

‘Taking things personally’: young Muslim  
women in South Australia discuss identity,  
religious racism and media representations

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## **Abstract**

Based on the analysis of interviews with young Muslim women in South Australia, and the analysis of two daily newspapers, *The Australian* and *The Advertiser*, this thesis looks at themes of religious racism, representation, identity, and resistance to racism.

This thesis offers critiques of existing terminology used to describe negativity and hostility based on religious affiliation. It also offers strong arguments for the use of new terminology: religious racism. This thesis argues that the lived experiences of young Muslim women in South Australia are fraught with this racism. It argues that claims of a 'secular' society mask the continuing influence of a Christian heritage and assist in the subordination of religious minorities, particularly Muslims.

Following similar research in other contexts, this thesis argues that the news media in Australia (especially newspapers) plays a significant role in the (re)production of religious racism, primarily through the repeated use of negative representations and stereotypes of Muslims. A number of textual strategies are utilised in this process such as the use of negatively loaded words (eg 'terrorist' or 'fanatics'), the types of photographs used, and the kinds of stories deemed newsworthy. Numerous examples of such racism are presented in the discourse analysis of representations of Muslims and Islam in the two newspapers. This thesis also addresses the direct impact of such representations on the participants in the study.

Although this thesis presents a number of narratives of religious racism as experienced by the women, it does not present these women as passive victims. It argues that in negotiating, dealing with and challenging such racism, these women exhibit personal agency as well as courage and resourcefulness. This thesis acknowledges both the significant impact of religious racism on the women as well as their resistance to it.

This thesis utilises literature from the field of race and whiteness studies to critique concepts of hegemonic national identity that marginalise Muslim communities and individuals. It argues that, although Muslims may not figure in hegemonic national identity, they construct their own sense of national belonging that encompasses their identities as Muslims, as women and as Australians.

## **Declaration**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

SIGNED:

DATE:

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## **Dedication**

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

I dedicate this thesis to the women I interviewed and to all the Muslim women in Australia who have ever experienced religious racism and resisted its effects.

'Verily, with every difficulty, there comes relief' (Quran, Surah 94 verse 5).