

Form 59
Rule 29.02(1)

Affidavit

No. NSD372/2023

Federal Court of Australia
District Registry: New South Wales
Division: Human Rights

Mehreen Faruqi

Applicant

Pauline Hanson

Respondent

Affidavit of: **Mehreen Saeed Faruqi**
Address: [REDACTED]
Occupation: Senator
Date: 3 October 2023

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I Mehreen Saeed Faruqi, Senator, of [REDACTED] affirm:

- I am the Applicant in these proceedings.
- Exhibited to me at the time of affirming this affidavit and marked "MF-1" is a bundle of documents to which I refer to throughout this affidavit. Where I refer to documents in this affidavit, I do so by referencing the page numbers in Exhibit MF-1.
- Unless otherwise indicated, I make this affidavit on my own knowledge, information and belief. Where I depose to matters on information and belief, I believe those matters to be true.

Background

Filed on behalf of (name & role of party) Mehreen Faruqi, Applicant
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[Version 3 form approved 02/05/2019]

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Mehreen Faruqi

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4. On 8 July 1963, I was born in Lahore, Pakistan.
5. I am Muslim.
6. I commenced studying a Bachelor of Engineering (Civil) degree at the University of Engineering and Technology in Lahore, Pakistan in 1982. In 1988, I completed my degree and obtained a gold medal (the highest medal you can achieve) in geotechnical studies.
7. Subsequently, in 1988, I commenced working as a structural engineer at NESPAK Consulting Engineers, the largest engineering firm in Pakistan. I held this position until 1992.
8. On 25 August 1989, I married my husband, Omar Faruqi. We have two children together, my son Osman Faruqi and my daughter, Aisha Faruqi.
9. In 1992, I migrated from Lahore, Pakistan to Sydney, Australia with my husband and son after obtaining permanent residency. Our son Osman had already been born when we migrated to Australia, but our daughter Aisha had not yet been born.
10. I have resided in Australia since 1992.
11. Between 1992 to 1994, I studied and completed a Master of Engineering Science, Environmental Management, Solid and Hazardous Water Management at the University of New South Wales in Australia (**UNSW**).
12. Between 1995 to 2000, I studied and completed a Doctorate in Environmental Engineering, Wastewater Management and Energy Recovery at UNSW.
13. I worked as both an engineer and academic between 1999-2013 and held the following positions:
 - (a) Environmental Engineer at Sinclair Knight Merz between 1999-2001;
 - (b) Manager Natural Resources and Catchments and Environmental Engineer at Port Macquarie-Hastings Council between 2001-2004;
 - (c) Senior Associate at Environmental Resources Management 2004;
 - (d) Lecturer in Environmental Management and Sustainability at the Institute of Environmental Studies at UNSW between 2004-2008. I was also the Acting Director at the Institute of Environmental Studies at UNSW between 2007-2008;
 - (e) Manager of Environment and Services at Mosman Council between 2009-2010;
 - (f) Academic Director Master of Business and Technology Program and Associate Professor at the Australian School of Business at UNSW between 2010-2013.
14. Between 2005 and 2011, I also held the following positions (some unpaid) through my various affiliations:
 - (a) Chair, Community Participation and Review Committee for the HCB Waste Issue at Orica Botany NSW between 2005 to 2010;
 - (b) Chair, Mosman Sustainability Advisory Group at Mosman Council between 2006 to 2008;
 - (c) Member (Sustainability specialist) of the NSW Government's Technical Committee for assessing 'Urban Sustainability Grants' under the Environmental Trust Funding

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between 2006 to 2010;

- (d) Visiting Fellow, Institute of Environmental Studies at UNSW between 2008 to 2011;
 - (e) Member, NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water Energy Efficiency Reference Group in about 2010; and
 - (f) Member, NSW Office of Water, Advancing Sustainability Leaders Advisory Group in about 2010.
15. In 2004, I became a member of the political party, The Greens NSW. I ran as a candidate for the Legislative Assembly seat of Heffron in 2011 and at the 2012 by-election.
16. In 2013, I was preselected by members of the NSW Greens to replace Cate Faehrmann in the NSW Legislative Council, and became the first Muslim woman to be a member of any Australian parliament. I occupied this role from 19 June 2013 to 14 August 2018, when I resigned.
17. On 20 August 2018, I was sworn in as a Senator for New South Wales. In doing so, I became the first female Muslim Senator in Australian history. As at the date of affirming this affidavit, I continue to hold the position of Senator for New South Wales.

My understanding of what racism is, how it is different to hurtful comments

18. In my experience, there is a difference between communicating a genuine perspective or viewpoint and expressing racism and hate speech.
19. As a politician, I think it is important in my role to raise issues in public debate, and I am not shy about voicing views or perspectives that others disagree with or may not be popular. I have had people respond strongly to my views in public debate, on social media, and through other forms of communication like writing or calling my office, and they respond in different ways. They may criticise what I am saying, sometimes very robustly, and I can appreciate and respect that they may have different views to mine.
20. Hate speech is different to that. That is criticism that is not just about what you're saying, but about who you are, what you look like and where you come from. The focus of the comments comes down to my race, my background, where I come from, and that is a clear distinction: that's racism.
21. I cannot – but more importantly, I don't want to – change who I am. I am proud of where I came from and the country I grew up in. Australia has been my home for more than three decades now, more time than I have lived in Pakistan, and I feel both proud and privileged to represent my community of New South Wales in the Senate. Comments are made about my particular attributes, about my being a person of colour, about not having grown up in Australia, not belonging to the dominant white narrative that exists in Australia. When it is those attributes that instigate the hate comments, rather than the merit or substance of my words or deeds, it's clearly racism.
22. I recall that I was not sure what to expect of Australia when I first migrated here and was surprised by incidents of racism that I experienced. Over many years I have been exposed to a narrative that – as a migrant – it's fine, and I'm acceptable if I'm hard-working, and a "good migrant". My Australian-ness feels conditional on staying quiet and not raising my head above the parapet and joining the debates that are happening in this country by expressing my views which could be different from the 'mainstream'. I experienced racism, but I ignored it because I was new to the country and didn't want to be labelled a troublemaker, life was hard enough as it was; my husband and I kept our heads down, focused on putting a roof over our heads, dealt with the difficulties of getting jobs and not

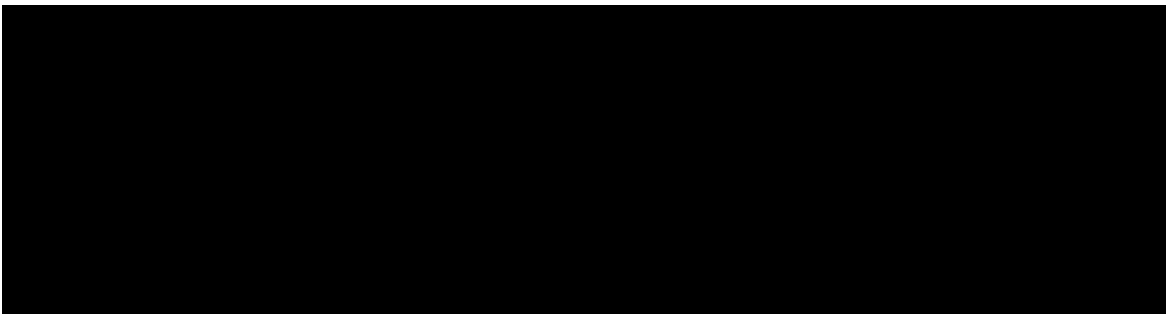
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being hired because of our names or accent. Now, in public life it is my job to speak out and try to rectify injustices in our society. When I do speak out against that narrative, my Australian-ness is challenged or called into question because I'm not white, or because I was not born here, or because for some I am outside the dominant white culture of this country. When it is those attributes that form the foundation of the challenges, and those challenges take the form of hate speech, I think it's more than just hurtful comments, it's harmful: to me, that's racism.

23. I feel that some people don't want me in Australia because I'm a Muslim. For them, I feel that they consider Muslims to be conservative and my way of life is incompatible with modern Australia. Others have told me to stick to my religion and not to meddle in 'our way of life' or have said that they don't want me to advocate for the policies of The Australian Greens. Either way, I'm accused of being divisive. Honestly, it seems like I'll never be Australian enough to be accepted.
24. Being Muslim plays a huge part in racist commentary I have received. People I speak to often don't want to connect religion to racism, saying criticising you for your religion is not racist. But when it comes to Islamophobia, I think there is a clear trope in terms of how that is directly racist because there's a clear racialized stereotype of Muslims rife in society and the media which kind of puts us all in a box. We are viewed as conservative. Muslim men are portrayed as Middle Eastern, with beards and turbans, or as gun-toting terrorists. Muslim women as wearing hijab or a burqa, which are viewed as signs of oppression. Muslim women are presented as passive victims of male power who need rescuing from their religion and from Muslim men; that we are either weak victims with no agency, or that we support terrorists. There is an expectation that being a Muslim, you are somehow responsible for terrorist incidents perpetrated by a Muslim/s. Regardless of which of these tropes is in play, the core of the narrative is that people like me don't fit into the predominate Judeo-Christian culture of this country and can't be 'real Aussies'.
25. For me, being a Muslim and being a person of colour are very closely tied to racism, because the hateful comments that come my way are very often about religion and ethnicity. The comments are about my religion, about where I come from, and me not being Australian because I wasn't born here and I don't fit into that culture or belong here. Just a couple of years after joining NSW parliament, I remember putting a photo of my daughter and me up on social media as we were on a bridge across a river in Brisbane, and immediately receiving a response along the lines of 'before your husband blows it up.' This makes me feel that I cannot freely participate in public debate or even do something as simple as posting a photo with my family online without exposing them to harmful tropes about our race and religion. That was the incident when I decided to stop ignoring this hate and xenophobia.
26. Hate speech and racism have consequences, particularly when they are normalised and mainstreamed. The Christchurch Mosque massacre of 51 Muslims was committed by an Australian man who, the NZ Royal Commission report says, was driven by an extreme right-wing Islamophobic ideology. This is the difference between hurtful comments, criticism, or legitimate public debate on the one hand, and racism on the other.

