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REGULAR ARTICLE

Editorial Political Cartoons in Australia: Social Representations & and the Visual Depiction of Essentialism

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Abstract Six million migrants from over 170 countries have resettled in Australia since 1945 ensuring religious diversity is now a hallmark of Australia's population. However, not all religious groups are perceived in the same way. In this paper, we explore how representational processes differentially essentialise religious groups, in particular how some groups are ascribed an underlying nature that irrevocably defines who they are and how they will behave, whilst other groups are conveyed merely as coherent entities with similarity in goals and structure. We elucidate this through an analysis of the depiction of religious markers in Australian Editorial political cartoons. We mirror the near-exclusive focus on the Muslim and Christian religions, in the religious cartoons we sampled, to present an analysis of 6 exemplar cartoons. Drawing from visual analysis techniques (van Leeuwen 2001) and social representations theory (Moscovici 1984) we highlight how essentialist perceptions of religious groups are unwittingly fostered in everyday media communications. We discuss the implications of our analysis for the transnationalisation of religion.

Keywords Social representations · Essentialism · Transnationalisation of religion · Editorial political cartoons

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Editorial Cartoons & the Visual Representation of Essentialist Politics in the Transnationalisation of Religion

Transnationalisaton of Religion in Australia

As a result of contemporary international migration, many immigrants now live their lives across borders whilst maintaining ties with their homelands, even when their countries of origin and settlement are geographically distant (Schiller et al. 1992). This is particularly true for Australia, where the history of migration dates back to the arrival of the British in 1788 although it was not until after the Second World War, and the dismantling of the White Australia[1] policy, that successive migrant intakes diversified the Australian population (Bouma et al. 2011), Further diversification has occurred since, as a function of Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian program which responds to the world-wide forcible displacement of people due to conflict and persecution (DIMAC 2012).

Australia's spiritual and religious profile began with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' (the Indigenous peoples of Australia) spiritualties "and sense of belonging to and reverence of the land and its waters" (Bouma et al. 2011, p5). In line with Australia's migration patterns, the advent of Christianity ,[2] and Judaism in Australia is associated with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, followed by the arrival of new religious traditions in Australia in the 20th century including Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Humanist, Islamic, Sikh and Taoist traditions, as Australia became more involved with Asia. Australia also has rapidly increasing Hindu and Sikh communities (Bouma et al. 2011). Relative to the total population of approximately 22, 000,000 (ABS 2011a, b), Buddhism (529,000 pop) is now Australia's second religion after Christianity (13, 150, 6000 pop) followed by Islam (476,300 pop) (ABS 2011a, b).

Australian's refugee and humanitarian program has further added to the religious diversification within Australia especially regional Australian communities which historically have been predominately Christian (Bouma et al. 2011; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007). Australia accepts around 13,000 refugees a year, and began accepting Humanitarian refugees in 1938 when it offered protection to Jews escaping Nazi Germany. However, it was not until 1975, and the end of the Vietnam war, that the composition of the refugee intake, in line with the focus of the Humanitarian program, shifted from the culturally familiar to the culturally distant (Colic-Peisker 2009; Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos 2010).

This shift from culturally familiar groups to those perceived as culturally different[3] has brought *visibility*[4] to minority religious groups in regional Australian

[1] The White Australia policy was passed in 1901. This policy, which set out Australia's approach to immigration, favoured applicants from certain countries, particularly those with Anglo-Saxon or European heritage. It was formally dismantled in 1973 (DIMAC 2009).

[2] The history of Islam in Australia pre-dates European settlement. From 1650, Muslim fisherman from South East Asia traded with the Aboriginal people in Australia's north. In the 1860 s, camel drivers, from Afghanistan and the Indian sub-continent, worked on railway lines in Central Australia and Overland Telegraph Lines between South and Central Australia (Bouma et al. 2011).

[3] Howarth 2011 defines cultural difference as ideological construction of differences between cultures (p2)

[4] Colic-Peisker (2009) uses this concept in preference to the scientifically discredit (discredited) notion of *race* to refer to ethnic character.

