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## **Bios**

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## **The Welcome Dinner Project: Food Hospitality Activism and Digital Media**

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### **Chapter abstract**

In this chapter we analyse what happens when the social media images used by the Welcome Dinner Project a food social enterprise which brokers intercultural exchange through potluck meals are remediated across online magazines and news media. We show how The Welcome Dinner Project uses photographic images to promote food hospitality activism through the visual trope of 'home mode everyday multiculturalism' which characterises the images shown

on their Facebook, twitter and Instagram accounts. But when digital magazines and newspapers post verbal and visual text about the Welcome Dinner Project, they reproduced racialised tropes of 'food porn' and 'world on a plate' which adopt problematically racist scripts thereby undermining the original message of the social enterprise. The Welcome Dinner Project influences how it is represented by providing images and content, but our analysis show that it cannot control how its verbal and visual texts are re-semiotised in racialised and racist ways.

## **Introduction**

In 2014, Elaine attended a Welcome Dinner event with 200 'guests' in Sydney's central business district. The Welcome Dinner Project (WDP) is a food social enterprise that, in their words, brings together 'established Australians' with 'newly arrived Australians' through potluck dinners. The WDP organises two types of hospitable encounters: dinners in people's homes, and those in community spaces. Elaine learned about the event from social media, having become aware of the WDP via the public relations magazine of the University of Technology Sydney. Elaine sat at a table with an Iraqi family, a Malaysian Australian, and two Japanese international students. Elaine noticed the event was being photographed and filmed, and joined the Facebook group. This was WDP's first major public event. At that stage, few home dinners had taken place. Four years later, the WDP has rapidly grown and operates in all Australian states and territories, with its emergence occurring in a context of intensely racist government policies and media reporting towards refugees and asylum seekers, alongside a resurgence of white supremacist anti-immigration politics in Australia. Since that time, we have studied the WDP ethnographically and through digital media analysis. In this chapter, we examine how what we call the 'food hospitality activism' of the WDP is made visible through its online media practices, and how these meanings change in racist ways through the re-mediation of WDP images via mainstream news and entertainment media. By food hospitality activism, we mean attempts by NGOs and social enterprises to facilitate connections between people of different racial backgrounds through food and hospitality, as a means to address social injustice and racism.

To date, writing on digital food media extends across various disciplines, media, genre, digital artefacts and food themes, for instance: hashtags, food and health (Rich, Haddadi and Hospedales, 2016); food blogs (Adami, 2014; Koh, 2015); pro-ana blogs (Lavis, 2017); digital food porn (Dejmanee, 2016; Ibrahim, 2015); digital food cultures (Lupton, 2018); food websites (Adami, 2014, 2015a; Flowers and Swan, 2017); Black hashtag activism (Vats, 2015); and fish activism and digital transmedia (Gambarato and Medvedev, 2015). But little attention has been given to the digital media associated with food hospitality activist social enterprises and their political effects, despite their proliferation internationally from Germany, Sweden and the US to Australia (Flowers and Swan 2017, 2018).

The WDP relies on its own webpages plus online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter for marketing and public communications, all of which are managed by volunteers. The WDP produces, distributes and crossposts a range of its own, and other media-generated, multimodal texts across these platforms. In this chapter, we focus on photographic images of food commensality drawn from the online presence of the WDP and consider how the meanings of the WDP shift as the visual and verbal texts are re-mediated elsewhere. We use the terms visual and verbal texts in line with multimodality studies, in which visual text refers to visual elements, such as graphics, typeface, colour, and digital photographic images, and verbal text to written words. In this chapter, we focus on the digital photographs and accompanying verbal texts associated with home (as opposed to community) events, as the WDP sees home dinners as the 'ur' food hospitality event.

The WDP creates photographic images and posts a selection on its website, and uploads, shares, forwards, reposts and re-contextualises and 're-genres' these images across their social media (Adami, 2014). Online magazines and newspapers published by large media companies, including NewsCorp and Fairfax, re-purpose WDP images and verbal texts. Media companies also generate their own images and re-purpose those published

elsewhere for their coverage of the WDP. The WDP then curates a number of these magazines and newspapers through hyperlinks on the webpages. In this way, photographic images and verbal text by and about the WDP move around the Internet through its circulation economy and audiences. Thus, cross-posting and remediation – re-using texts created for other purposes in other contexts - is central to the WDP and to the ways in which ideas about race are depicted and mobilised (Adami, 2014).