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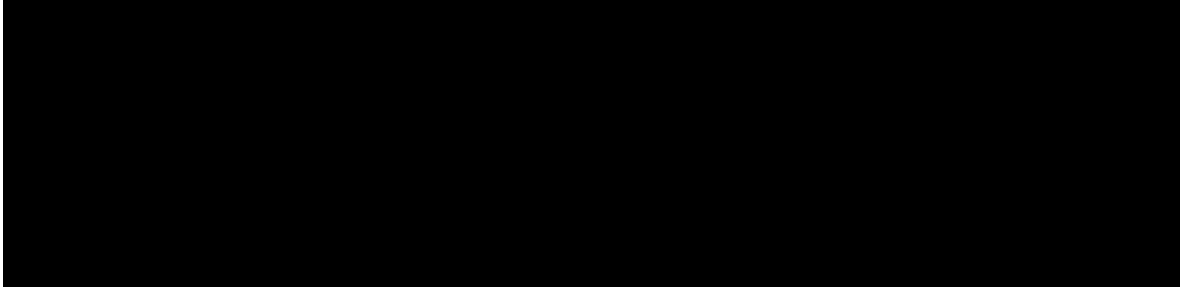
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My experience of racism before politics

28. I have been experiencing racism and discrimination since I moved to Australia in 1992. A lot of it we disregarded, for the reasons I have set out above at paragraph 22. I have set out below some incidents that stand out in my mind.
29. I remember an incident where we were looking for a rental property. It was a townhouse, and I went to the agent to ask for a viewing. This was a time where the agents would give you the keys and you would go to look at the property, around the late 1990s. When I asked to pick up the keys, the real estate agent asked me three times if I was aware of the highish rent of the place I was about to inspect, her voice kept getting louder each time. I remember thinking there was something very off about her saying this to me so many times. It was clear that she thought we could not possibly afford the rent.
30. I go to Pakistan almost every year to see my family, and I remember one year when I returned to Australia (I cannot remember exactly when), the customs official at the airport started speaking to me loudly and slowly and saying 'Do you understand what I am saying?' This had never happened to me before, and I felt it clearly had something to do with the way I was dressed, as it was the first time I had worn shalwar kameez on the way back to Australia.
31. I remember a time when my son was told to 'go back to Afghanistan.' It wasn't long after September 11, 2001. He was in high school in year 8 and was giving a speech at the school assembly.
32. I had completed a Masters and a PhD form UNSW, and I had worked as a structural engineer in Pakistan before I moved to Australia. The first job I got here after leaving UNSW was as a new entry-level graduate engineer, which I was very overqualified for, and the head of that division of a big consulting firm had wanted to interview me himself to see if I was a 'cultural fit.'
33. I have always been a sports fanatic, and I have played cricket, netball, badminton and table tennis throughout my time living in Pakistan. After I moved to Australia, in my late 30s (around 2002) when we were living in Port Macquarie, I started playing soccer. The coach of the women's team was a white man, and he would not let me play soccer unless I wore shorts. I don't wear shorts, and I have never worn shorts. I had to make a decision about what to do, and because I was trying to be a 'good migrant' and fit in and not cause trouble, and I really wanted to play soccer, I didn't want to rock the boat. I felt forced by the coach as he had the power to not allow me to play unless I did what he said. So I wore shorts and was so uncomfortable with the whole experience. Soon after that, I did my ACL and was not too sad about that because I was just so uncomfortable every week being forced to wear something I didn't want to.
34. I have encountered racism since arriving in Australia because I am a migrant, Muslim woman of colour. But I didn't respond to it because I thought people just didn't know me and once they did it would be different. Sometimes I felt disempowered to say anything, and that I couldn't or shouldn't make a fuss, and I would just let it slide because I really wanted to fit in and make a life here.

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35. With so many of these incidents, I look back now and wish I had said something, to the estate agent or the customs officer or the principal at my son's school. Sometimes I chastise myself: why didn't I just say no to wearing shorts? Why didn't I speak up? Why didn't I rock the boat?
36. I believe that the examples of discrimination outlined at paragraphs 29-33 above are the symptom of systemic racism in our country which is still not acknowledged the way it needs to be in order to tackle it.

My experience with racism in politics

37. Since stepping into public life, I feel that the level of racism I have experienced has increased enormously. I have been told more times than I can count that I don't belong in this role because I am not 'from Australia'.
38. People will openly and publicly say things like "what is a Muslim/migrant doing in the Australian parliament?". One of the earliest incidents I remember is when I was doorknocking before an election for the Greens in about 2011 or 2015. I remember the person, it was an older white male who answered the door in Sydney, and when I introduced myself on behalf of the Greens he said something like 'Why would you be even involved in politics here? You're not even from here.' While this sort of interaction happens quite a lot online, that particular incident is a very distinct memory for me; it's very clear in my mind.
39. I remember sitting in the audience for a 'Politics in the Pub' discussion panel between a group of people whose politics would be described as "progressive". The discussion on population and environment turned to migrants coming to this country because when they come to Australia, their ecological footprint becomes large. I interpreted this discussion as implying that in their 'poorer' countries, migrants had a small ecological footprint, but when they come to Australia they start contributing to environmental destruction. My husband and I were both in the room and felt deeply uncomfortable and targeted. At the end of the event, someone who had been saying those things during the discussion approached my husband and I and said something along the lines of 'well of course, we weren't talking about you, you're the 'good' environmentally aware migrants.'
40. I was at a fundraising lunch last year raising funds for people affected by the floods in Pakistan. It was Pakistani food which was served. I was having a nice conversation with the person opposite me, and then he suddenly said to me 'What did you people used to eat with before knives and forks were invented?'. He said it in a very disparaging way. I couldn't believe what he had said, but obviously the subtext of white superiority didn't go unnoticed.
41. One of the platforms where I receive racist and hate speech comments – about me not being from here and that I don't belong – is on social media. For my mental health, I try to minimise looking at social media, but because of my job I still have to keep an eye on it. I also get phone calls to my office and emails like that, as well as people saying it to my face at times. I can't recall every occasion, every social media post or email or someone saying it to me because there have been so many.
42. A year into my political journey, I recall feeling like the abuse was becoming unbearable. Moderating the Facebook comments alone was becoming a job that was extremely time-consuming for my staff. Abusive phone calls were taking a toll on my health, and I was concerned for the wellbeing of my staff as well. I felt that something had to be done. Most people I confided in were completely unaware of the abuse, or were in total disbelief. Some, usually those who will never feel the sting of structural oppression, dismissed these online manifestations of racism as inevitable and ineffective. Well, they may have been inevitable, but they were damaging to me. Ignoring them wasn't going to stop that. Nor would it stop the people making these abusive comments from commenting.

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43. Perhaps strangely, one of the ways that my staff and I have tried to deal with racist and hateful speech is with humour. I have received many hateful tweets and messages over the years, and my staff and I have decided to expose some 'highlights' on a Facebook album we named 'love letters to Mehreen'. We also had them printed on coffee mugs. Photographs of these mugs are included at **pages 9-20 of Exhibit MF-1**. This may seem like a strange coping strategy, but the purpose of it is twofold: first, to draw attention to the sorts of hatred a woman of colour in politics is exposed to, and second, to allow us to cope by laughing off something which is really not funny at all. I recall we did get some support from people who had no idea this sort of toxic behaviour existed, but as is usual, I recall exposing and calling out racism initiated more hate as a result.
44. After I gave my first speech in the Senate, I felt like there was a massive hate campaign that exploded. I realised that when I spoke up about racism and hate speech, there was even more backlash. I feel like it just increases, it multiplies every time I speak up, and it gets worse when I actually speak up about it because I'm told I have a victim mentality, or I am dividing people, or I don't know what I am talking about, or there is no racism in this country, or that I shouldn't be here anyway. The louder I am in speaking up, the worse it gets. It really is a huge burden and it's getting worse, it's on my mind a lot and I feel, because of this constant gaslighting, I am now second-guessing myself a lot more.
45. On 6 December 2018, the Guardian published an article entitled 'Inside the hate factory: how Facebook fuels far-right profit' which referred to an investigation undertaken by the Guardian and revealed that I, along with the two first Muslim congresswomen in the United States, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, was a target of a covert international plot to control some of Facebook's largest far-right pages to harvest Islamophobic hate for profit. At the time of my first speech in the Senate, ten pages of this network launched a coordinated action, inciting their 546,000 followers to attack me for speaking against racism. A copy of this article is included at **pages 21-29 of Exhibit MF-1**.
46. In May 2021, I wrote an article entitled 'The moment of reckoning' which was published by The Monthly. In this article, I stated that *"It's impossible to feel safe in a workplace with constant reminders from the likes of One Nation of why people like me don't belong here. When parliamentarians call for a ban on Muslim immigration, question the value of multiculturalism or talk about immigrants in condescending ways, their comments may not be directed at me, but they are very personal"*. A copy of this article is included at **pages 30-32 of Exhibit MF-1**.
47. I am aware that there are other Greens MPs who are white but also migrants like me, who advocate party policies and their own views quite strongly in the public domain but I feel I'm the only one who has been told to go back to where I came from. I believe I get this backlash because of my race.

The tweet


48. I don't recall exactly how I found out about the tweet. I remember it was a Friday afternoon.
49. I believe a member of my staff highlighted it to me on the day it was posted, but I cannot remember who this was or what the exact circumstances were.
50. After I saw the tweet, I remember discussing with my staff/team about it. Initially the conversation was around possibly not responding to it, and then after the weekend it shifted to whether or not we would respond (and if so, what to say, what medium to respond in, and the timing of any response).

Immediate reactions to the tweet

51. It is difficult to separate out the short and long-term effects of receiving a tweet like this one.

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I have been receiving racist comments for such a long time in politics, and faced racism since I came to Australia in 1992.

52. My first reaction to the tweet was a feeling that it challenged my sense of belonging and sense of self. It immediately had that triggering effect. It was insulting and humiliating. I have lived in Australia for longer than I lived in Pakistan, I have made this place home. It's where my family has grown up. To still be made to feel like I'm not accepted when I feel like I belong to this place, it's pretty humiliating and belittling to be frank. I don't know what more I could do to be accepted.

53. I don't often show emotion to or in front of my staff, but I remember crying in front of one member of my staff in the aftermath of the tweet and the racism and toxicity it created

My staff and I work very hard to carefully think about and consider what public statements I make, to consider the content but also the effect and repercussions it may have for me and my staff, personally and professionally. We think about what the backlash will be, what hate and racism will I face, if we say this what will happen? My normal practice on seeing a tweet would be to consider with my team what I do next: do I respond; if so, what do I say; is this something we let slide or does it warrant a response.

54. One of the thoughts I recall having is that in my view, Senator Hanson has previously unleashed so much hate and racism. I recall being afraid of how much hate and racism she might unleash now from this tweet, including from her followers and people who take her behaviour as an example or as leadership of what is acceptable or reasonable. That fear was very real, because in my experience tweets like this by people who have a public platform and a large number of followers tend to encourage others to join the chorus of hate. I knew this tweet it would not just be limited to Senator Hanson: it was thousands and thousands of people who would be on Senator Hanson's Facebook page and other social media accounts who would read her tweet and add their own comments to it.

55. I kept an eye on social media over the weekend to some extent, but I remember that I gave up after a certain amount of time and only looked when I needed to be on social media for work. I also saw the emails come through on my phone. I don't remember all of the messages or exactly what was said in each one. I remember seeing a lot of social media messages/emails that echoed part of what Senator Hanson said. That sticks in my mind. I remember that the vast majority of messages were telling me to go back to where I came from, go back to Pakistan/shithole. I remember a lot of horrible expletives describing me. I also remember a lot of messages telling me I am a disgrace. It was because of these messages that I took Monday off.

56. On the Tuesday (after my mental health day), when I returned to work, my staff advised me not to look at them. They usually reported back to me what came in by saying things like "there was a barrage of terrible comments", but they never went into much detail about what was sent. On that Tuesday, we also decided that some calls could go to voicemail, as much as we could, but we are in an office so my staff had to take some calls. In preparing this affidavit, I have been reminded by my staff that they started to close off the ability for people to comment on Facebook. They turned off the comment sections on previous Facebook posts which were still open as people were posting on them and on Twitter.

57. The impact of this tweet has really made me think like never before of the consequences and impacts of telling it like it is for someone like me in Australian politics. It has had a silencing effect on me. I believe that comments like this are intended to have this impact. I find that I am moderating myself now when I speak about colonialism or racism, because

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these are some of topics that generate the worst hate. I always think about the consequences, and I know there will be some consequences for what I say, but I never imagined anything like this just because I am not white; because I am brown, a woman, a Muslim, a migrant. Now I find myself deciding whether or not to say anything much more than I did before. I am constantly monitoring and being selective about what I feel I can or should respond to out of fear of the backlash. When I choose to speak out boldly about something, I need to steel myself for the consequences. When you have to pick and choose what I say and how I will say it in the context of my job to engage in public debate, that is a silencing effect.