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communities; due to their distinctiveness in the Australian social context of a predominantly white, Christian, English-speaking population (Colic-Peisker 2009). It is the inference potential of this *visibility* that is the interest of this paper, in particular the potential of some visible religious markers to be perceived as projecting an underlying essence about the group that irrevocably defines who the group is, what they think and what they do (Wagner et al. 2009). We elucidate this through an analysis of the depiction of religious markers in Editorial cartoons.

Transnationalisation of Religion and the Projection of Essence

The idea that *things* and *creatures* may have an underlying essence is not new; found in the writings of Plato, it refers to the concept of natural kinds—naturally occurring things that are perceived to have a sharp boundary, of which there is a perpetual and characterising feature that cannot be changed (Sachs 2006; Wagner et al. 2009). The *attribution* of essence onto a social category such as a religious group is to attribute members of that social category with a natural-kindness that unequivocally determines their belonging, fundamental alikeness and behaviour in the same way that all exemplars of a biological species are more or less the same (Gelman 2003; Medin and Ortony 1989). As a discursive device, essentialist rhetoric towards an outgroup can be used to justify acts of discrimination by implying that "they" are by nature different from "us" and that negative characteristics like aggressiveness are a natural trait of the respective group. However, essentialist rhetoric can also be applied towards the own ingroup. Here, essentializing one's own identity can, for example, foster claims of superiority and separation towards other groups (Holtz & Wagner 2009; Wagner et al. 2009; Wagner et al. 2012).

In the context of the transnationalisation of religion in Australia, and specifically the resettlement[5] of refugees with non-Christian religious beliefs into regional Australian communities, the attribution of essence to unfamiliar religions can severely obstruct and unhinge resettlement processes. Resettlement is an active process that relies on joint participation and mutual acceptance; necessitating dialogue, negotiation and tolerance between those being resettled and those in the place of resettlement (Jenkins 2004). Essentialist perceptions of immutability, inflexibility, inability to change and ascribed traits to both in and out groups can, potentially, derail this process.

Importantly, refugees and migrants do not arrive into an empty space. Despite the resettlement community's lack of experiential knowledge of the refugee or migrant's country of origin, established networks of beliefs, values and ideas already exist in the host country that position newly arrived groups into the social matrix, even before they arrive (Moloney 2007; Philogene 2000).

The media are pivotal players here, particularly in the construction of the imposed identities of groups who have little redress to their depiction (Moloney 2007). Media communications are underpinned by representational systems and because the producers and the readers reside within the same historicity, these communications are, arguably, bi-directional co-constructions (Rouquette 1996; Wagner et al. 2009).

[5] For full discussion of resettlement procedures in Australia please see: http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/ World wide see: The United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR Resettlement Handbook (2012). http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a2ccba76.html:

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A significant body of research now exists on the media construction of minority identity (see for example, Nolan et al. 2001; Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos 2010) but, surprisingly, little exists around the role of the political Editorial cartoon in these constructions (except Moloney 2007); particularly religious identity. We address this through an analysis of the depiction of religious markers in politically satirical cartoons.

Why the Editorial Cartoon?

The politically satirical cartoons, we refer to here, are typically found in the Australian national broadsheet and regional community newspapers, and are distinguishable from cartoons found in comic books or comic strips. Typically, they take up to one third of the space on the Editorial page and, at first glance, may seem frivolous; a visual titillation that brightens up the grim retelling of the news of the day. These types of cartoons frequently engage in what Manning and Phiddian (2004) term indignation cartooning which satirically attacks the action and manner in which the issue is being dealt with, rather than the legitimacy of the office itself.

