deny racism. In particular, these strategies enhance the level of Islamophobic agency within the Reclaim Australia movement by trying to control the narrative about race. This was apparent at the rally in Hobart, where a woman draped in an Australian flag carried a sign that read 'It is not racist to criticize a religion, what race is Islam?[60] One of the speakers, in an attempt to challenge accusations of racism, grabbed his megaphone and offered to pay 100 dollars to any counter protester who could tell him 'what race is Islam?'[61] Similarly, a speaker at the Cairns rally denied he was racist and posed an 'Islam is not a race' gotcha statement that was applauded fiercely by the crowd.[62] The Townsville rally organizer, Kim Vuga, representing the 'Love Australia or Leave' party also unsurprisingly denied racism. As a pro-gun candidate, Vuga argued that Muslims were too violent for Australia and that it was wrong to label her a racist as 'Islam, it's not a race, it's a political ideology.'[63] In cases where Reclaim Australia members have had their gotcha strategies directly challenged, they have attempted to monopolize the narrative by shutting it down. As was the case in Rockhampton (central Queensland), where a local organizer similarly attempted to further produce an argument that his rally was against 'Islam' not Muslims:

> Journalist A: You don't believe that Muslims should be allowed in Australia?

Organizer: I didn't say that.

Journalist A: What did you say?

Organizer: I said Islam. The preaching of Islam and Islamic religion.

Journalist B: Some people might say that what you are doing is racist, how do you respond to that?

Organizer: People are going to call you whatever they want. It doesn't mean anything. I will happily wear that tag if they are going to call me that because I am standing up for women, for children, innocent lives being murdered. This is not about anything else but that. If people want to call me that, we get called racist for flying our flag, for Christ's sake!

Journalist C: So, you are looking to have different groups excluded from Australian society.

Organizer: No, I didn't say that at all. Do you want someone in this country to come and behead you?

Journalist C: I would like people to have freedom of religion.

Organizer: No one said that they couldn't have freedom of religion. Do you follow Islam?

Journalist C: No sir, I don't. People have the right to. What is your issue with people practicing their own beliefs?

Organizer: (aggressively) I got no problem with that at all. Thank you. Done.[64]

It is this 'gotcha' strategy of 'Islam not Muslims' and 'Islam is not a race' that is of interest, as it is utilized by those who are racializing Muslims in attempts to mark their Islamophobia as a genuine, patriotic concern. A gotcha strategy refers to a simplistic way that proponents of this movement express a basic statement aimed at both shutting down criticisms and affirming 'not racism.' 'Gotcha' is a colloquial term for 'I have got you', implying that any criticism of a racist movement through a gotcha strategy has been defeated and the critic's 'faults' of accusing racism have been uncovered. Arguably, a gotcha strategy speaks volumes of racial illiteracy that misconstrues what race is and how it informs the movement's Islamophobia. I argue that these oversimplified 'gotcha' tactics inject Reclaim Australia with Islamophobic agency as they are comprised of misconstrued understandings of race and racism that can deceive any illiterate layperson. Whether the proponent of this movement insists that their protest is about 'Islam' while calling for the persecution of Muslim people, or a recurring 'Islam is not a race' statement; these 'gotcha' attempts enable Islamophobes to simultaneously racialize a group of people as a threat to Australia, then express wrong definitions of racism devoid of any substantial racial literacy or understandings. Malik argues that typical 'Islam is not a race' statements enable disingenuous thinking that Muslims are

not racialized people.[65] Lentin argues that the mantra that 'Islam is not a race' enables Islamophobia to 'flourish under the guise of concern for women and gay rights, and for a secularism rebranded as radical opposition to Islam and Muslims.'[66] This was the case at the Canberra rally that attracted a woman dressed up in a suffragette costume, exhibiting how women's rights are asserted in Islamophobia and white patriarchal feminism.[67] The organizer of this rally, an independent politician named Daniel Evans, attempted to assert 'not racism' by arguing that he was not against Muslims but against Islam.[68] These efforts of denial need to be investigated in terms of how race functions within these gotcha strategies. It is due to populist assumptions that inform the movement's approach to race – that racialized peoples are only thought of as a biologically distinct 'race' of people and 'skin color' is perhaps the ultimate marker in their view.

