Australia Day brings out a range of perennial issues in Australia to do with cultural icons. People argue about whether the date is racist, if we should change our anthem or flag and whether we should become a republic or not. On top of these usual debates, Australia Day this year saw a controversy around Australia Day advertising.

Quick facts:
- The ad featuring the two girls wearing hijabs was taken down by billboard company QMS on January 17th but re-erected several days later after public pressure to reinstate them.
- Criticism of the hijab ad came from groups such as the United Patriots Front, an extreme right racist organisation who claimed the ad would “define your nation”.
- The Meat and Livestock’s 2017 Australia Day ad did not mention Australia Day - its first ad never to do so.

The big question: How do advertisements for Australia day represent what it means to be Australian?

Two Australia Day advertisements sparked some fierce argument about how to best represent what it means to be Australian in 2017. One of them was an advertisement from the state and federal governments promoting Australia Day celebrations. The ad, featuring two young girls wearing hijabs, generated a series of racially abusive complaints, that in turn led to the company that maintained the billboards taking the advertisements down.

The other ad was the annual commercial made by Meat and Livestock Australia which seeks to promote eating lamb as patriotic on Australia Day. This year’s ad involved a satirical reenactment of the first fleet’s landing on January 26th but also referred to every wave of immigration to Australia. Many commentators felt the advertisement was nothing more than a series of stereotypes that did more harm than good, while others argued the ad did a good job at portraying our diverse and relaxed culture.
Arguments that are critical of the Australia Day ads

- In its attempt to represent 70,000 thousand years of Australian history in under two minutes, all the Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) ad achieves is a simplistic representation of Australian history
- It’s not just that indigenous people are stereotyped in the MLA ad - everyone is stereotyped, creating a facile representation of Australia
- Putting two young girls in hijabs in an Australia Day ad was bound to be controversial - so why do it?

Snap perspectives

A great ad

Meat & Livestock Australia has launched another cracker, which may be its most political ad yet. For a start, despite very clearly being an Australia Day-themed ad, not once does it mention the day by name.

And secondly, it sends a very clear message of unity and acceptance for all people, regardless of race, religion, sexual identity, and where the bloody hell ya came from.

The ad opens with a lil' BBQ on the beach, again riffing on the idea of Indigenous Australians being the first to the barbie as well as, y’know, the first inhabitants of this country. Everyone else very pointedly (and accurately) arrives by boat, including a boatload of refugees which would otherwise find themselves locked up in Dutton’s offshore detention hellholes. "Aren't we all boat people?" someone asks. Yep.

It's a bloody brilliant take in the lead-up to our nation's highly controversial Australia Day celebrations. It's not pointing the finger of racism at anyone celebrating January 26, but rather presenting a vision for what Australia Day moved to a different date could look like.

From Pedestrian.tv

Problem with hijab ad is gender, not religion

But lost in the accusations of racism and nationalism is a more complex conversation - one that might consider the motivations and impacts of our government promoting an image of religious "modesty" covering on a child. Women across the Islamic world are struggling to free themselves from male supremacy, out of the confines of the hijab, niqab or burqa and into a gender-equal public life. And yet the progressives of the West are working quickly to counteract their hard work. The religious veil is placed firmly back in front and centre of representation of Muslim women.

To be clear, the problem is that the Victorian Government has chosen to depict children cloaked in an instrument of gender segregation as a symbol of inclusivity.

Laura McNally, The Daily Telegraph