Analytically, the irony underpinning the satirical comment in these cartoons is a function of a deliberate incongruity between written text and the visual aspect of the comment (*cf* Winokur 2007), and often requires a sophisticated understanding of the political issues of the day to recognise. Reiterated by Gamson and Stuart (1992), only a small number of viewers actually understand the satirical comment of these cartoons. We suggest, possibly of more significance, is that for the vast majority of viewers, the visual aspect of the satirical comment eclipses the written text. Whilst many viewers may not fully understand the satirical comment, we argue they do engage with the visual aspect of the cartoon and, in particular, the caricatures.

This is important because in order to convey the satirical comment in the cartoon, the caricatures need to be instantly and irrefutably recognisable. That is, the caricature must resonate with how the viewer perceives that group to be.

Caricature predominately works at the group level: the caricature of a person is representative of a group or institution. In the same way that a caricature of a Prime Minister parodies the institution of the government (Barrow 2003), a caricature of a religious person becomes representative of that religious group . It is this enigmatic leap from individual to group that affords the caricature its power (Barrow 2003), particularly as often only one *likeness* is caricaturised in the depiction of a group.

Situated between stasis and transition, shared representations are dynamic and malleable making them susceptible to influence by those who have the agency and resources to proliferate one version of events over others (Jovchelovitch 1997). Caricaturisation of one likeness tells only one side of the story, and more often than not the mainstream perception if the group is a minority. The tools of caricature: exaggeration, infantilising and physiognomic stereotyping add hyperbole to this depiction. Acceptably funny, when used to portray well known figures who chose to put themselves in the public eye but negative and demeaning for minority groups who have no immediate right of redress (Moloney 2007).

Cartoons work at the denotative and the connotative level; that is they both identify and signify (van Leeuwen 2001). Because, we can only ever recognise what it is we already know, the visual aspect of the cartoon reproduces social representations, the interpretability of which is premised on an implicit interdependence

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between the image and the viewer. Connotatively, meaning is signified by the poses of, and objects associated with, the caricature.

Barthes argues that, "there is an unwritten dictionary of poses known to all who have been exposed to the visual media" (Barthes in van Leeuwen 2001, p.97) exemplified by the bowed head and aggressive stance. The use and positioning of objects in an image signify assocations with place, events, and institutional affilation, such as the skull (famine) and olympic rings (unity). As representational discourse, this is analogous to a lock and key; the viewer must be apprised with the layered meanings implicit in the cartoon in order to interpret the cartoon, and, the cartoon must replay these layered meanings back to the viewer to communicate the satire (Moloney 2007). Whilst most cartoonists are champions of the cause they are casting their satirical gaze over they are, we argue, inadvertently, reproducing the very thing they are lampooning . In the process of providing commentary on social and political life, the satirical cartoon inadvertently not only reproduces but contributes to, the social identities and positioning of vulnerable groups within mainstream society (Moloney 2007).

Our search for political Editorial cartoons focused on the Australian broadsheet newspaper widely read by residents in regional areas of NSW where the refugee resettlements have been occurring. The Australian is a daily newspaper that carries an Editorial cartoon on the same page as the Editorial itself. Typically, the Editorial cartoon makes comment on the news of the day. The Australian newspaper carries the political cartoons of two well known Australian cartoonists: Bill Leak and Peter Nicholson. A search was conducted of both cartoonist's websites, which list the cartoons drawn for this newspaper.

Our initial search focused on 2010 and 2011, and targeted cartoons that made reference to religious groups. This search revealed that the majority of cartoons depicting religious groups made reference to either the Muslim or the Christian religion. A few cartoons made reference in writing, but not caricature, to religion whilst other cartoons carried very sketchy or muddled caricatures that didn't lend themselves to analysis. No cartoons were found that made reference to Buddhism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Hinduism or any of the other major religions. We included 3 other cartoons in our analysis. There were carried in 2002, and 2005 at times when particular political instances brought attention to the Muslim religion.