58. It is exhausting having to conduct a risk/benefit analysis about every word I say in public. This is not the same as someone just moderating themselves in a normal professional context. I feel the difference here is when my process has changed completely so that extra level of consideration becomes a muting effect, restraining my expression and my freedom to express myself on important issues of national significance.
59. Just look at my Twitter feed to see what I'm talking about. When I 'say nup to the cup', or when I highlight racism or the rise of the fascist far right, it's soon filled with threats and abuse. It's scary to be on the receiving end of such hate, and often I wonder if my stand is worth it. But when people tell me they shy away from public life after they see the volley of abuse sent my way, I know packing it in is not an option. On 7 November 2018, I posted a tweet to my Twitter account which collated some examples of the hate I received after I spoke out about the gambling industry and cruelty of horse racing on the day of the Melbourne Cup. A screenshot of my tweet is included at **pages 33-34 of Exhibit MF-1**.
60. I also feel like if I do say something, it is scrutinised more closely. I am a researcher and an academic, so I'm pretty thorough about my fact-checking. I feel like in my case, there are layers of fact-checking added, and that I can't afford to make a mistake on top of everything else. If I make a mistake, then that's another reason people will comment about me in hateful racist way.
61. In my role as a Greens senator, I have the Republic portfolio, and I am excited about this portfolio and campaigning on it, but I am also fearful about the consequences it will have once I start campaigning.
62. I feel that the more I speak up about racial slurs, the more I get attacked. Accompanying what I call the now predictable hatred are the haters' assumptions about why I speak out. I recall being told it's to attract more loathing so that I can play the victim. Someone called my office to tell my staff I was a drama queen. I can't recall exactly when, but I have been accused of playing identity politics, using my gender, race and religion as weapons – as if these are not the constant subject of the abuse I receive. I admit, I don't shy away from saying things that others find controversial. But I believe we can provoke conversations on controversial issues without descending into racism.
63. I feel as though I deserve better choices than being expected to ignore sustained abuse or being told to hide the fear and the gut-wrenching pain that it causes. If I speak out about it, I am told that I have a victim mentality and this is all part and parcel of public life. I will not shy away from doing my job or speaking out, but I will brace myself for the extra hurdles and the consequences
64. I feel small, 'othered' and isolated. I've worked in many places in my professional engineering career including consulting firms, local government, and a large university. Most of them were dominated by white men. But none of them were anything like parliaments, where I am so marginalised, so invalidated, and made to feel so small.

Short-term effect(s) – PROFESSIONAL

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65. One of the decisions I made when I stepped into this role was about how to interact with my team. Some of my current team members have been with me since I started in this role, and many of them are people of colour. My team and I share an awareness that we are privileged to be in our positions/roles, and we understand that it is rare. There are only 76 of us Senators in this country, it is a real privilege for me to be one and it is a reminder to me of how important it is to use this privileged platform to actually make some useful changes. That sense of privilege and responsibility is what drives me: if racism is stopping me from doing what I am there to do, then I have to do something about it. I want to change things, so the threat of abuse does not discourage people from participating in politics and in public debate.
66. In collaboration with my team, I made a decision to be bold and courageous and to push the boundaries of debate in this country to try to improve the lives of people who are marginalised. Part of my motive was to confront what I saw as the legitimisation and normalisation of racism and hate that I see happening in Australia.
67. I am conscious of the toll pushing boundaries takes on me and on my team. My team and I work hard to be bold and courageous and my team supports and encourages me to do that work, and I am the face of it. It takes a toll on all of us; not just me, although I am the public face of it.
68. I understand that in pushing boundaries, my team and I have to think about the impact it's going to have, on them and on me. We choose to use my role to the fullest extent to call out injustices that we see in society.
69. When I started in the role of Senator, I never anticipated the breadth and the depth of racism and hate that I would experience. I thought I knew the extent from the experiences of my previous role as a member of the NSW Legislative Council. I thought I had developed strategies to cope with it to the best of my ability and with the support of my team and my family. I had underestimated how it would pan out on the bigger stage that the Australian Senate provided. I never realised the impact it would have on me including my mental health and wellbeing, and on my family. I recall that other people who said similar things that I did about public issues didn't receive the backlash that I did. When I received this tweet, it was especially triggering, because of the personal attack but also because it came from a Senator who I consider has a history of racist stunts in the senate. 

70. When I received this tweet, part of what I had to contend with was balancing my own emotional reaction with the wellbeing of my team. I was so afraid of the barrage of hate speech and comments that was going to come next, and my team and I had to brace ourselves for this onslaught and I had to think about my team and the consequences for them and how I deal with all of that professionally whilst trying to deal with my own emotional rollercoaster.

Long(er)-term effect(s) – PROFESSIONAL

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Andrea Farrugia


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71. This tweet has had a particular impact, in part because of the compounding effect of receiving racist comments and hate speech for such a long time.
72. Whilst I have chosen this path and role and remain committed to actually make life better for marginalised communities, the personal emotional toll means it gets harder and harder to represent those communities.
73. There are already many barriers for political outsiders like me, and then every time I rise above the barriers like I have into Parliament I have to consider the repercussions and toll of that. I have to make decisions about whether I respond, whether I just stay quiet and not say anything and absorb the hate.
74. Choosing to stay silent means this will just keep happening, but standing up and calling it out means these repercussions will keep happening. The consequence of choosing to stay silent is I just keep absorbing the harm all the time, the broader community keeps absorbing the harm. I have a platform that very few people in this country have, and I feel that I have a responsibility to reduce this harm to the community.
75. I am conscious that this tweet and hate speech triggered and harmed me, but it also triggered and harmed other people who have heard this racist slur before. I feel an obligation to keep pushing and fighting against that happening. The emotional toll on me is there, but so is the commitment to a fight to change things. I received contact from people who could relate to the experience of being told to 'go back to where you came from'. [REDACTED]
76. Being a public figure does not inure me to the harm and psychological damage that comes from experiencing racism. I started using the Parliamentary workplace support service because of the impact of the racism I have experienced. I have been doing that for more than a year now and I started shortly after the tweet was published because the racism and hate speech has reached a level where I felt I needed to reach out for that support.
77. The emotional toll is now an everyday experience for me: it is literally every single day that I feel this, and it can feel like a heavy burden. It was there before this tweet, but it felt so much worse to receive this attack from a workplace colleague.
78. It is extremely stressful being in a workplace with someone who has said this sort of thing to and about me without any consequences. There are days where I will spend hours in the chamber in Canberra with this aggressor sitting right across the room from me. It's difficult for me to go in there every day, to sit there and do my job. I have a physiological reaction to going into the chamber to sit in close proximity to someone who has caused so much upheaval and distress in my life, and in the lives of countless Australians of migrant background, over so many years.
79. [REDACTED]
80. The effects of hate speech shouldn't be a burden left to individuals like me to bear. It shouldn't be exclusively my responsibility to hold individuals to account. This would not and should not be tolerated in any other workplace. I have worked in so many workplaces in Australia, I'm a civil engineer so most of the workplaces I have worked in are white and male dominated. But I have never experienced anything even close to this racism and hate speech in those workplaces.
81. This was a direct attack from a colleague in my workplace, a very direct attack from a

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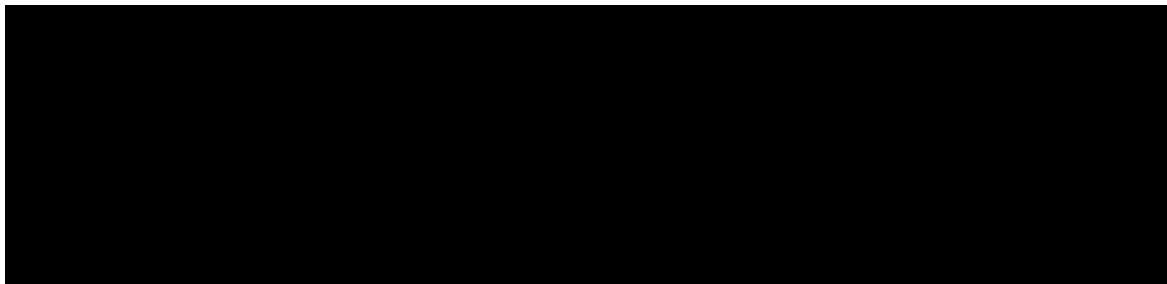
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colleague with a big platform. I don't think I have ever experienced this sort of racism from a colleague in my life. This person was able to say what she said with no consequences, and not just say it but re-affirm it in and outside the workplace and nothing substantive was done.

82.



83. It's the marginalisation, the racism, and then when I call out the racism, the gaslighting as if I am the one who is wrong, who is causing the division, and who should watch what I say. I feel it's racism that divides the community, not calling it out, and it's pretty heart-wrenching, it cuts you up. I feel unsafe and threatened, and there is no separation in my workplace so I have to face this person who caused this trauma in my life every single day the Senate sits. I have to live that trauma every day, and I have to do that not knowing if there will be an end; it could continue for years to come if we both remain in our jobs, which reignites this upheaval for me and many others.
84. I am much more aware of the toll it has and continues to take on me. No one should be made to feel this way for doing their job, one they are passionate about. I want to and will continue in my role, but it is much harder to do this than I originally anticipated and the toll it has taken is much bigger.
85. I am pretty self-confident, but I have been doubting and second guessing myself a lot more. I so lucky to have such amazing, intelligent people in my team to take advice from, and I do take their advice. I was pretty confident in our work, but this self-doubt has crept in. It's a self-doubt about belonging, about whether I should be in this role, about whether I should have or should continue to do and say the things I have done and said.
86. Many months after the tweet, the social media posts and emails continue about this: the intensity varies, but it hasn't really stopped. People are still posting about what happened and responding to it with more racism and hate, that I am a horrible person and I should go back to where I came from. I now try not to show my emotions or share my thoughts with my team because I don't want to exhaust their emotional support.

Short-term effect(s) – PERSONAL

87. I am preparing this statement almost a year after the tweet, and I still have sleepless nights.
88. This tweet and the hate it unleashed dominates my emotional space, and I have spoken to my husband about it almost every single day since it happened.
89. Since this incident, I have felt unsafe and threatened. I look over my shoulder a lot more. Not long after the tweet, I can't remember exactly when, I was walking towards my home and there was a car parked outside with a person sitting in the driver's seat, and I felt fear and just ran into my house. This event has made me more fearful, like I have a lack of psychological and emotional but also physical safety at times as well.

Long(er)-term effect(s) – PERSONAL

90. My husband really bears the brunt of the toll this has and continues to take on me. He is very supportive, and we both realise that this has happened because of the public role I

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have. This wouldn't have happened or matter if I wasn't in this role, if I was just an anonymous citizen, and we question the unfairness of the toll this takes we talk a lot about whether to pursue accountability and this court case, and where that pathway will take us. In the end we both agree that to make change, I do have to keep doing my work boldly. This is reaffirmed by people I meet who tell me the stand I take on many injustices makes them hopeful that things can change for the better.

