

Beyond Donald Trump and the Banishing of Muslims

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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He was the kingpin of the whole affair by suggesting it. In December 2015, the US Republican presumptive nominee for President, Donald Trump, came up with that daft suggestion which seems so utterly devoid of informed meaning. Ban Muslims from entering the United States and the phenomenon of terrorism would somehow be abated.

His prepared statement was characteristically dramatic in the manner of reality television, envisaging a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on.”

The recent shootings of US police officers, inflicted by disgruntled former black American soldiers, may inspire Trump to think about another form of banning and banishment, though where, exactly, are we to put such aggrieved patriots? It was the policy of British American settlers to happily make use of slaves and remove them, with the assistance of various trading middlemen, from their African homes. Such difficulty!

The latest terrorist attack in Nice generated a good deal of activity on the idiocy meter, with other representatives of immigrant societies suggesting that Muslim immigration should stop altogether. Australia’s resident demagogic squawker, Andrew Bolt, did his usual tin-pot surmising with the idea that there were links between immigration, Islam and terrorism in France.

Bolt’s reasoning in the *Herald Sun* is proudly myopic, a breezy speculative excursion that confuses correlation, causation and everything else. Jihadists have run amok in France to make “Europe’s bloodiest battlefield” because “France lets in the most Muslims.”[1]

The fact that French foreign policy has an inglorious record of destabilising regimes such as that of Gaddafi’s Libya and further stirring the pot of Islamic fury in Syria, never makes an appearance in the analysis. Western states, goes this line of thinking, engage in foreign theatres without domestic consequences.

Bolt’s hold on evaluation, accuracy and statistics is sketchy. But the life of a fanatic is untroubled by the intrusion of facts, a point that he shares with those terrorists he struggles to understand. “No European country has a higher proportion of Muslims than France – up to 10 per cent of its population, or six million, though statistics are vague, and vary.”

This permits Bolt to engage in a false statistical analysis. He scours the globe to identify places where the Muslim populations are fewer. Naturally, he picks a country from his fantasy where immigrants of all types are few and far between: Japan. “Japan has strict controls on immigration and its 127 million people include just 100,000 Muslims. Result: zero Islamist attacks.” Genius.

Air head Sonia Kruger, a host of a breakfast show host, *Today Extra*, decided that Bolt had a point, suggesting the intellectual muscle he can muster for his scribbles. "There is a correlation between the number of people in a country who are Muslim and the number of terrorist attacks."

Naturally, Kruger feels that being a mother somehow provides her the magic of omniscient insight, a deep feeling for the sociology of life. "Following the atrocities of last week in Nice where 10 children lost their lives, as a mother, I believe it's vital in a democratic society to be able to discuss these issues without automatically being labelled a racist." [2]

Such views are never far from the psyche of the immigrant society. Built by immigrants, forged by immigrants, such a society is bound to also have some self-loathing at a certain point. Bad apples found in the cart suggest that it might tip over. Best, therefore, to make sure that particular orchard is never harvested.

In doing so, the argument tends to be made that free speech is being asserted. Kruger's shallow understanding here is palpable. "I want to feel safe and I want to see freedom of speech." Obviously, banning the followers of a particular faith from entering a country would be a stunning affirmation of how speech is distinctly not free.

While *Today Extra* is hardly the front line of weighty Enlightenment thinking, co-host David Campbell did provide a tincture of balance. "I'd like to see freedom of religion as well, as well as freedom of speech. They go hand in hand."

The issue of banning immigrants of a particular disposition coming into Australia has never been far from Australia's political pulse. The first act of the fledgling Australian parliament in 1901 was the Immigration Restriction Act which inaugurated the White Australia policy.

Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard has similarly been excited by notions of banning entrants, be they Asians or individuals of a certain disposition. While opposition leader in the 1980s, Howard gambled on the idea that Australia was simply accepting too many Asians, thereby diluting its cultural and racial stock.

On August 1, 1988, Howard suggested that, "If it is in the eyes of some in the community too great, it would be in our immediate term interests and supportive of social cohesion if [Asian immigration] were slowed down a little so that the capacity of the community to absorb were greater."

It was political stupidity, and suicide on his part, though he would learn his lesson during the 1990s. In that decade, he transformed the Australian approach to refugees by developing a trans-pacific prison system euphemistically called processing, using poorer Pacific countries to do Canberra's dirty work. During these years, he would launch a series of blows against those arriving to Australia on often dangerous rafts and vessels, claiming that he did not "want people of that type in Australia".

Those who favour bans on immigrants of a specific religion tend to ignore the obvious point about what resident, and Australian-born followers of that faith would do. What better statement of deprivation and estrangement could there be than one of state-sanctioned exclusion. What next? Concentration camps? Perhaps the logic here is one of internment and ultimate banishment. Trump would be proud.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He

lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

[1] <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/andrew-bolt/muslim-migration-opens-door-to-terror/news-story/8ee3c985088b9a502ff475b5dbdf74c5>

[2] <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/07/18/nine-defends-krugers-freedom-speech>

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