Given the relative lack of qualitative methodology for pictorial material the present procedure followed an adapted version of semiotic analysis as suggested by Penn (2000) and Barthes (1964). The present cartoons were very straightforward and did not contain much difference between lower and higher—abstract—signification. Given their character, the cartoons were not embedded in extensive text that would have needed deep analysis as required for more complex pictorial and text material. Addressing the 'normal' readership of newspapers, the connotations were clear to any culturally informed researcher. Hence, our analysis compares the depiction of the Muslim and Christian religions within a majority-minority relationship The cartoons we selected are considered exemplars in that they typify how these groups are politically and culturally depicted and talked about in the present political and geographical context.[6]

[6] Our discussion does so in relation to the current socio-political context of Australia. See Huntington (1997) for a global discussion of these issues.

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Depiction of the Muslim Religion

The *Does my bomb look big in this?* cartoon by Bill Leak appeared in the Australian newspaper after the Bali bombing on 21 November 2002. The text line *Does my bomb look big* has been parodied since in countless cartoons, and can be found adorning paraphernalia from backpacks to underwear.

This cartoon exemplifies how the religious marker of the *veil*[7] has been appropriated and projects the essentialist perception that *Muslims are all the same,* and, *are so by the wearing of the veil*.[8] Denotatively, the veil identifies the women as Muslim. Connotively the furtive gaze of the women combined with stooped posture and the sticks of dynamite, symbolise threat. Acknowledging, that this cartoon as been the subject of critique (eg: see Kabir 2006; Hamad 2010), our objective in focusing on this cartoon is to highlight how the use of the veil firstly, identifies the women as Muslim; and secondly conjoins the religious garment with both posture and objects readily associated with threat.

Worn by many Muslim women in Australia, the use of the *Veil* as a religious marker projects essentialist perceptions about this group creating the potential for the viewer to infer that *all* Muslims are a threat. This is particularly so when knowledge of this religious group is still for many Australians vicariously known through the media. The potency of this essentialising is alarming as 70 different ethnicities constitute the 476,300 people (2.2 % of Australia's population) who identified as Muslim in the 2011 census (ABS 2011a, b).

Although the intent behind the cartoon may have been a passing comment on the Bali bombings (Kabir 2006), we argue the depictions were not. Moreover, and to the best of our knowledge, there have been no incidents in Australia where a bomb has been hidden under the Burqa. Thus, we argue that the cartoon holds potency in Australia's socio-political climate, giving tangible form and confirming the representations currently held about these groups. The cartoonist's humour and irreverence didn't create these representations rather the visual reproduction of these representations, in cohort with catchy text, legitimised them.

The veil was the religious marker used to depict Muslim women in all the cartoons we found: sometimes coupled with violent images, sometimes not but almost always projecting the Muslim woman as an *Other*: "… historic static; a symbol of archaic gender-oppressive practices within Muslim societies" (Wagner et al. 2012, p. 2). Stereotyping that not only ignores but blatantly overrides any possibility of alternative symbolic meanings. As asylum-seekers and refugees (see Fig. 2), heads are bowed and arms are holding children; as women their religion is inextricably intertwined with threats of violence and terrorism (Fig. 1).

The *Go back to where you didn't come from* cartoon was published in the Australian by Nicholson in August 2011, and makes comment on the Australian Government's (depicted in Fig. 2 by Chris Bowen the Minister for Immigration) "Malaysia solution" that proposed asylum-seekers be sent "back", irrespective of their country of origin, to Malaysia instead of being processed for asylum in Australia.

[7] The depiction is somewhat ambiguous with regard to the exact type of the veil. Whereas the blue colour would be somewhat "typical" for an Afghan Burqa, the face veil looks to us more like an Arabic Niqab.
[8] See Wagner et al. (2012) for our use of the word "veil".

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Fig. 1 Bill Leak's *Does my bomb look big* cartoon published in the Australian newspaper 21 November 2002

Typification denotes people as a type, and is achieved in visual images through synchrony of posture, repeated caricature, physiognomic stereotypes and cultural attributes that overshadow individuality (van Leeuwen 2001). In Fig. 2, the same caricature is used for both women, who are identified as Muslim by the veil,[9] with ethnicity denoted through the physiognomic stereotype of a large "Central Asian" nose overshadowing individuality. Typification that signifies *those Muslims*, identified by the veil, are different from us (*cf* van Leeuwen 2001).