The various social media, online newspaper and magazine platforms have different multimodal and technological affordances, genres, conventions, audience profiles and relations with audiences. Elisabetta Adami (2014) points out that genre, meaning and form can change as texts are cross-posted on platforms with different modes of meaning-making. Thus, remediation and recontextualisation, while not unique to online media, are fundamental to thinking about digital representations of WDP, its aims, politics and visibility. In particular, this chapter examines how the WDP's representation of hospitality activism change visually, racially and politically through remediation by different media outlets. Our analysis shows that persistent racism occurs as WDP is reported in online news and entertainment media. In particular, we analyse how the WDP's images of welcoming are remediated in ways that fit racist scripts about whiteness, who counts as a 'good' migrant, and acceptable images of cultural and racial diversity.

Hence, our contribution to scholarship about alternative food and media is threefold. First, we follow a food social enterprise's social media images as they are remediated and re-contextualised across various digital platforms. Second, we provide a racialised analysis of these forms of mediation by showing how the remediated images change the WDP's images of welcoming to consolidate racist meanings. Third, we show how seemingly 'innocent' images of food racialise. To begin, we provide a brief introduction to the project and its history, followed by a discussion about Australian multiculturalism, a summary of our method, and a detailed discussion of our sample of digital media texts.

## **The Welcome Dinner**

The WDP represents an Australian project of food hospitality activism. Its purpose is to bring together 'newly arrived people and established Australians to meet over dinner conversation in the comfort of their own home' (The Welcome Dinner Project, n.d., p. 1). The WDP publicity explains that 'people come together across cultures over a shared meal' (Attend a Home Dinner, n.d.), a means through which 'strangers... become friends' (Bishara, 2015, p. 1). The project aims to:

create a platform for meaningful connection, sparking friendships between people of diverse cultures who are living in close proximity to one another in communities throughout Australia. (The Welcome Dinner Project, n.d. p. 1)

The project's purpose is to facilitate connections between people through food, as the *Guide for Welcome Dinner Participants* explains: 'the mix of food, conversation and the opportunity to try something new, creates a perfect recipe for connection and rediscovery of our common humanity' (The Welcome Dinner Project, n.d., p. 3). After the dinner, it is hoped that everyone will 'exchange contacts and stay in touch afterwards' (The Welcome Dinner Project, n.d., p. 2). A central part of its philosophy is that the Welcome Dinners benefit established, as much as newly arrived, Australians because they too suffer from social isolation.

Since 2013 there have been over 200 dinners in homes and community spaces across Australia. Over 300 WDP facilitators have been trained across Australia and over 5,000 people attended a dinner. The WDP is run largely by volunteers. Funding is sporadic, with small amounts raised through crowd-funding, and to date only two State governments have given grants. Local government councils have provided in-kind support.

## **The events**

The WDP convenes dinner events in 'local homes.' Hosts and participants register online. A local co-ordinator selects and formally invites a mix of between 5 to 10

established Australians and new arrivals respectively, each of whom ideally reside in the same local area. Dinners run for two hours and this timing is strictly adhered to by the facilitators. An established or newly arrived Australian hosts the event. Their home and motivation are vetted by WDP facilitators who visit the host in their home before the event. The events are facilitated by trained volunteers. The agenda includes: a formal welcome; an acknowledgement of country (an Australian protocol for showing respect to the Indigenous owners of the land on which a meeting or event is held); a host welcome and introduction to their home; an icebreaker; gathering around the food with each person explaining their dishes; eating; sharing feelings about the event; exchanging contact information; and, finally, a group photo.

For the WDP, 'established Australians' refers to anyone who has lived in Australia for over ten years and the category 'newly arrived Australians' covers international students, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who have been in Australia for ten years or fewer. At the dinners we attended, there were a mix of people including international students from the Philippines, Germany and China, Anglo and Asian established Australians, and refugees from Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq.

### **The politics of welcoming**

With the name *Welcome Dinner Project*, it can be understood that welcoming new arrivals into homes and to Australia via food is an important political and cultural aim for the organisation. The practices of welcoming through commensality are repeated in WDP media coverage, at training courses, in WDP handbooks and at the dinners themselves. The rationale presented for the food hospitality activism of the Welcome Dinners is three-fold. First, the founder states that many new arrivals have not been invited to an established Australian's home. Secondly, this weak sense of belonging and feelings of isolation and disconnection were not seen as peculiar to new arrivals but a problem also affecting established Australians. Thirdly, many established Australians want to meet new arrivals but claim they do not know how.