91. I continue to have sleepless nights, and a few times I have woken up in great distress. I was never that person; I have never experienced that before.
92. My husband is extremely supportive, but I am also aware that there is a limit on stamina to keep dealing with this over and over. So there are times when I try not to share my thoughts or emotions with him, stopping myself from sharing the hurt and trauma because I don't want him or my children to feel the same trauma I do.
93. Sometimes I am told to 'grow a thick skin,' that others experience criticism too. It's tiring to have to explain on such a regular basis the difference between what others might experience that are hurtful comments, and racism or hate speech. I don't believe 'growing a thick skin' is the answer because if I do, I just become immune to racism nothing will change. I also believe if I 'grow a thick skin,' I will lose my vulnerability and by extension my ability to feel for others as well. So I will cry, but I will not develop a thick skin because that helps no one.
94. I do not believe that others are expected to respond in that way to this sort of behaviour when they are attacked for who they are, and it's exhausting to be told that this is the solution.
95. In bringing this action, I hope to draw a line in the sand about what is and is not acceptable conduct for a person in a workplace such as parliament. Many people do not seem to understand that when racist speech happens, it impinges on the lives and rights of people who are exposed to it. If we leave it up to individuals to confront it case by case, we create a huge burden on already marginalised communities. I hope that by bringing this action, there will be a shift in what is considered acceptable discourse by people in positions of prominence and responsibility.

'Offend'

96. To me, the word 'offend is about feeling disrespected. It's about making someone feel upset or not good about themselves, and that is harmful. It's harmful because it minimises who someone is: it's intentionally trying to exclude or belittle someone. In the context of discrimination and racism, it's about belittling you for who you are, for your background, for what you look like.
97. I think when someone is offended or insulted, there are layers of how a person might feel. If that offence takes place in the context of someone's race or religion, something someone cannot do anything about, I feel it's quite different in terms of the emotional distress.
98. For me, if someone disrespects me in the context of something I have said, I can cope with that, I can come back and have a conversation with them. But if it's done in the context of who I am, where I come from, what I look like, I think it's much more emotionally distressing.

'Insult'

99. To me, there isn't much of a difference between offend and insult. I feel it's about the same disrespect, the same belittling, the same kind of intentional harm. In the context of racism, it's very similar in terms of the emotional distress.

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100. I don't think there is a place for offensive conduct or comments in day-to-day political discourse. I feel offending and insulting comments are often couched as robust debate, but I think there is a clear line between being insulting and offensive to someone and robust debate. You can have really good, robust debate without being offensive or insulting.
101. To me, this tweet was not robust debate. Telling someone to 'piss off back' to where they came from is insulting, it's offensive, it's humiliating. It was probably perfectly acceptable for Senator Hanson to object to my comments about the Queen and to engage in a debate about the Queen's legacy, but it is not acceptable to me for her to target me based on my heritage.
102. It has also unleashed a frenzy of other vile and abusive responses as well. For me, it is important for people to have the right to voice their opinion, no matter how strong. But I feel it comes more naturally for some people because they might not be migrants or people of colour so they are free to do that. I think it stems from this dominant view of 'white' culture, that for some people they can own the right to debate but anyone who is perceived as inferior to them does not have that same right. For others like me, my right to public debate is limited because of how I look and where I come from.
103. It's not easy to offend me. I am prepared for robust debate. I have been in roles where I have been the only woman or one of the very few persons of colour in organisations which are often very male dominated. I am not easily offended when people disagree with my opinion: I meet people every day in my role who robustly disagree with my opinion. I often have conversations with neighbours and community members about what I stand for or what my political party stands for. They have strong opinions, and that is never offensive or insulting. When disagreement is done in a respectful way, that actually leads to good, creative solutions. I have always believed that I can use speech in that way and it's really important for us to disagree on matters that are important to us. As a politician, if I want other people to listen to my views, I'm very open to listening to other people's opinions as well and hopefully changing my mind if they are convincing enough. I have led big campaigns of controversial issues, such as decriminalising abortion and legalising cannabis, which have faced significant opposition, and strong negative opinions about the issue. So, I don't think I am easily offended or insulted with disagreements, opposing views and robust debate.
104. When I first read the tweet, I was offended and insulted. That day, I recall seeing similar sentiments to mine being expressed and from what I remember seeing, I don't recall other people getting the hate that I got. I felt this was an unleashing of hateful remarks because of who I am. Because of my history with experiencing racism and hateful remarks since being in public life, it was like putting salt in the wound.
105. It's not just the final sentiment of 'piss off back to Pakistan' that is offensive or insulting. The sentiment expressed in the first part is about me being a migrant and not having the right to the same things that other people in this country do. I believe that I have the same right as every other citizen of Australia to be able to express myself and have the same opportunities that others who live here do, so this whole tweet is part of the same sentiment of trying to insult and humiliate me.
106. It's very hard to separate out whether I was offended and insulted professionally from whether I was offended and insulted personally. This tweet was directed at, happened in, and I saw it in my workplace, it happened because of the work I do. While it happened in that context, the effect on me is very personal as well. The distress and trauma that it causes is very personal.
107. The overlap between professional and personal is not easy to separate for me because I am a minority in my workplace, the way I look and where I come from is something quite distinct that I can't change.

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108. The overall impact is sometimes really difficult to explain in terms of how it impacts your mental and physical health. I have a feeling of being despised for what I look like, for where I come from, because I have the audacity to participate in public debate. That participation becomes harder and harder to do to my full capacity. The impact feels like dismissing me as a person who is a legitimate part of the community because of my background. That dismissiveness is what is difficult because it's based on what I look like and where I come from which makes my view apparently not as legitimate and valid as others, I don't have the right to express that view. I'm still adamant that I want to express these views strongly because of this really privileged role that I have, but the process of expressing that role has become more twisted and arduous than it needs to or should be.
109. The effect it has on me is feelings of being excluded, being othered, being belittled, the feeling of not belonging and not being able to express my opinions. That is very insulting: I have lived here for more than 31 years, more than I have lived in the country where my family lived for generations. I have a family that has grown up here, I have worked in many organisations and have been elected by my State to perform this role. [REDACTED]

'Humiliate'

110. To me, humiliation is about being shamed or embarrassed in front of the whole world, whatever that is for you. For me, that is in front of all of my colleagues. I feel vilified.
111. Even without the scars I have from previous racist encounters, this tweet is absolutely shocking and humiliating. It made me feel embarrassed and ashamed, it's abusive.
112. I've been in public life for 10 years now, this is the first time I have received such direct racial abuse from a colleague, and I feel the humiliation even more because there was no action taken by the workplace.
113. I felt like nothing was done to address it in my workplace. I have to be in the same Chamber with this person who caused this humiliation every day, which compounds it. I don't feel like I have the freedom of or that I am on an equal footing with my other colleagues, that I have the same right of expression to hold my opinions. I feel this has ebbed into my workplace and has impacted my feeling of freedom in my workplace to engage without having to go through this huge thought process before I say anything.
114. Senator Hanson's tweet made me feel as if I was ungrateful and undeserving of what I have achieved in Australia including being a Federal Senator. That made me feel degraded.
115. It was humiliating for Senator Hanson not to engage in any processes, and nothing could be done about it. It was like each step I tried to take to address it compounded the humiliation because there was nothing being done to address this or hold her accountable. I don't think I have ever felt humiliated in this way in my life, and because the message and the tweet keep being reaffirmed the humiliation feels like it is continuous.

'Intimidate'

116. To me, this word means to be threatened, making someone feel fearful or scared. At the heart of it is someone stopping me from doing or saying something.
117. The impact for me is to stop me from saying things: the threat is to shut up or beware of what is coming your way.
118. After this tweet, my workplace has felt hostile and unsafe because no action was taken. It is an unsafe place for me because I feel that if I say something similar again, I will have to

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go through the whole trauma again and no one will take any action, just like this time.

119. There is also the threat of physical violence, and there was a clear threat of physical violence to me after this tweet. It makes me feel there are people out there who don't want me in public debate.
120. To be clear, it is the content of the tweet that is intimidating in its own way: it is really hostile in nature. I have talked about the silencing effect, the fear of what hatred is about to be unleashed. It is the comments that follow, where people express similar views in social media responses to that used in the original tweet. So the intimidation continues, where members of the public feel they can say whatever they want to say using that racist views and language.
121. It makes me question my place and validity in the Senate. Every time I go in there, the perpetrator is there so it's having this continuous effect of anxiety always hovering in the background. It has been a year now, and I still grit my teeth and must find courage every time I go into the Chamber. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] As a minority in the workplace, I feel it's hard to speak up about this experience. The lack of response makes it feel like it's easy for someone to intimidate, even intimidate someone like me. It's all well and good for people to perceive that I am in a powerful position, I'm a senator, but when it comes to racism it doesn't matter; my position doesn't matter.
122. Humiliation is part of this. When I am stopped from saying or doing something in my job when others I feel are free to do that, it is humiliating. It is also offensive and insulting not to be able to say or do what I need to do in my job, to be excluded from my job in that way.

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Mehreen Faruqi

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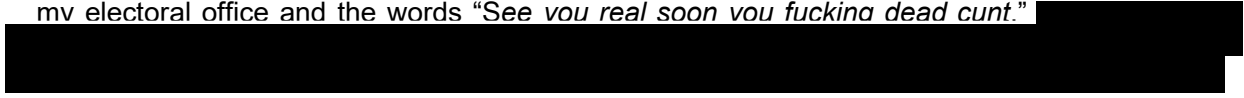
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123. On the day that I announced to the media that I was commencing these proceedings, I received a direct message on Instagram from someone that I did not know which said that "You're a filthy Muslim paki terrorist cunt if I ever catch you pig I'll slit your fucking throat fuck off back to Pakistan while you still have the chance you fucking wog cunt." I subsequently received a further message from this person which included the address to my electoral office and the words "See you real soon you fucking dead cunt."



A screenshot of the direct messages I received are included at page 43 of Exhibit MF-1.

Affirmed by the deponent)
at Oakland)
in California, United States)
on 3 October 2023)
Before me:)

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Mehreen Faruqi
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Signature of deponent

DocuSigned by:
Andrea Farrugia
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Signature of witness

Andrea-Marie Farrugia
Solicitor
Marque Lawyers

This affidavit has been affirmed and witnessed via audio visual link in accordance with Part 2B of the Electronic Transactions Act 2000 (NSW).