Photogenia refers to connotation through photographic style or technique (Barthes in van Leeuwen 2001). In Fig. 2, the photogenia connotators in use are profile shots and social distance. The asylum-seekers do not look at us signifying possibly, Australia's detachment from these people. Social distance is signified through firstly, the different size of the caricatures used; the Minister for Immigration is nearly twice the size of the asylum-seekers, and, secondly, the politician's raised arm[10] which, if tracked, points upwards to the 'vanishing' point suggesting the control and power of the Australian government in deciding the fate of asylum-seekers, and their subsequent positioning in Australian society.

Interestingly, the play on the phrase "Go back to where you [*don't*]come from" is clearly ridiculing the Government's stance on asylum-seekers, yet despite this clear advocacy, the cartoon visually disparages these people (*cf.* van Leeuwen 2001). The illogicality, we suggest, of the political Editorial cartoon is that whilst attacking institutionalised injustices through cutting satirical text, the caricature carrying these perceptions inadvertently reinforces and legitimises them.

The *Tracking device for Muslim extremists* (see Fig. 3) was published in the Australian by Nicholson on September 2005. This cartoon makes comment on the attempts by the Coalition to track members of Al-Queda, and coincides with a successful airstrike by the Coalition on an Al-Queda safe house in Iraq.

One of the most consistent religious markers used to depict Muslim men in the Editorial cartoons was the full beard with the Taqiyah, a hat worn by some Muslims

[9] We note that one of the women doesn't wear a veil possibly reflecting that when amongst family members Muslim women are not required to. She is also the only one looking directly at the viewer, possibly eliciting empathy from the viewer who is free to engage with her rather than to perceive her passively.

[10] Distortion of the politician's form, specifically, the exaggerated extension of the length of the politician's raised arm (more than twice the length of the other) emotes the capacity of the politician to make powerful directives.

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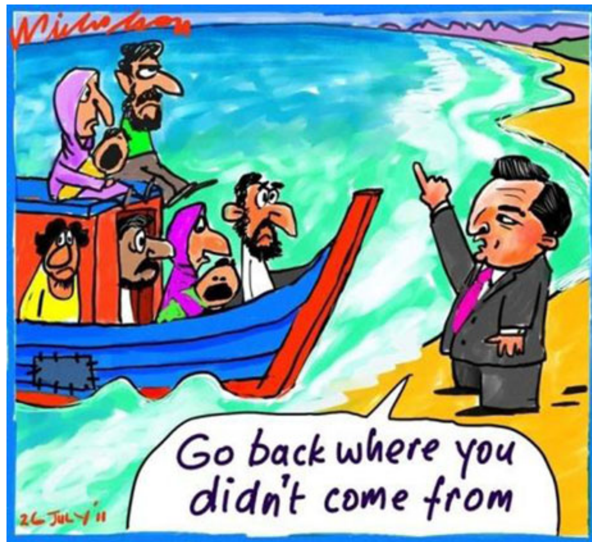

Fig. 2 *Go back where you didn't come from* Nicholson, Australian, 8-8-2011

when they go to prayer. When worn by itself, the Taqiyah may have any color but when worn under the Keffiyah scarf, it is usually white.

It is unclear in Fig. 3 whether the caricature that portrays the Muslim extremist is a parody on Osama Bin Larden but what we did find was this caricature likeness typically depicts Muslim men using a combination of the physiognomic stereotypes of the beard and the "Central Asian nose". The attaching of the tracking device to the beard of the Muslim man, identified as such by the Taqiyah, by the secret agent, is all