Welcoming initiatives, structures and practices for refugees, asylum seekers and new migrants have a particular history in Australia government policies and NGO approaches. As Giulia Borri, Brigida Orria and Alex Vailati note of Italian state practices:

In every social context we can find particular philosophies and expressions of welcoming. Strangers and travelers are part of everyday life even in places that are far from the global flow of symbols and people. Welcoming practices are usually very complex. They have different aims and strategies in every context. (2014, p. 11)

Globally, the category of 'welcoming' crops up frequently in policy and civil society discourses about refugees and asylum seekers. Various governments have attempted to establish welcoming infrastructures. Since 2015, for example, European cities have collaborated to improve the policies associated with welcoming refugees and migrants (Bousiou, Bucken-Knapp and Spehar, 2016).

Academics critique welcoming initiatives on a number of fronts. For instance, Borri, Orria and Vailati (2014) assert that welcoming projects are based on essentialist constructions of refugees, and present welcoming as derived from notions of charity and pity, rather than from the empowerment of migrant communities. Hence, they argue, welcoming practices can intensify stigmatisation and discrimination. Another criticism is that welcoming policies are more informed by geo-political and economic, rather than humanitarian, concerns (Akrap, 2015). As in Europe, welcoming new arrivals to Australia is also politically complicated. Invaded by the British in 1788, Australia is a settler colony in which Indigenous people have been systematically murdered, dispossessed, and disadvantaged. This means that non-Aboriginal people may not be in a position to welcome new arrivals. Indeed, there is a specific cultural protocol for public events where local Aboriginal elders welcome non-Aboriginal people to their Aboriginal nation. A second reason why welcoming is so complex is that Australia has a long history of racist immigration policies, of not being welcoming, and it continues to administer brutal detention practices both on- and off-shore. This is despite Australia's history of large-scale migration and the fact that multiculturalism is much vaunted in

the 'selling' and marketing of Australia (Ho, 2011). While racism towards Indigenous Australians and other non-white groups (such as Asian Australians) persists, racist fears and hatred are now most intensely levelled at Arabic and Muslim Australians, new and established, with moral panics intensifying after September 11, 2001 and the Cronulla Riots in 2005 (Dreher and Ho, 2009).

The Australian government's refugee and asylum seeker policies have become some of the most draconian, regulatory and securitised in the world, with privatised offshore detention centres for people seeking refuge by boat, and cruel exclusionary refugee and asylum seeker legislation (Pickering, 2001). While there are NGOs (such as WDP) advocating for more support, the Australian government's track record in relation to refugees can best be described as harsh and uncompromising.

Despite the fact that Australia's recent intake of refugees is small compared to other countries, there has been ongoing moral panics about refugees and asylum seekers as a 'deviant population'; this has been especially true of the 'quality' print media, which has presented asylum seekers as invading, racialised, diseased and deviant (Pickering, 2001). Mainstream media, right wing activists and politicians have consistently presented Australia as under siege, with displaced peoples - refugees and asylum seekers - constructed as 'queue jumpers', and as threats to security and to Australia's supposedly homogenous 'national values'. Farida Fozdar and Lisa Hartley write that 'negativity towards refugees in particular is widespread, with up to 75 per cent of the population seeing them as a threat' (2013, p. 130). As a result, visibly different migrants and refugees are unlikely to feel welcomed by the majority mainstream population and may feel ambivalent about whether they belong in Australia.

The WDP draws attention not only to the situation facing refugees, but also to that of international students, who can experience intense loneliness (Sawir et al. 2008), racism from state structures and universities, racialised exploitation as casual workers (Florance and McGhee, 2016), and racist abuse on public transport (Williams, Gailberger and Lim,

2016). Through its food hospitality activism, the WDP seeks to challenge racist and xenophobic views of refugees, racialised migrants and international students.

## **Methodology**

From our review of literature, our research question became: how do visual and verbal texts represent the food hospitality activism of the WDP? To answer this, we analysed photographic images and verbal texts drawn from the WDP web and Facebook pages and from online magazines hyperlinked via the WDP webpage's news media section. We selected texts that represented food hospitality activism, with a focus on photographic images of food and commensality and their associated headlines and written text. Images selected for analysis were either taken directly by WDP volunteers and remediated by mainstream media publications, or they were taken by professional photographers for media stories about the WDP. Our focus was on the semiotic resources and the meaning-making potential of these texts, and not on their conditions of production or their interpretation by audiences (Swan, 2010). Our focus on the meaning potential of visual and written texts, rather than their production or consumption, has its limits. For instance, industry conditions affect how visual and written texts are produced. Photographers cannot control how their digital images are re-purposed by the journalists who compose the written text. Journalists do not write their own headlines, and this can also contribute to shifts in meaning potential. Despite the complexities of these production contexts, this chapter works from the view that images and text work to produce meanings 'beyond' the intentions of their producers.