Form 59
Rule 29.02(1)

No. NSD372 of 2023

Federal Court of Australia
District Registry: New South Wales
Division: General

MEHREEN FARUQI

Applicant

PAULINE HANSON

Respondent

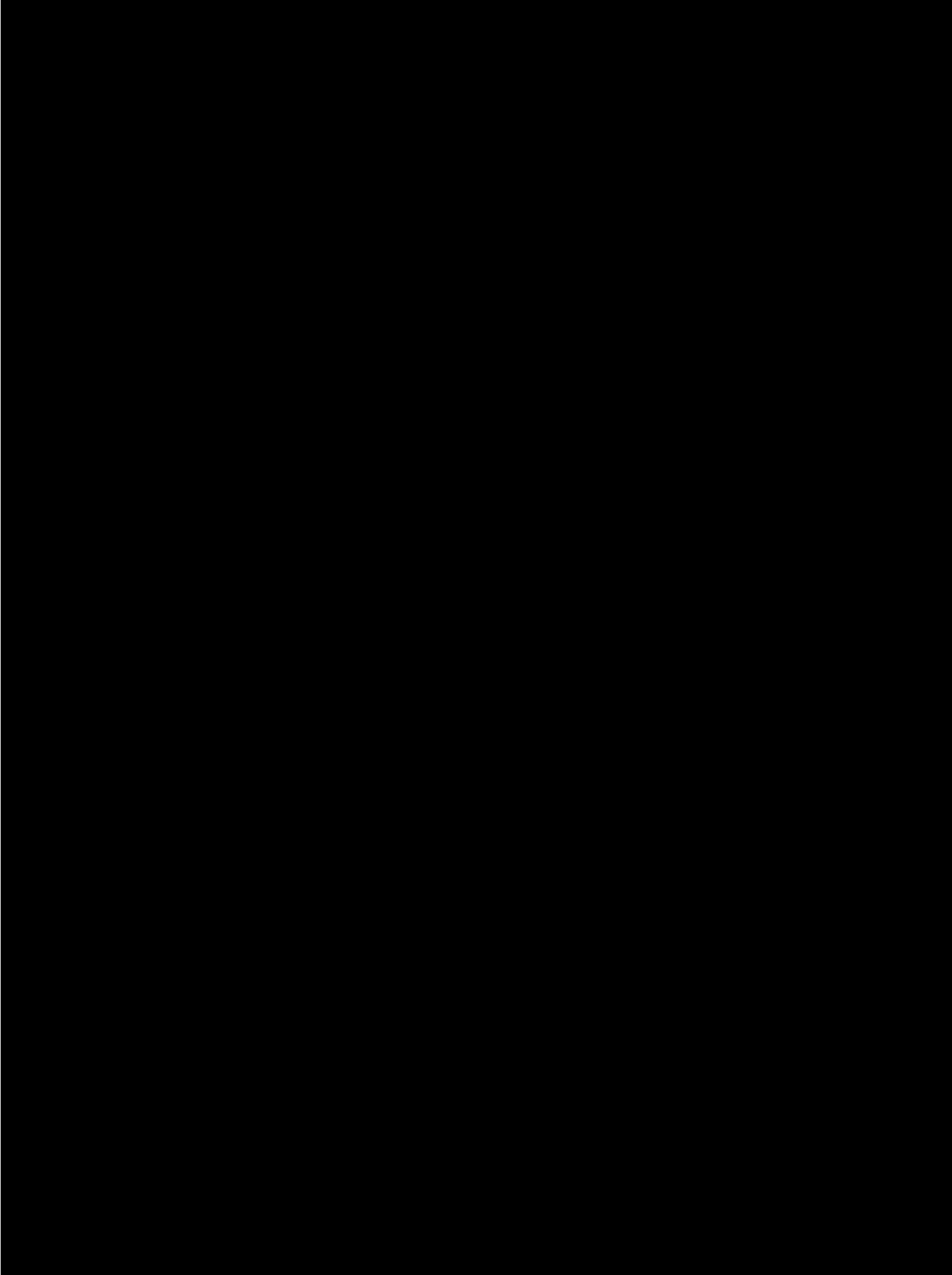
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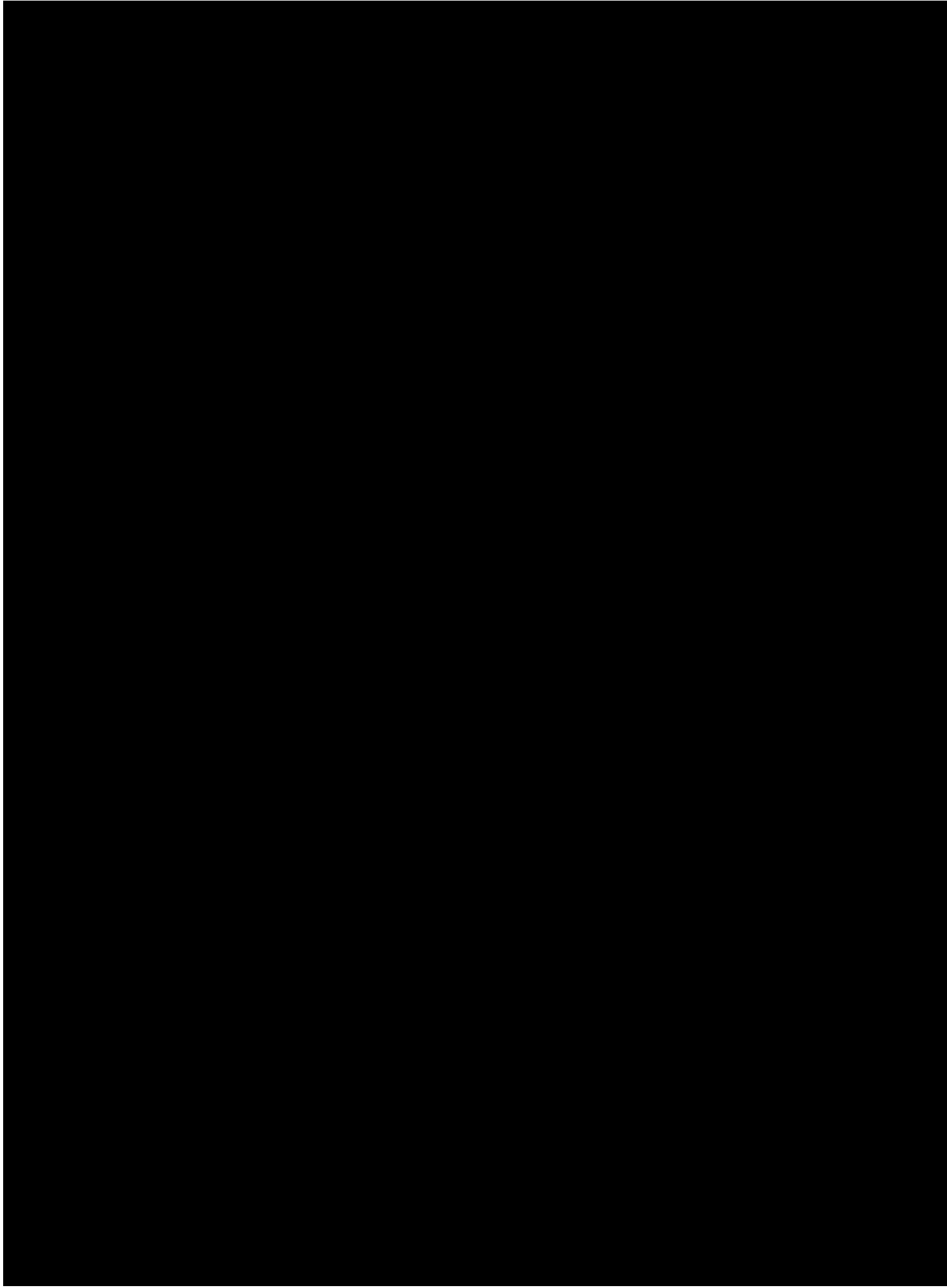
This is the exhibit marked “**MF-1**” referred to in the affidavit of Mehreen Saeed Faruqi 3 October 2023 before me:

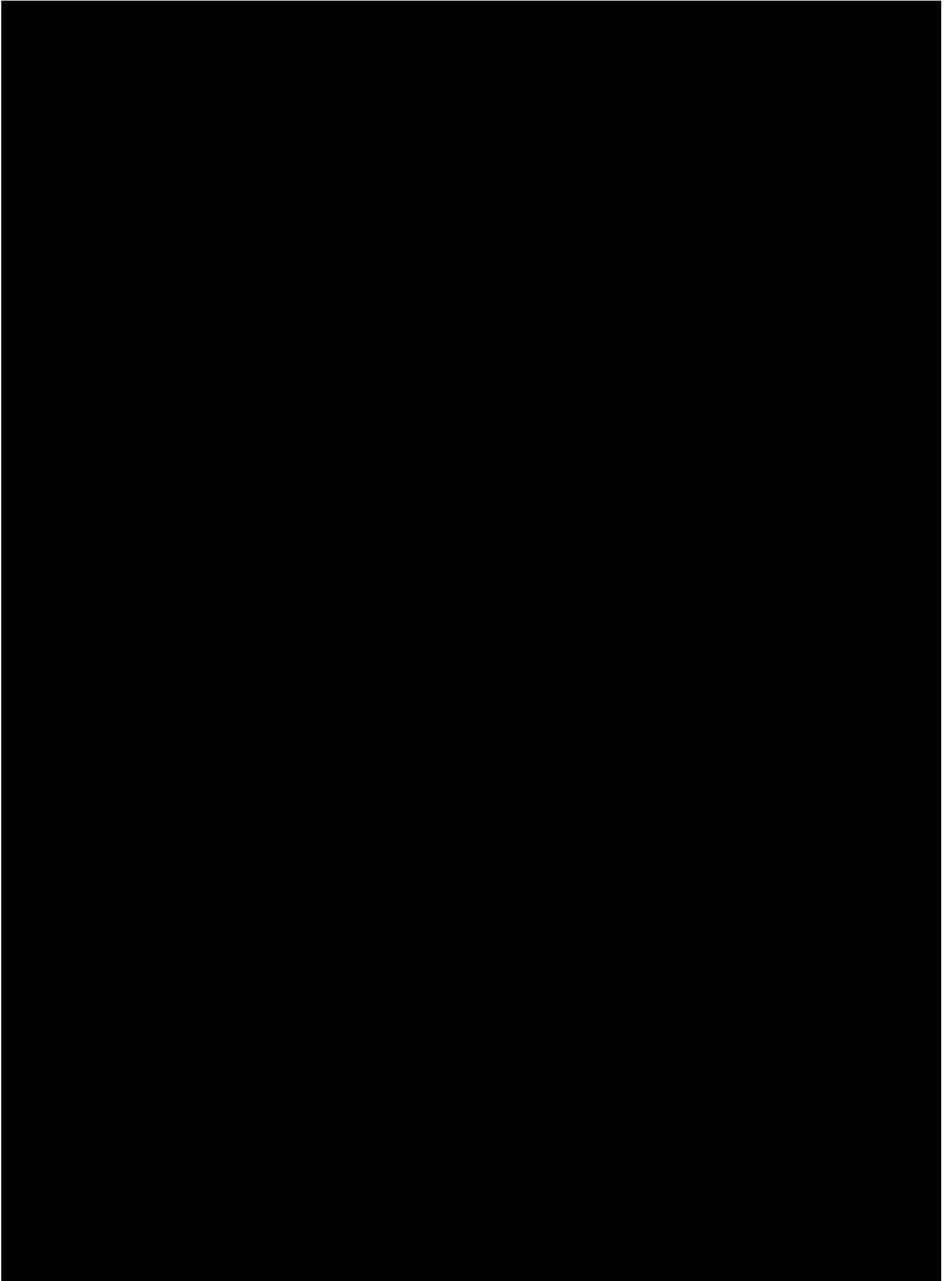
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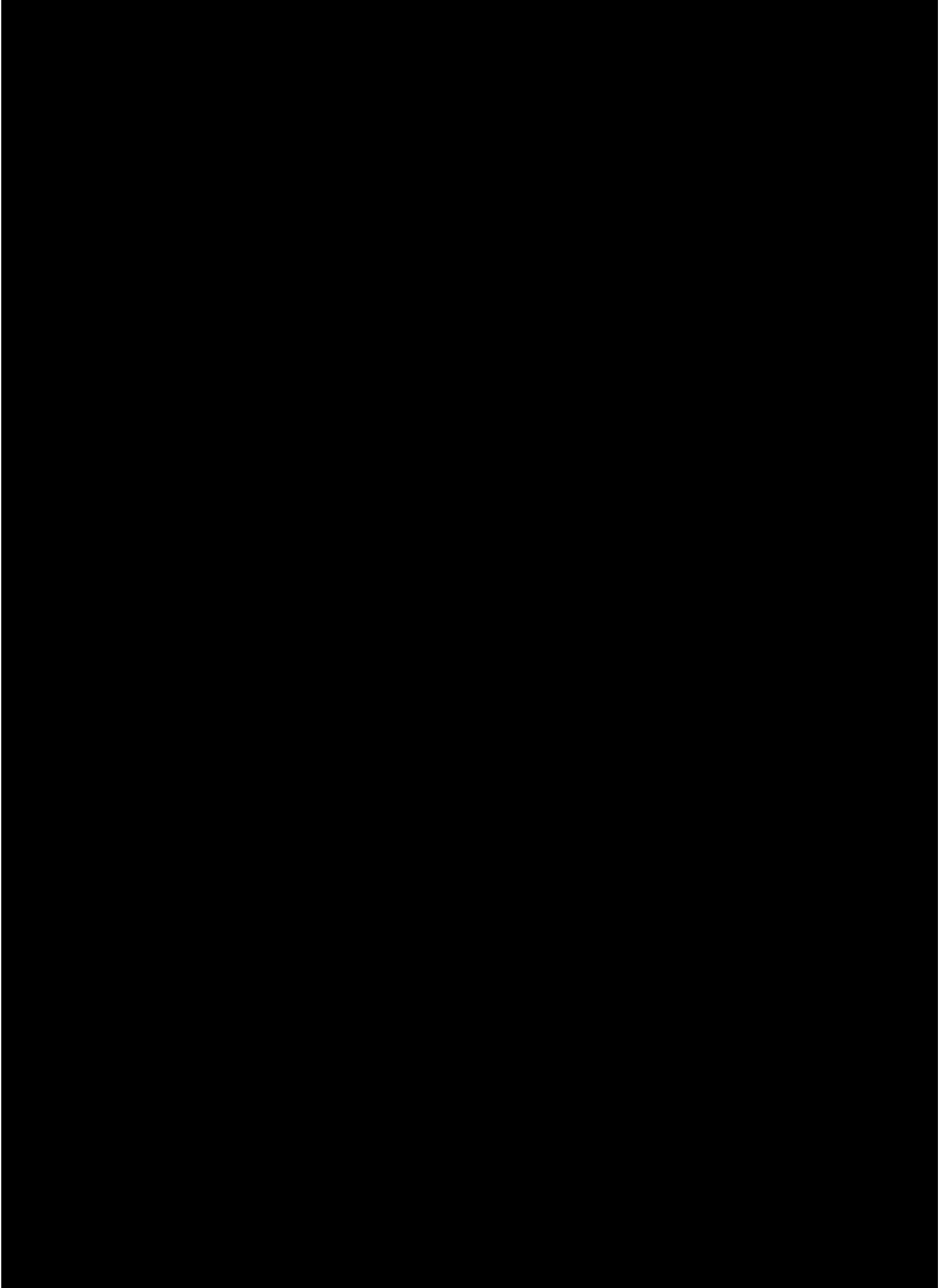
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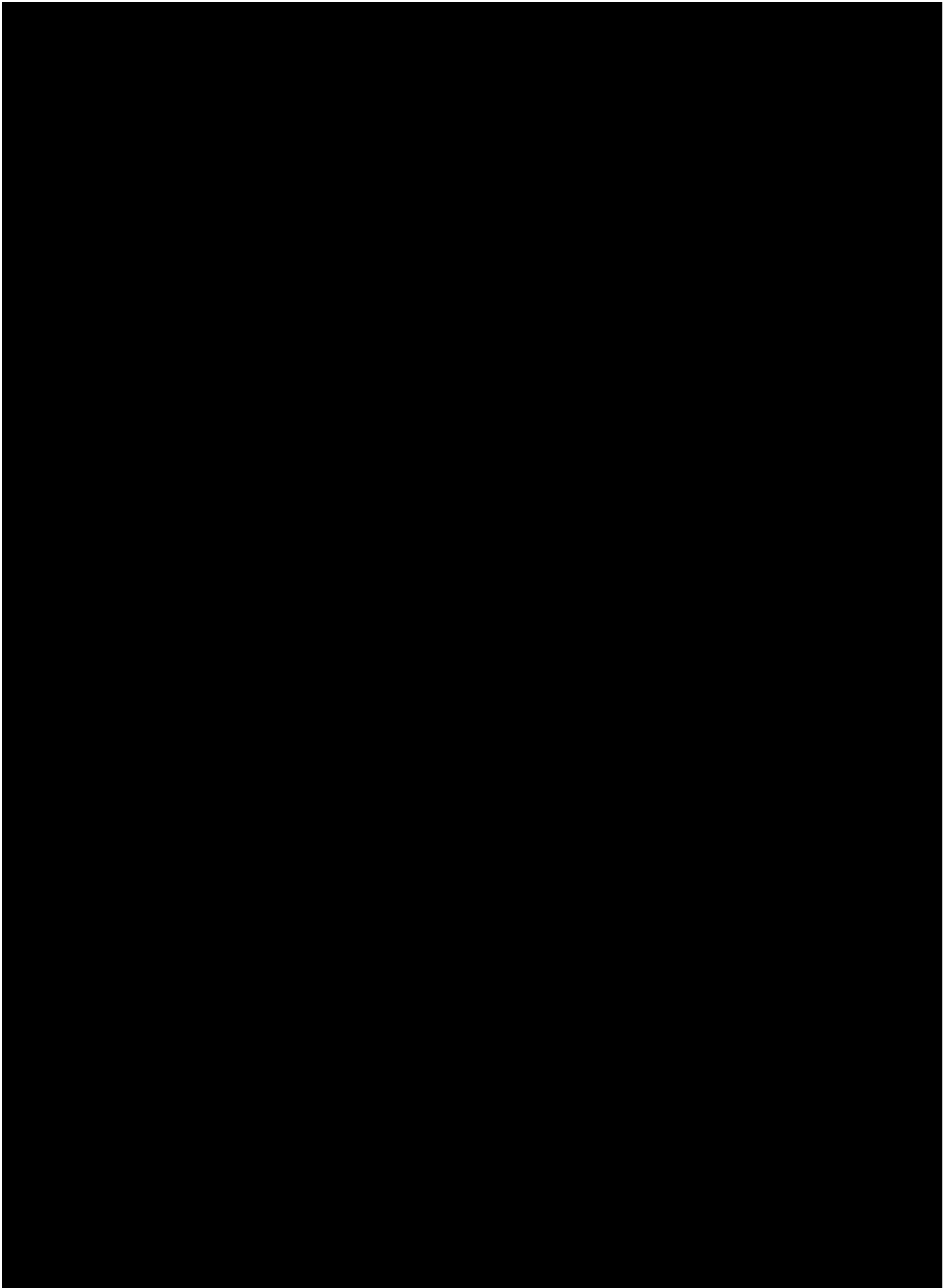
Andrea-Marie Farrugia
Solicitor