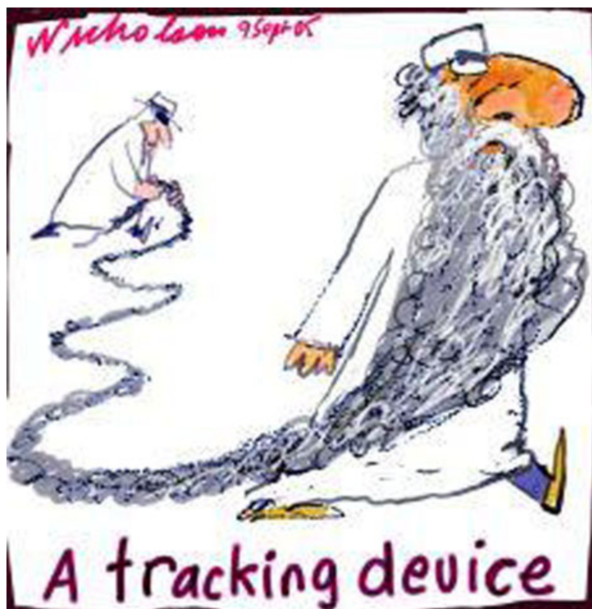

Fig. 3 *Tracking device for Muslim extremists* 9-9-2005, Australian, Nicholson

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powerful in casting Muslim men as potential threats. By giving a tangible image to the discursive trope ' we *must* keep an eye on *them*', this cartoon legitimises and gives voice to the association of threat with Muslim men.

Islamic book stores may be raided was published in the Australian on July 19th 2005, and makes comment on a joint investigation by NSW Police Commissioner and the Australian Federal police of Muslim bookshops in Sydney on the suspicion that one store in Sydney stocked books endorsed by Osama bin Laden (Fig. 4).

Hetero-Referentiality in Editorial Cartoons

Editorial cartoons, usually commenting on topical political issues, most frequently use a humorous metaphorical framing for their satirical or ironic messages. In the case of targeting immigrant groups, however, their tone is surprisingly stereotypical and devoid of finely tuned humour beyond the less than funny 'humour' of exaggeration. As shown before, the typical elements of migration-related cartoons take up one or two single characteristics of the outgroup, such as the Salafi Sunna Muslims' beards and women's veil, and brought into similar threat contexts. We suggest this tendency is not restricted to Australia but common to cartoons in the Western World, making the cartoons immediately intelligible to non-Australians.

Even though Salafi Sunna Muslims are only a tiny minority among the general Muslim immigrant population, their conspicuous appearance attracts attention and is immediately associated with terrorism and generalized to the whole Muslim population. By focusing on these attributes, the cartoonists wittingly or unwittingly take up the target group's cultural definition of identity that prescribes specific attire and body features as symbolizing their religious devoutness. Simultaneously, cartoonists implicitly contrast the foreign features with their own cultural background.

Fig. 4 *Islamic book stores may be raided* 19-7-2005, Australian, Nicholson

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In other words, cartoonists around the Western World fall into the trap of 'hetero-reference' (Sen and Wagner 2005). Hetero-referentiality refers to story or cartoon structures that implicitly or explicitly refer to two groups and foster one's own identity by setting up a boundary beyond which the other group is symbolically located (Pratkanis 2000; Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963). This altercasting of the collective other is the keystone in the architecture of *hetero-referential* representational systems. Holtz and Wagner (2012, pp 465 ff.) show how Salafi Muslims, in their reaction to the Swiss minaret ban in 2009, 'faithfully' confirm the very attributes and behaviours that right wing Swiss radicals have formerly used to motivate the electorate to forbid minarets in Swiss cities. Right-wing radicals, on the other hand, initiate discriminative action or, in the case of the Editorial cartoon, create grossly stereotyping caricatures that justify the immigrants' negative preconceptions about the host country. In other words, populist politics and the cartoons in its service are caught in a vicious cycle of altercasting and hetero-referential representations.

Depiction of the Christian Religion

The depiction of the Christian religion, the majority religion in Australia, was primarily through the institutional leaders of the church or, as in the case of Fig. 6, God.