### *Theoretical framing, methods and sampling*

Our theoretical approach draws on the literatures of critical race and whiteness studies, feminist studies of digital media, and critical food studies. It is influenced by social semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis (Adami, 2014, 2015a; Nakamura, 2002; Van Leeuwen, 2008), with a particular focus on hyperlinking and cross-posting (Adami, 2014, 2015b). Multimodal semiotic approaches are not rigid maps but descriptive frameworks (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001). They are a first step in the analysis, enabling

descriptions of analytic categories, followed by explanatory categories, followed by theoretical approaches to enable wider social and political interpretations (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001).

Taking inspiration from Brooke-Erin Duffy, Urzula Pruchniewska and Leah Scolere's (2017) argument that media ecologies need analysing, we cut a slice through the WDP's media ecology and, inspired by Ian Cook's (2004) work on following food, we 'followed' the WDP media and their hyperlinks. We followed the hyperlinks to online magazine and newspaper coverage, because hyperlinks indicate the associations that the WDP webpages seek to create as part of their 'virtual neighbourhood' (Martinson, 2006). External links to other sites, along with differences in lexical field and images, each influence how users read websites and can also indicate political effects.

We viewed the WDP webpages and online media coverage hyperlinked on the WDP webpages, took screenshots that we labelled, printed, and stored on a computer, and noted points of interest in relation to images of food, commensality and people to develop preliminary codes. We then coded all the images on the webpages and online media stories more systematically, adding a sample of 10 images each from the Facebook and Instagram sites. Accessed in January 2015 and in April 2017, our dataset comprised:

- 9 images from the WDP webpages
- 21 images from 13 online magazine and newspaper stories
- 10 images from the WDP Facebook site
- 10 images from the WDP Instagram account.

We generated codes such as 'ethnic food', 'eating', 'whiteness', 'commensality' from the literature and the images. Analysis of whiteness is complex because it is both seen and unseen, and it is performed through stylised visual conventions and cultural scripts that normalise whiteness across a range of off- and online media (Flowers and Swan, 2017; Swan, 2008; Swan, 2017). Our analysis was informed by our already well-established

focus on visual regimes of making race: Lisa Nakamura's work on 'digital racial formation' (2002, 2008), and the 'racialised gaze' and 'coloured semiotic resources' in visual design and digital multi-modality (Fleckenstein, 2014; Hum, 2015).

After collecting our larger sample, we selected three images and their accompanying verbal text for detailed analysis and interpretation. The images represent three major visual tropes: 'food porn', 'world on a plate' and 'home mode everyday multiculturalism'. The texts were each accessed via WDP webpages, which hyperlinked to online media publications. Two images were taken by professional photographers on behalf of the media publications with verbal text generated by a journalist. The third image was uploaded to the WDP Facebook page by a WDP volunteer; it was then published in an online newspaper alongside verbal text prepared by a journalist.

### **Imaging food hospitality activism**

Visually, the most striking feature of the full sample of photographic images is the predominance in the online magazine and newspaper publications of close-up and intimate images of dishes of prepared food. When people are featured, the images typically do not show full bodies, but only arms and hands serving food. There were fewer photographic images of people interacting over food than one might expect given that the WDP is about commensality, or as they put it, 'conversations over food.' Indeed, it was typical of the online magazines reporting on WDP to focus on dishes of food and not on people. Such images were often in the conventionalised and highly popular genre of 'food porn' (Coward, 1984; Cruz, 2013; Dejmanee, 2016; Ibrahim, 2015; Lavis, 2017). Overall, what is conspicuous is that across the online newspapers and magazines, there were no photographs of food preparation, of people actually eating, nor of cleaning up after the meal. In contrast, the WDP webpages feature a much higher percentage of images of people eating together. There also full shots of people – rather than hands - serving themselves food or standing near plates of food. The other prominent difference between the images relates to their style and aesthetics. The effect of these differences, as

we argue below, is that the remediated news media images reproduce a pervasive whiteness that preserves offline racist meanings and recirculates them online.