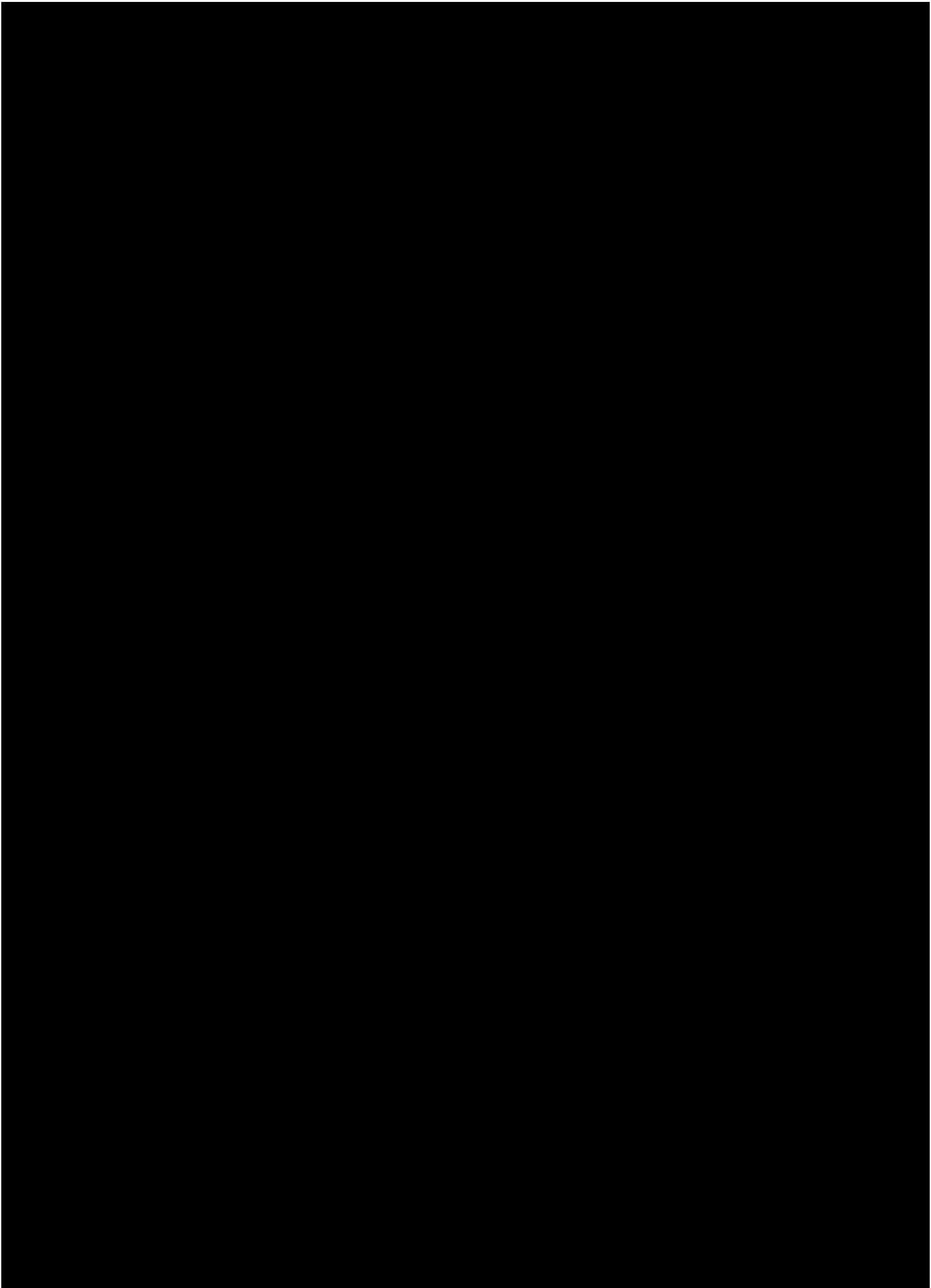


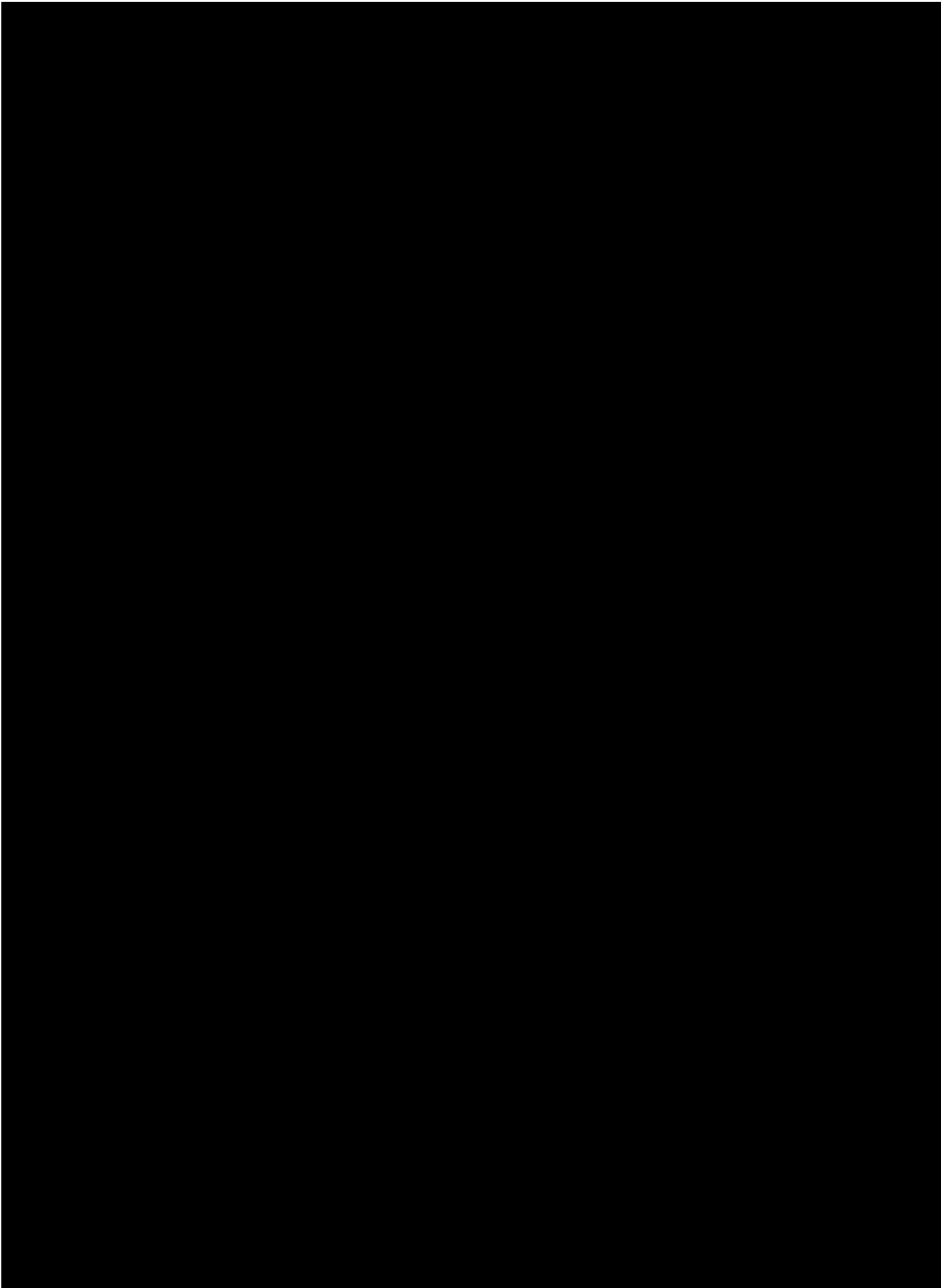


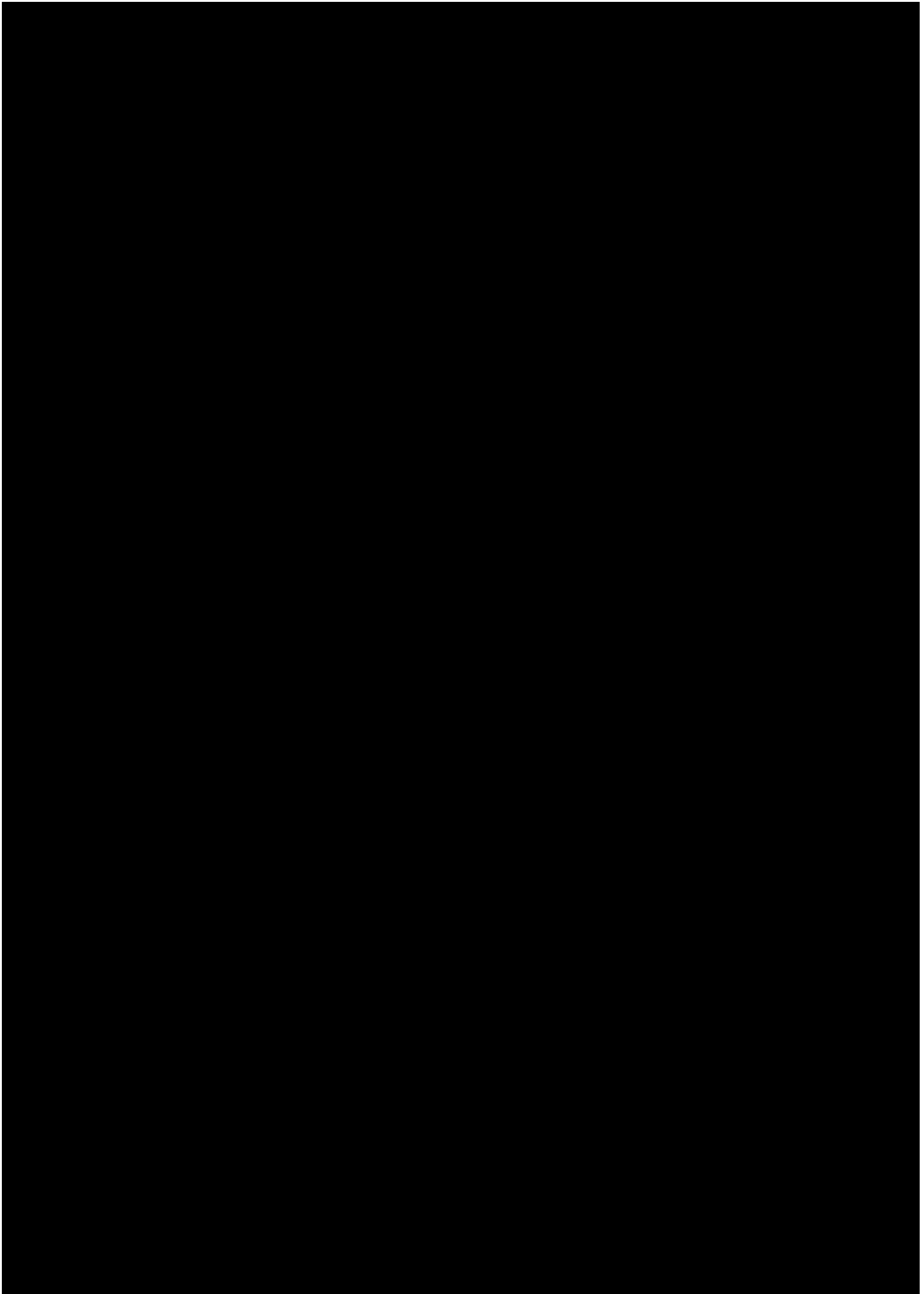


















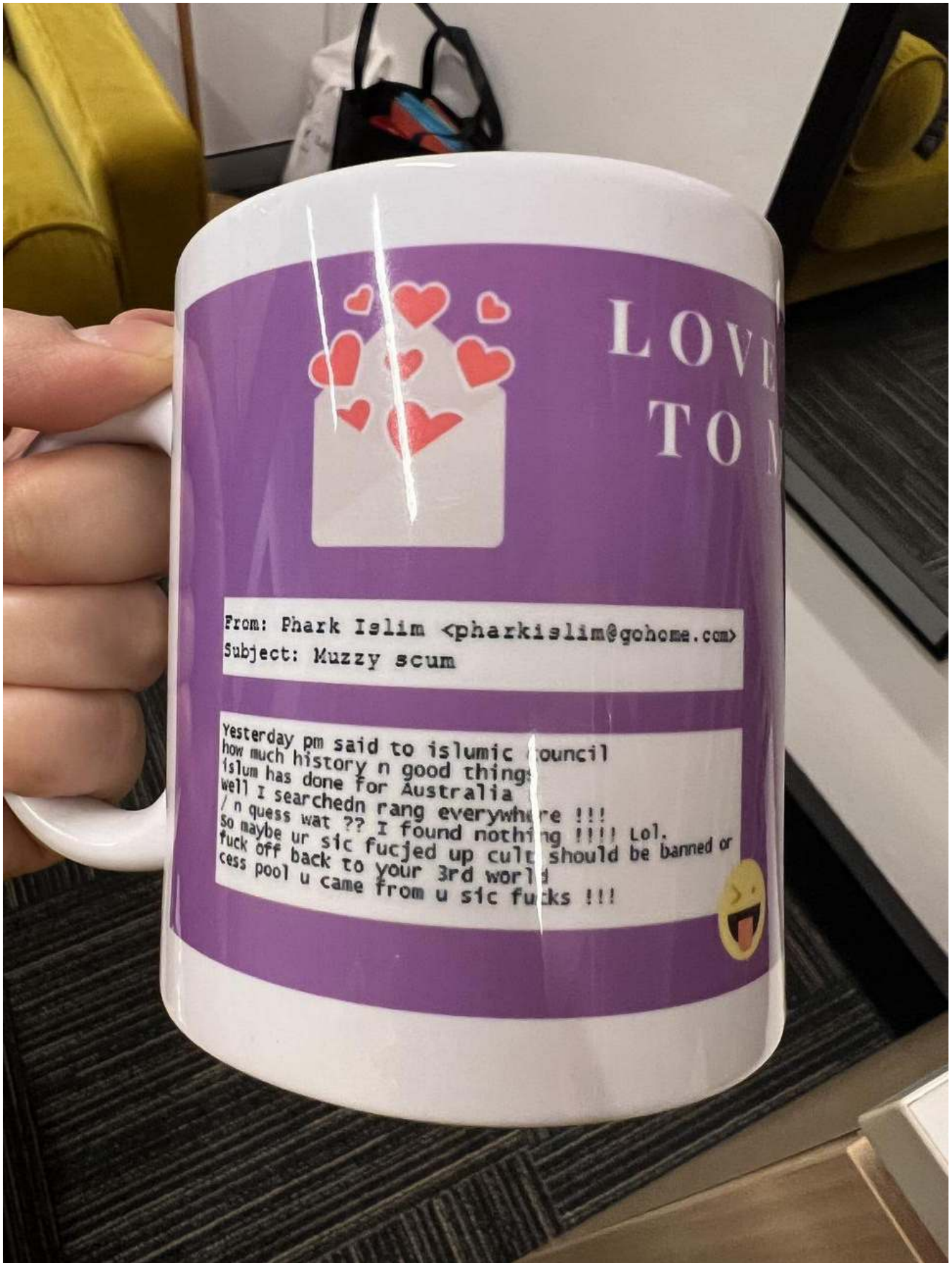








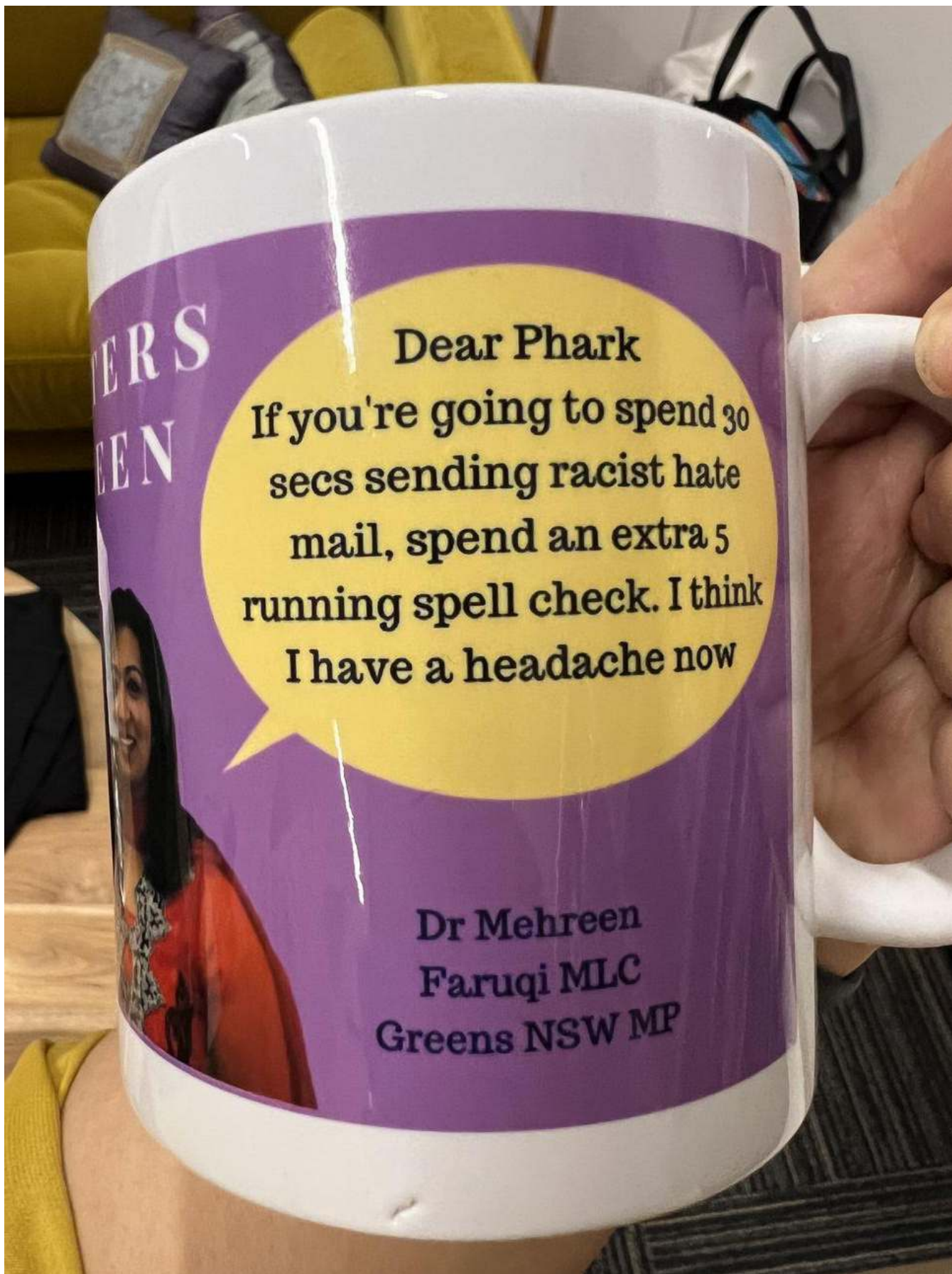


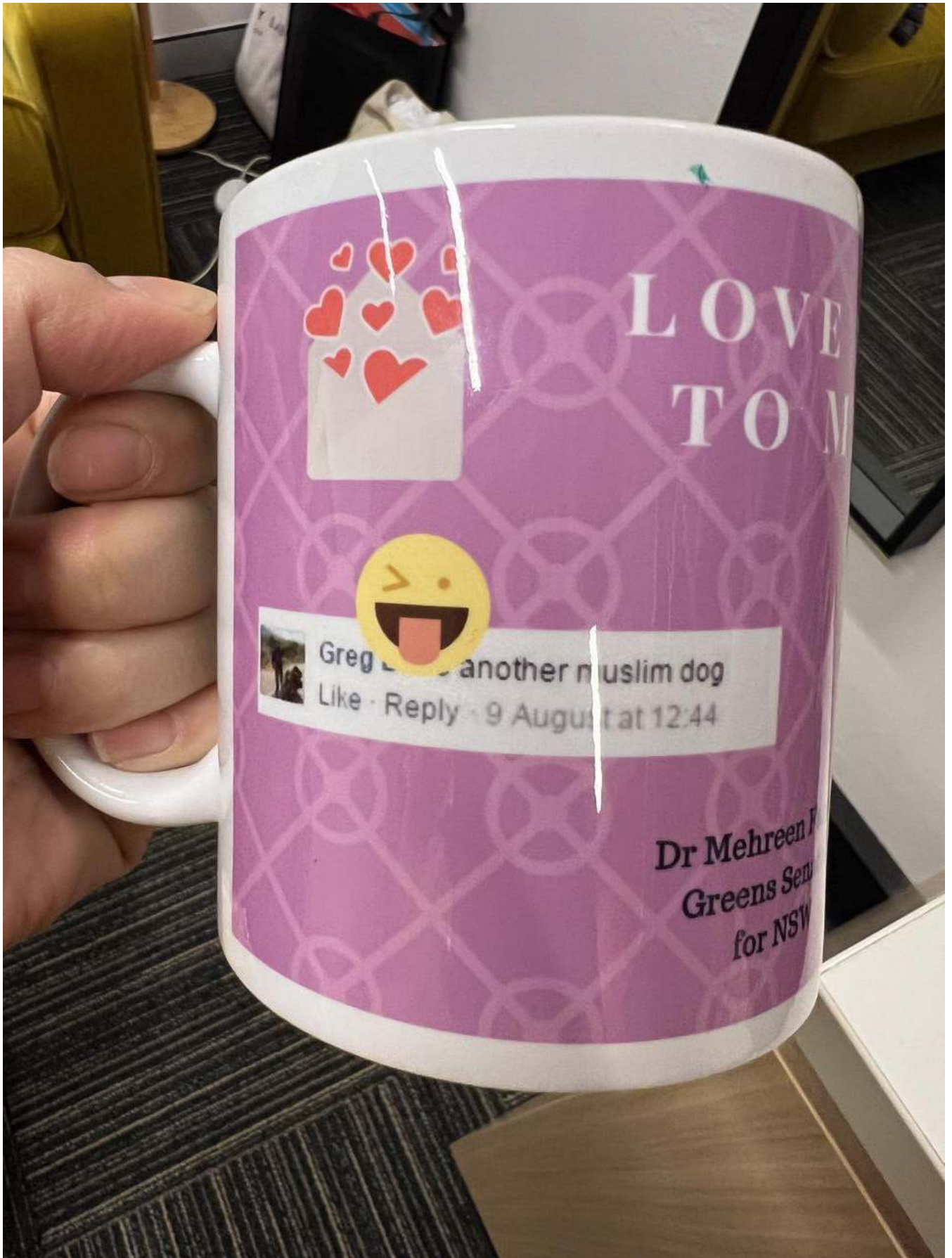


From: Phark Islim <pharkislim@gohome.com>
Subject: Muzzy scum

Yesterday pm said to islamic council
how much history n good things
Islam has done for Australia
well I searchedn rang everywhere !!!
/ n guess wat ?? I found nothing !!!! Lol.
So maybe ur sic fucjed up cult should be banned or
fuck off back to your 3rd world
cess pool u came from u sic fucks !!!









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The transparency project

Inside the hate factory: how Facebook fuels far-right profit

Guardian investigation reveals a covert plot to control some of Facebook's largest far-right pages and harvest Islamophobic hate for profit

[Revealed: Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib targeted in far-right fake news operation](#)

by [Christopher Knaus](#), [Michael McGowan](#) and [Nick Evershed](#) in Sydney, and [Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem

A Guardian investigation reveals a covert group is using its network of far-right Facebook pages to churn out fake news posts for profit. Illustration: Oliver Holmes

Fri 6 Dec 2019 01.00 AEDT

The message from Israel arrived on an otherwise unremarkable afternoon for 36-year-old Beau Villereal.

At his family's sprawling 42-acre property outside Live Oak in Florida's rural north, Villereal sat alone in his bedroom trawling for news about Donald Trump to share on the rightwing [Facebook](#) page he runs with his mother and father.

The messenger, who gave her name as Rochale, asked Villereal to make her an editor of Pissed off Deplorables, a self-described "pro-America page" that feeds its thousands of followers a steady diet of pro-Trump, anti-Islam content.

"I totally understand you," she wrote. "I'm from Israel and this is ... really important to me to share the truth.

"Please give me a chance for a day."



Identical Facebook posts attacking the UK Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, across a number of alt-right Facebook accounts. Photograph: The Guardian

About 1,000 miles north in Staten Island, New York City, Ron Devito was tapping away on his laptop to the 20,000 followers of his pro-Trump Facebook page, Making America 1st, when he received a similar message, this time from someone using the name Tehila.

“She pitched to me that she was a good editor, she could provide some good content to increase likes and views on the page,” Devito told the Guardian. “Could I just give her a chance and let her post her stuff, right? So I figured, ‘What the heck, give it a shot’.”