The *George Pells school money* cartoon (see Fig. 5) was published in the Australian by Nicholson on 26th April 2011, and shows the Australian Archbishop George Pell discussing with the then Minister of Education, Peter Garrett, funding for private and public schools. The Archbishop, in full religious garment and wearing a cross, makes a reference to certain postcodes being chiselled in stone like the Ten Commandments to support his argument, while the Minister of Education looks in another direction.

In the case of the Archbishop, the religious symbols do not only represent his Christian faith, but also his position within the church. He is depicted abusing an

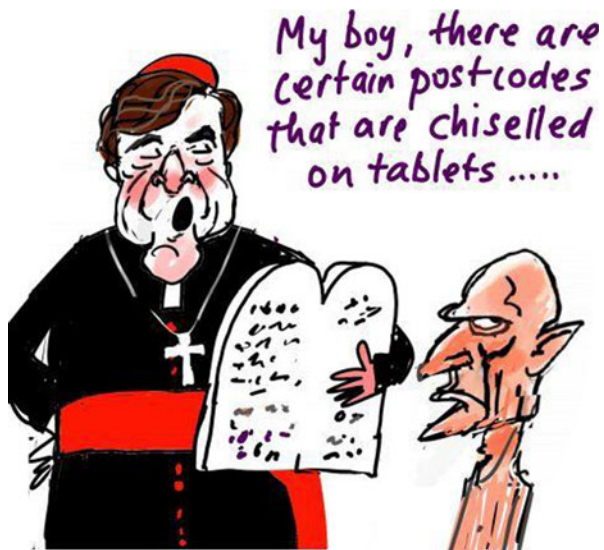

Fig. 5 *George Pell schools money verily giveth taketh* 7th January, 2011, Australian, Nicholson

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ancient religious symbol to exert influence on today's politics. Like a religious dogma, his position on school funding is not up for democratic debate.

When looking at the Minister of Education, there are no visible religious markers at all, although he as well is a Christian. The staring into another direction can be understood as discontent with the Archbishop's position and his sinister face may indicate that he is angered as well. Religion is depicted as an influential part of Australian society, but it is possible for Australians to disagree and it is possible not to be influenced by religious thoughts. Hence, religion seems not to be an 'essential' characteristic of 'Australianness'.

The *How [crook] is zat* cartoon was published in the Australian on 7th January 2011 by Bill Leak, and shows the former Captain of the Australian cricket team, Sir Don Bradman, chatting to God about the appalling state of Australian test cricket in 2011. Keith Miller, whilst considered by many to be Australia's finest cricket all rounder was also known for his flamboyance and love of life.

God is depicted as trying to comfort Bradman with a cup of tea, whereas he claims that he rather would be in hell. Again, the Christian follower is depicted as disagreeing with the religious authorities. Of course, Sir Donald is depicted as a Christian by being in the Christian heaven and conversing with God, but he is not only a Christian, but also a former cricket player. In the conflict between his religious background and his cricket background, he decides that he would rather be in hell with his former cricket mate. Hence, the cricket-part of Sir Donald's identity seems to override the religious part.

The Minister, the Bishop and the Pope (Fig. 7) cartoon by Bill Leak was published in the Australian on October 18th, 2010, and makes reference to the canonization of Mary Mckillop, Australia 's first saint. Kevin Rudd, was the Australian Prime Minister at the time, and Julie Bishop, the Deputy Opposition leader.

Here again, the Pope is depicted in religious garment with various symbols representing his position within the Catholic Church. His exclamation "it's a miracle" on one hand obviously refers to government and opposition being in "complete agreement". The 'miracle' as religious prerequisite for the process of canonization is put out of context to comment on daily politics.