Race needs to be understood as something constructed well beyond skin color and other notions commonly associated with biological constructions of race. It is this illiteracy among Reclaim Australia enthusiasts that informs the prevalence of these gotcha strategies and how they sustain Islamophobia. Lentin offers a deeper account of how race is defined well beyond narrations of biology, by formulating 'race as a technology for the management of human difference, the main goal of which is the production, reproduction, and maintenance of white supremacy on both a local and planetary scale.'[69] In contrast, illiterate understandings of race underlie the movement's gotcha strategies, as Reclaim Australia peddlers assert that race refers to biological differences. For example, Mandy Chapman, the organizer of the rally in the beachside town of Hervey Bay (in Queensland), pointed out that people of 'different races' supported her while claiming that Muslim immigration would facilitate an invasion and thus she needed to 'reclaim' Australia.[70] In Melbourne, comedian John Safran noticed how the rally consisted of an unusual amalgamation where largely a non-white evangelical congregation participated in unison with white supremacists (some who had Nazi symbol tattoos). Safran noticed signs at this rally that read 'Australia welcomes all races & religions except barbaric, evil Islam.'[71] It is important to situate Reclaim Australia's 'not racism' with what race does, as several participants have asserted ideas of race whilst maintaining gotcha strategies to deny racism. Chapman noticed race when she talked of Muslims as a threat and the Melbourne rally signs communicate ideas of 'race' that separate it from 'religion' while demonizing Muslims. These gotcha strategies function to sustain 'not racism' in ways that; deceive onlookers, sustain Eurocentric notions of race, and enable Islamophobes to simultaneously racialize Muslims then deny racism. In other words, gotcha strategies such as 'Islam is not a race' translate to a statement that a Reclaim Australia enthusiast is not necessarily focused on skin color when signifying Muslims as a race. Further, the common 'Islam, not Muslims'/'Radical Islam, not Muslims' argument translates into an attempt to fool observers into thinking that Reclaim Australia are opposed to an ideology and not a group of people, when in fact their protest narratives involve calls to vilify and deport a group of people (Muslims) they racialize from this colony. While 'not racism' via such gotcha strategies aims to legitimize the movement's Islamophobia, it actually performs a typical Eurocentric practice of trying to take control of definitions of race that enhance this movement's Islamophobic agency. Race functions through these not racism gotcha strategies to allow Islamophobia to racially vilify Muslims as a national threat by focusing on religion, enabling the Islamophobe to dodge responsibility for their

racist actions. Further, the practices of Islamophobia as colonial patriotism enable a Reclaim Australia enthusiast to merely be concerned about the welfare of the nation and frame their Islamophobia as a defense of Australia. Each of these functions to inject and sustain Islamophobic agency by contradictorily mobilizing race then denying their Islamophobia is about race.