### **Digital food porn**

To turn now to a detailed analysis of the three images, we examine two taken from a national, and the third from a regional, online newspaper. We begin with the online version of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* magazine supplement, *Good Food*. The *Good Food* online magazine story about the WDP is dominated by a large photograph of a pavlova dessert. The image sits at the top of the page and is accompanied by a column of verbal text (see Boys, 2014). The image is brightly lit and shot from above at an oblique angle. It displays a perfectly round pavlova, up close and personal enough to see syrup dripping through the deep folds of whipped cream and banana and passionfruit slices sliding lusciously down the sides of the white meringue. This image is a classic 'food porn' shot, part of a 'now familiar trend in gastronomic representation' that entails 'spectacularized commensality' (Lavis, 2017, p. 200). Academics and food commentators alike use the term 'food porn' to describe a visual genre of conventionalised images of food, highly stylised such that they appear 'more than real' and are used to produce sensory sensations (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 170). The stylistic conventions include close-up shots of food, usually desserts, beautifully lit with a focus on detail, sharpness, glossiness, high pigment, depth, light and 'oozing' (Coward, 1985, Dejmanee, 2016), which give rise to food porn's 'Rubenesque excesses' (Cruz 2013, p. 331).

An important point about food porn is its migration and proliferation as a food media genre from offline to online. Tania Dejmanee (2016) describes how the concept 'food porn' was used before the Internet to describe images in print media and advertising, but this style has since been modified for digital media. Ariane Cruz (2013) suggests that 'cyber gastro-porn' has 'perforated' interactive, user-driven digital photograph sharing platforms such as Instagram. Anna Lavis (2017) points to a wide range of platforms which circulate food porn images from Facebook to Pinterest, Tumblr to Instagram. She

shows not only how offline images get remediated online, but how online images also shape media representations offline:

Such foodie moments seep beyond the Internet into other forms of popular media, such as UK fashion magazine Marie Claire's 'Insta-grub' section, which comprises seven photographs of food taken by a different celebrity each month. (Lavis 2017, p. 200)

In relation to digital food porn, Yasmin Ibrahim emphasises that it elicits 'an invitation to gaze and vicariously consume, and to tag images of food through digital platforms' (2015, p. 2). In this way, she argues, 'our eyes let us "taste" food at a distance by activating the sense memories of taste and smell' (Ibrahim 2015, p. 4). Food porn works to stimulate our desire and ogling, but remains unattainable. Cruz writes that food porn provides:

brilliant close-up photographs of splendidly executed dishes created with exotic ingredients – and its chimerical act of transforming a food fantasy (one far out of reach of the quotidian, non-professional American chef) a phantasmagorical yet palatable food reality. (2013, p. 331)

This fantasy is amplified in that food porn photographs always hide the labour that goes into their production (Lavis 2017).

It is somewhat surprising that an online food magazine would feature a food porn shot given that the WDP is about food hospitality activism. The focus of WDP is not completely lost to *Good Food* as headline for the article is 'Welcome Dinner Project connects Australians with refugees' (Boys, 2014). Underneath the pavlova is the caption: 'Welcome to our world: Welcome Dinners unite people through the simple act of sharing food'. Thus, the article acknowledges the aims of the WDP and foregrounds refugees in its verbal text. But the visual image offers an alternative meaning, namely a racialised reading of the WDP that focuses on whiteness.

Very few scholars have commented on the racialisation of food porn, but race can be signified through a number of visual tropes, including food (Hall, 1997; Flowers and Swan, 2017). Amy Bentley (2001), Melissa Clicks (2009), Perel Gurel (2016), Diana Negra (2012), Lisa Jordan Powell and Elizabeth Engelhardt (2015) all stress how food media can signify whiteness in varying ways, from lighting through to food's marketing and cultural associations. Accordingly, we suggest that the digitalised pavlova, as an image of the national dish of Australia, connotes white Australia in a number of ways. Adopted from a smaller New Zealand dessert in the 1930s, the pavlova with its European colonial meringue, invokes the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova with her femininity, daintiness, lightness and whiteness (Leach and Browne 2008; Leach 2010; Symons 2010). Michael Symons points to its nostalgic appeal in the latter part of the twentieth century as:

Contrasting markedly with the even earlier, masculine meat pies, damper and billy tea, this feminine food icon harked back to the disappearing full-time home-makers - people's mothers and grandmothers (2010, p. 212).

Indeed, many early twentieth century women's community cookbooks called on women to make the idealised perfect pavlova. Thus, the pavlova not only references the feminine whiteness of the ballet dancer, but also white domestic femininity in the days of overwhelmingly white immigration. Thus, the pavlova's connotations of white femininity and a nostalgia for an Anglo-centric Australia work to visually counter the message of the WDP and its project of hospitality activism.