In the references in these cartoons towards the Christian religion (see Figs. 5, 6 and 7) 'ordinary' Christians are depicted in relation to church officials like Bishops and the Pope or religious figures like angels, the Apostle Peter or God himself. Members

Fig. 6 *How crook is Zat*, Australian, 7-1-2011, Bill Leak

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Fig. 7 *The Minister, The Bishop and the Pope*, Australian, 18-10-2010, Bill Leak

of Christianity are shown interacting with these 'representatives' of the Christian faith. Sometimes they disagree and argue such as in Figs. 5 and 6, sometimes the views of 'the Christians' are compared to the views of the church officials as in Fig. 7. This at least possible disagreement between members of the church and its representatives indicates that although Christians are shown in relation to their religion, their beliefs do not dominate their way of thinking and define themselves as persons.

In case of the religious figures and church representatives, visible markers such as crosses, liturgical garments, and halos are used. However, in contrast to the depiction of Muslims, 'ordinary' Christians are not depicted as wearing religious symbols or other visible markers of their religion. Again, they are shown in relation to their belief, but religion is not depicted as something inherent. In contrast to Muslims, Christian believers (see Fig. 7) are depicted with varying faces and dresses representing stereotypical looks of 'ordinary' Australians.

This individualization (*cf.* Leyens et al. 2000), or intra-group differentiation of Christian Australians, can be regarded as a de-essentializing discursive strategy (Verkuyten 2003; Wagner et al. 2009, p. 373f): People are depicted as Christians, but their religion is neither inherent, nor is it defining other important personality traits and characteristics. However, Christians are recognizable as Christians.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that still a majority of Australians are members of Christian denominations. Compared to Muslims, which constitute a minority, there may be less need to make visible references to Christian beliefs, because by default "white" Australians may automatically be perceived by the readers as Christians.

Discussion

Religious diversity is now a hallmark of Australia's population leading many to assume that Australia has embraced a multiplicity of different religions. While this may be the case, attacks on Sikh temples, violent and vitriolic protests over the building of Muslim schools and Islamic prayer centres (Al-Natour 2010) suggest the transnationalisation of religion isn't necessarily smooth. Moreover, it would appear not all religious groups are perceived in the same way.

In this paper we have focused on how essentialist perceptions of religious groups may be unwittingly fostered in everyday media communications through the

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seemingly innocent Editorial cartoon. We have argued that because the caricature used to convey the satirical comment must be instantly and irrevocably recognizable, the depiction of a group through caricature must resonate with how that group is socially represented. In the case of religious groups,[11] visible religious markers were used to identify the religion of the group. The veil and beard denoted the Muslim religion whilst the presence of Church leaders in religious garments (and even God himself) signified Christianity. This group /individual dichotomy became the vehicle for the essentialising of the former and a de-essentialising of the latter.

The simplified stereotypical and "vacuous" depictions of the Muslim religion gave instant recognition not to this group's identity but to an identity constructed by the mainstream - altercasting and hetero-referential representations that essentialise the group through visible religious markers. In contrast, the denotation of the Christian religion through hierarchical Church figures inferred that individuals interacted with their faith rather than their faith prescribing who they were and their behavior.

Our point in bringing attention to these differences is not to denounce political cartoons nor decry their satirical humour. As we have mentioned, most cartoonists advocate for the subject of their satire. Our intention has been to highlight how stereotypical depictions of minority groups unwittingly disparage these groups reproducing and legitimising the representations that these groups *must then* negotiate around, or refute (Duveen 2001; Howarth 2002).[12]

In sum, the transnationalisation of religion through a shift in international migration patterns and recent refugee resettlement has brought unfamiliar religions into metropolitan and regional Australia. Their cultural distinctiveness in regions historically aligned to Christian-based religions has given them a "visibility" that can become a source for potential inference about that individual. However, we hasten to add that it is not the power of the caricature in the Editorial political cartoons that constructs these religious identities but rather the prescriptive power of representations when inequitable communicative processes exist.

Acknowledgments Cartoons by Nicholson from The Australian www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au. Cartoons by Bill Leak from The Australian www.newspix.com.au.

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[11] And, the cartoons we presented here

[12] We argue that this does not need to be the case, as the cartoons depicting the Christian religion suggest to us that caricature can reflect the identity of the group as they, not others, see themselves.

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