

**Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the outback in  
Australian literature and film: 1890-2011**

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## CONTENTS

Summary

Declaration

Acknowledgements

Introduction \_\_\_\_\_ 1

Chapter One: The Afghan Menace: the tradition of Arab and Muslim deviance in

Australian literature (1890-1940) \_\_\_\_\_ 49

Chapter Two: The Lascivious Aghan and the threat of “brown babies” \_\_\_\_\_ 105

Chapter Three: ‘Fake Afghans’ and White Camels: the construction of Afghan absence

\_\_\_\_\_ 153

Spatial exclusion \_\_\_\_\_ 155

Political exclusion \_\_\_\_\_ 158

Absence from history \_\_\_\_\_ 160

Literary absence \_\_\_\_\_ 163

Fantasy fulfillment: clever whites and useless Afghans \_\_\_\_\_ 164

The ‘Fake Afghan’ \_\_\_\_\_ 177

Camels as metonymic signifier \_\_\_\_\_ 193

Unheard Afghan voices \_\_\_\_\_ 206

Chapter Four: Creating a counter-discourse: reinscribing Afghans into history, the

outback and the nation \_\_\_\_\_ 210

<b>Chapter Five: Islam in the Outback: Mena Abdullah’s destabilising subjectivity and the question of belonging</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Rising from the ashes: Islamic spiritual rebirth in the outback in Eva Sallis’ <i>Hiam</i></b>	<b>289</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>327</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>345</b>
<b><i>Appendix 1 (What it will come to by Anonymous)</i></b>	<b>399</b>
<b><i>Appendix 2 (Shouting for a Camel by Andrew ‘Banjo’ Paterson)</i></b>	<b>401</b>
<b><i>Appendix 3 (Yussuf Khan by C.G.A. Colles)</i></b>	<b>402</b>
<b><i>Appendix 4 (When Abdul Had Gone by Bakblox)</i></b>	<b>404</b>
<b><i>Appendix 5 (A Fall in Orientals by Dexter)</i></b>	<b>405</b>
<b><i>Appendix 6 (Exiles’ Land by Gilrooney aka R.J. Cassidy)</i></b>	<b>407</b>
<b><i>Appendix 7 (Abdul’s Love by Gilrooney aka R.J. Cassidy)</i></b>	<b>409</b>
<b><i>Appendix 8 (The Pilgrimage by Gilrooney aka R.J. Cassidy)</i></b>	<b>410</b>
<b><i>Appendix 9 (Smiling Eyes of Sunset by Gilrooney aka R.J. Cassidy)</i></b>	<b>411</b>
<b><i>Appendix 10 (The Desert’s Daughter by Gilrooney aka R.J. Cassidy)</i></b>	<b>414</b>
<b><i>Appendix 11 (An Afghan Hawker by Louis Esson)</i></b>	<b>417</b>
<b><i>Appendix 12 (Afghan by Douglas Stewart)</i></b>	<b>419</b>
<b><i>Appendix 13 (A Tribute to Singh by Vince Sheckleton)</i></b>	<b>420</b>
<b><i>Appendix 14 (The Afghan King by Mena Abdullah)</i></b>	<b>422</b>
<b><i>Appendix 15 (Sample references of newspaper articles analysed)</i></b>	<b>425</b>

## Summary

This thesis examines the representation (and self-representation) of Arabs and Muslims in the outback in Australian literature and film in the period beginning in 1890 and ending in 2011. Much of this analysis focuses upon portrayals of the 'Afghan' cameleers, as the first Muslim and Arab community that emigrated to and settled in White Australia, and whose presence in Australia garnered significant public attention. While recent focus has been given to a recovery of the cameleer history, this thesis seeks to address the dearth of attention paid to how this history became translated into fictional portrayals.

The thesis argues that the representation of the Afghan cameleers, while drawing upon Orientalist and colonialist ideologies and bodies of knowledge, helped to establish a tradition of Arab and Muslim representation that is specific to Australia. This tradition of representation is framed by two major practices of 'deviance and absence', wherein Muslims and Arabs are simultaneously demonized and imagined as external to Australia. Despite historical shifts in attitudes, these practices have carried through to current imaginings of Arabs and Muslims in Australia and are most evident in post 9/11 Islamophobic discourse.

The focus upon representations of Arabs and Muslims in the outback is premised upon the significance of this landscape as a space of inherent political and national significance within the Australian imaginary. How Australia has imagined itself with relation to Arabs and Muslims is effectively allegorised in their fictional portrayal within this landscape, where they are often portrayed as those who encroach, invade, corrupt and devalue the outback, and by extension the nation. Alternatively, they are absented from the landscape altogether, their history co-opted either by white men or by the camel, which metonymically displaces them.

In relation to these representations, the thesis also examines evidence of a tradition of counter-discourse, extending from 1890-2011, which has sought to fight against these absenting or demonizing practices and to emplace the cameleers within Australia's historical narrative. As part of this counter-discourse, attention is also paid to Muslim-Australian self-representations in the outback (unconnected to the Afghan cameleer history) and the most recent evolution of this tradition in refugee literature set in the outback, either inside or outside of detention centres.

## **Declaration**

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled 'Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the outback in Australian literature and film: 1890-2011' has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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