Anthropological studies stress that particular foods, meals or cuisines are emblematic of nations (O'Connor 2008). Indeed, most people's experience of the nation is not through political rhetoric, but through food, and we can see nationalism invoked in cookbooks, food advertising, ingredients and dishes (Palmer 1998, p. 187; Crowther 2013, p. 139). We can think of the *Good Food* image of the pavlova as a form of digital 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995). Greg Noble writes how 'banal nationalism', as expressed in

Australian homes in the form of trinkets, embeds the nation 'materially in everyday life' (2002, p. 54). In the online food magazine, the image is accompanied with verbal text, 'welcome to our world'. The verbal text reinflects the nostalgia for white feminine domesticity connoted by the visual image to position white people as the welcoming hosts of the nation. Groups who are seen to be more national than others are recognised as the arbiters of national culture and define who can belong under what conditions (Hage, 2012). Hence, the food hospitality activism of the WDP becomes visually and digitally re-semiotised as whiteness.

### **Digital World on a Plate**

In the second image, taken from another hyperlinked magazine, we can see a different kind of othering at work. Rather than just one image, *Broadsheet* - an online entertainment publication which specialises in events and food reporting - features an incredible seven digital food porn-style photos under the headline and above a column of verbal text (see Kauppi 2014). The text reads: "A beautifully simple idea, The Welcome Dinner Project is helping new arrivals and established locals get to know each other over a good feed".

The images are dynamic at the top of the webpage and rotate between a range of beautifully shot images of people helping themselves to an aesthetically appealing buffet table bedecked with well-displayed dishes of food. Some images show disembodied white arms and hands reaching out to serve themselves. One depicts a male hand and forearm proffering a gleaming stainless-steel pan of 'ethnic' looking food above a feta cheese salad and baked lasagne. Five of the images feature middle class cutlery and bowls such as wooden salad servers, ramekins and enamel baking dishes. Two foreground a glistening wok filled not with takeaway-style brightly coloured stir-fry Chinese food, but middle class fare, signified by the appearance of grains and greens.

Overall, these images depict the abundance and diversity of ethnicised dishes available for the taking. Like similar images in the other online publications, they reference the ‘world on a plate’ trope found in off- and online media in which a cornucopia of ‘foreign’ dishes are arranged in buffet style and visualised in an aesthetically appealing way, ready for the eating (Cook and Crang 1996). Ian Cook and Mike Crang (1996) argue that the ‘world on a plate’ trope is a food media motif that depicts and evokes a white middle class desire for consuming a medley of ‘foreign’ dishes – what has been called ‘food adventuring’ (Heldke 2003) As Sunvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese write:

[t]he culinary, with its economy of enrichment and incorporation, signifies the palatable and always aestheticized element of multiculturalism precisely because it still effectively reproduces an assimilationist economy of cultural containment and control. (1996, p. 110)

Thus, the *Broadsheet* images represent ‘edible diversity’, palatable and digestible to the white middle class palate, but also the eagerness of white people to devour the ‘Other’. The racialisation of the images is underscored by the headline, ‘Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?’, the title of a 1960s film, starring US black actor Sydney Poitier, which tells the story of a man being introduced to his white girlfriend’s racist father.

Too often in food media, food is decontextualised, both visually and textually, in ways that ignore complex histories of colonialism, power, migration and the unpalatable realities of racism and inequality (Flowers and Swan, 2017; Germann Molz, 2007). While there is extensive criticism directed at the desire of white people to consume ethnic food in offline food media and tourism settings, to date little attention has been given to online representations and, in particular, to the visual trope of ‘world on a plate’.

What is remarkable is that the *Broadsheet* images of WDP do not depict ethnicised or racialised bodies. Such visual exclusions are key to othering racialised people (Van Leeuwen 2000), and to visually representing digital food ‘multiculturalism without migrants’ (Hage 1997). In film, for example, representations of ethnic food are seen as offering vicarious consumption of culinary adventurism, but ‘without ever coming into

contact with actual fear-invoking racialised bodies' (Lindenfeld qtd. in Kelly 2017, p. 21). As Cara Kelly insists: 'as a strategic rhetoric, whiteness operates... through the negation of racialized bodies' (2017, p. 25). Again, we can see how digital food images in online food media re-inflect the WDP's food hospitality activism, visually representing the events as a way to 'do' food adventuring. Indeed, a longstanding criticism of Australia's approach to migrants is that they are only welcomed for their food. As Sneja Gunew argues:

in the imagery of official multiculturalism, the host wants only the food and only the mute or stammering bodies cut off from their words and histories. We are asked to produce only food and not fluency. (1993, p. 41)

### **Peopling Food**

In contrast to a comparative lack of images of racialised bodies in most of the newspaper and magazine stories hyperlinked to external sites, the WDP's webpages, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts feature hundreds of images of people of different racialised and ethnicised backgrounds interacting during and at the end of the dinner events. For instance, the WDP webpages present eight professional-looking images of food and commensality, featuring seven with small groups of mixed racially minoritised participants and one of all white people. On the WDP Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages, there are hundreds of photographs of food and commensality, with a mix of professional and amateur style close-up and long shots portraying people talking to each other, eating, helping themselves to food, and standing and seated in kitchens, dining rooms, lounges and on patios at intimate and friendly social distances.