CONCLUSION

The scope of this paper focused on how 'not racism' is an entrenched narrative that Reclaim Australia's proponents use to legitimize anti-Muslim racism. I outlined how a xenophobic movement was formed, built on racist anti-Muslim stereotypes that inspired a diverse group of stakeholders to celebrate white colonial patriotism. The several moral panics and racist events concerning both Arabs and Muslims since the 90s contributed to the nature of Islamophobia and the several rallies that took place in 2015. Each rally was an opportunity for Islamophobes to simultaneously celebrate Australian colonial patriotism while expressing anti-Muslim racism – as though the two were sides of the same coin. Narratives of 'not racism' functioned to sustain destructive attempts to redefine anti-Muslim racism as an acceptable form of Australian patriotic expression. The typical gotcha tactics not only injected the movement with Islamophobic agency, but also exhibited contradictory practices of upholding and denying racism. The nature of Islamophobia within the Reclaim Australia movement alarmingly highlights the increasing normalization of anti-Muslim racism as an expression of white colonial patriotism. Since 2015, the number of Reclaim Australia enthusiasts have dwindled yet their Islamophobia has driven several dangerous outcomes, illustrating how Islamophobia that is deemed by the Right and White Left as supposedly 'harmless' chants and protests has in fact paved the way for dire consequences.[72] While the major Facebook page that had 20 thousand followers has disappeared, local Reclaim Australia pages have surfaced and usually have a short life span as they are reported by anti-racists. An existing Reclaim Australia page has morphed into supporting other extreme right causes, for instance, the Perth Reclaim Australia page focuses on challenging lockdowns during the Covid19 pandemic and vilifying Asian Australians, protesting the Black Lives Matter movement, upholding climate change denialism and racially vilifying Aboriginal people. One of the organizers of the Melbourne rally hosted a white Australian politician who called for the return to the White Australia Policy at an anti-African rally.[73] The strategy of 'ignoring' racists is destructive[74] and arguably enables the normalization of Islamophobia as 'not racism' with disparaging racist consequences. Evidently, 'not racism' is a 'gotcha' strategy designed to: save a racist movement's reputation in the eyes of observers; and redefine 'Islamophobia' as a legitimate view in Australia's interests rather than racism. Yet, any analysis of its themes, actions and chants at Reclaim Australia rallies would suggest otherwise.

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NOTES

1. On the 15th December 2014, a 50-year-old man with a history of criminal activity named Man Monis, entered the Lindt Cafe in Sydney's Martin Place and held ten customers and eight employees' hostage at gun point. During the standoff with police, Manis forced his hostages to hold a black flag that resembled the Islamic State flag. After a 16-hour siege, Monis shot a hostage dead, prompting police to enter the café. Police had killed Monis and accidently killed a hostage. Monis had claimed that he had links with the Islamic State and placed several bombs around Sydney, it was later revealed that these claims were false. Further, authorities later discovered that Monis made several fraudulent claims that he was an 'Islamic cleric,' was convicted several times for sexually assaulting women, and was diagnosed with narcissism and several personality disorders.

2. The trio affirmed that sieges did not happen in the Australia they grew up in, and Muslims had supposedly transformed it. The movement's genesis detailed how its pioneers racially profiled Muslims as people who introduced alien forms of violence in Australia (even though Australia as a colony was founded on genocidal violence against Indigenous people). The racialization of the siege as symptomatic of Muslims in Australia ignores a reality that sieges have been committed by several white and non-Muslim peoples in the past century. The several hostage events that have occurred in Australia since the 1970s would reveal that Monis (an Iranian Muslim refugee) did not commit Australia's first and only recent siege situation. In terms of describing these events, I will mention the known ethnicity of the criminals involved – only to affirm that the racialization of the siege as a newly introduced event resulting from Islamic immigration is both racist and unjustified. In 1972, passengers on a flight from Adelaide to Alice Springs were held hostage by a Czech migrant named Miloslav Hrabinec, who subsequently committed suicide. In 1976, the Spring Hill Siege occurred in Brisbane where a 36-year-old white Australian man named Robert William Wilson went on a shooting spree and held 5 hostages at gunpoint in a suburban home. In 1991, the Strathfield massacre in Sydney occurred when a white Australian named Wade Frankum murdered 7 people at the Strathfield plaza and held a woman at gunpoint, forcing her to drive away from enclosing police. In 1993, the Cangai Siege occurred when three white Australian men (Leonard Leabeater, Robert Steele and Raymond Bassett) took hostages at a farmhouse at Hanging Rock Station in Cangai, located in regional NSW. Again in 1993, the Jolimont Centre Siege occurred when 47-year-old Felipe Ruizdiaz (unknown origins) set fire to a government building in Canberra and had a two-hour standoff with police before killing himself. In 2011, the Hectorville Siege took place in Adelaide when a 39-year-old Italian Australian man named Donato Anthony Corbo entered his neighbor's property and indiscriminately killed people, leading to an 8-hour siege. These various hostage situations within the Australian landscape – several of which were committed by Europeans in Australia, would challenge the view that the Lindt Cafe Siege of 2014 somehow signified a supposed new chapter that introduced unknown forms of violence.

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