While some of the images are more professional or stylised photographs (often those cross-posted and re-purposed from external sites), most of the images on the WDP sites are in a 'home mode' genre of photography, taken with mobile phones. Richard Chalfen (1987) writes about how Kodak film in the 1960s transformed domestic photography, creating a new expressive and aesthetic form that he calls 'home mode'. Seemingly spontaneous, the amateur photographs were stylised and curated by family members

according to social norms of family, home and photography. Digital media scholars argue that a digital 'home mode' style of photographic images is making a comeback on social media as a vernacular antidote to overly stylised, perfect images, albeit with less focus on the family (Ibrahim, 2015; Perlmutter and Silvestri, 2013).

Many of the WDP snapshots of food hospitality activism reflect a digital home mode style not only in their aesthetic but also in the focus on the domestic and its ordinariness. We see homely, cluttered, non-aestheticised domestic spaces and objects – aluminum foil, cling film, blinds, straggly garden plants, tables of messy crockery, tupperware, mismatched furniture, and evidence of food labour. Naturalistic, poorly-lit, with higgeldy-piggeldy bodies and half-eaten food, these stand in stark contrast to the stylised images of food in the online newspapers and magazines.

One marked type of home mode shot is the photograph taken by the facilitators at the end of the dinner, usually on their mobile phones and conforming to generic conventions: these photos typically show the attendees at the Welcome Dinner all huddling close together with big smiles, gazing directly in a horizontal angle at the camera, and holding coloured paper speech bubbles. Combined, these conventions signify solidarity and a sense of egalitarian conviviality. These images are then posted and shared on the WDP Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. This type of image contrasts with the food porn and world on a plate photographs on a number of counts.

To illustrate, we describe one such photograph. The image shows a large group of adults and children from diverse racial backgrounds all huddled together. People are in long shot with their full figures in picture, and they are waving and holding the WDP cardboard cut-outs of speech bubbles on which they have written their feelings about the event (such as 'happy', 'contented', 'welcome'). People sit or stand closer to each other than in the other, more professional photographs. Although individually dressed with different body types and hair styles, the image of the group evokes a sense of togetherness or post-meal commensality. The photograph is clearly posed but people

seem relaxed and energetic, if a little self-conscious. They are smiling broadly and looking directly at us as if to invite us to join in. A table of half-eaten dishes and dirty plates is also included in the image, rare occurrence in re-mediated food images of the WDP and in food media more broadly. The featured food and plates do not conform to the middle class stylised image of food porn. Instead we can see a mix of plastic containers and plastic picnic plates and cutlery. There are no wine bottles; instead there are large bottles of value-for-money fruit juice and piles of supermarket, sliced white bread. The image is in quintessential home mode aesthetic: blurry, harshly lit, crowded and poorly centred.

Such home mode images express an ordinarisation of the Welcome Dinners and their food hospitality activism, depicting everyday multiculturalism in the domestic sphere. Helen Grace (2013) argues that home mode style of digital images are more about affective expressivity than they are about aesthetics or content, and many of these WDP images convey warmth, generosity and conviviality, albeit mixed in with some social awkwardness. Given that these photographs are uploaded, posted, shared and circulated across a number of WDP media platforms, they interrupt 'the feed' of food porn and world on a plate photographs, although their circulation loops will be constrained to their platform audiences.

Digital photography is not only a record, but also a form of activity (Pink, 2011). Thus, as Sarah Pink notes that amateur photographs of 'real' activities uploaded onto digital platforms by community groups document and communicate 'the experience of being involved in projects and activities' (2011, p. 93). Thus, the home mode photographs not only show us ethnic food *with* migrants, they constitute in themselves a form of activity – food hospitality activism. They also illustrate a different form of everyday multiculturalism. To date, writers on everyday multiculturalism focus on public domains such as shops, malls and schools, and tend to focus on the temporality of the habitual and mundane in everyday multiculturalism, rather than on planned or engineered multicultural events (Noble 2013, Wise 2011, Ho 2011). In contrast, Welcome

Dinner events focus on domestic domains, are highly structured and require extensive organising. Hosts and homes are checked. Volunteers give up their time to facilitate the dinners and run activities to enable people to talk and share. They arrive early, put up balloons, help prepare the table, and welcome guests. Images of the WDP's everyday multiculturalism depict friendship and commensality in the domestic and intimate sphere. Of course, given our focus here is on digital images taken, uploaded and shared by the WDP, we do not comment here on the social effects of the food hospitality activism, although that is part of our wider project. As Amanda Wise (2011) suggests, there are possibilities for cultural anxiety and the exacerbation of cultural differences in cross-cultural commensality, as well as more positive connections. Indeed, the WDP organisers try to anticipate some of these issues in the way they choose their hosts, train volunteers and organise the events. Despite this, some of the digital home mode photos depict bodies that are more ill-at-ease than others - not hostile, but perhaps less confident or used to the circumstances.

As digital images of food hospitality activism, WDP home mode photos evoke an ordinarisation and domestication of racist politics in Australia. Rosalind Krauss (1994) notes that photographs of families and homes are part of the collective fantasy of domesticity and 'family cohesion.' And perhaps what we have here are images of a fantasy of the nation. The home is imagined as a place of sociality, hospitality and commensality for strangers, and as a site of politics and hope that counters the wider racist politics of government policies and mainstream media representations.

However, home mode images of hospitality activism and everyday multiculturalism can be re-semioticised once they are re-mediated from WDP sites. For example, the home mode photograph that we described earlier was repurposed for the online publication *The Perth Voice Interactive* (see Pollock 2015). The *Perth Voice Interactive* displayed the image next to the headline 'G'Day mate: Now get stuffed' reproducing the language and spelling typical of a broad Australian English accent, associated with an 'ocker' Anglo-centric masculine vernacular and its connotations of being laid back, informal and

conservative (Willoughby, Starks and Taylor-Leech, 2013). Thus, in this process whiteness is re-centred, like the images of the pavlova and world on a plate, albeit in different classed and gendered terms. Its white masculinity stands in strong contrast to the culturally feminised WDP, and the wider feminine associations of domestic food, the home and hospitality .

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have analysed a sample of digital photographic images and verbal texts from WDP media and its hyperlinked online food and news media coverage. We have shown how the WDP uses social and digital media, especially photographic images, to promote its project of food hospitality activism, domestic welcoming and everyday intercultural commensality. In particular, we have demonstrated that while the written text of mainstream media coverage tends to replicate WDP's core messages, these messages can be undermined by the images that accompany them. While some of these images are drawn from the WDP's digital media, others adopt problematically racist scripts.

In this chapter, we have shown how the WDP's food hospitality activism can be re-semiotised through various genres of digital photographs, including food porn, world on a plate and home mode everyday multiculturalism. Like offline food media, online digital images of food can racialise, Other, and invoke and normalise whiteness. Thus, we have illustrated how the images reinforce offline racism about multiculturalism without migrants. In addition to our discussion of the cross-posting and remediation of digital images, we have argued that written text often interacts with the digital images to produce and reframe meanings. We found that headlines and captions expressed views that undercut the WDP food hospitality activism to reproduce racialized stereotypes. In contrast, the WDP inserts the racially minoritised into its digital representations of the everyday, tapping into people's desire to connect with the Other and challenging racist ideas about refugees, asylum seekers and international students. The WDP's visual ordinarisation of food hospitality activism and everyday

multiculturalism organises material and affective hospitality through online tools and images, centring the home in Australian race politics.

The WDP influences how it is represented by providing images and content, much of which is re-used and re-circulated, but at the same time, it cannot control how its images are re-used and re-semiotised or how digital images produced by other media organisations appear alongside verbal text. Online magazines and newspapers visually translate food hospitality activism into pre-existing racialised tropes about food and migrants. Not only is re-mediation and re-semiotisation a product of digital cultures of sharing, and of digital platforms and their affordances, they are also now part of how journalism is organised and how the WDP and other social enterprises have to operate in their public communications.

Our chapter underlines how important it is to think about the separations and the connections between digital and offline food media, and to analyse how the specificities of digital food media produce meaning-making potential. This includes defining and mapping particular digital food genres and artefacts. In particular, we argue for more attention be given to digital racial formation and multimodal processes of racialisation, including whiteness. This is not simply an academic exercise, but as we argue elsewhere, this is also about addressing inequalities of media visibilities and invisibilities in food media, politics and activism (Flowers and Swan, 2017).

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