Villereal and Devito weren’t the only ones. Over the past two years, a group of mysterious Israel-based accounts has delivered similar messages to the heads of at least 19 other far-right Facebook pages across the US, Australia, the UK, Canada, Austria, Israel and Nigeria.

Full Story podcast

How we cracked a far right network



00:00:00

00:31:36

A Guardian investigation can reveal those messages were part of a covert plot to control some of Facebook’s largest far-right pages, including one linked to a rightwing terror group, and create a commercial enterprise that harvests Islamophobic hate for profit.

This group is now using its 21-page network to churn out more than 1,000 coordinated faked news posts per week to more than 1 million followers, funnelling audiences to a cluster of 10 ad-heavy websites and milking the traffic for profit.

The posts stoke deep hatred of Islam across the western world and influence politics in Australia, Canada, the UK and the US by amplifying far-right parties such as Australia’s One Nation and vilifying Muslim politicians such as the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, and the US congresswoman Ilhan Omar.

The network has also targeted leftwing politicians at critical points in national election campaigns. It posted false stories claiming the UK Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, said Jews were “the source of global terrorism” and accused the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, of allowing “Isis to invade Canada”.



Australia's first female Muslim senator, Mehreen Faruqi, felt the full force of the network in August last year. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

The revelations show Facebook has failed to stop clandestine actors from using its platform to run coordinated disinformation and hate campaigns. The network has operated with relative impunity even since Mark Zuckerberg's apology to the US Senate following the [Cambridge Analytica](#) and [Russian interference scandals](#).

When the Guardian notified Facebook of its investigation, the company removed several pages and accounts "that appeared to be financially motivated", a spokesperson said in a statement.

"These pages and accounts violated our policy against spam and fake accounts by posting clickbait content to drive people to off-platform sites," the spokesperson said. "We don't allow people to misrepresent themselves on Facebook and we've updated our inauthentic behaviour policy to further improve our ability to counter new tactics."

But this comes too late for some of the network's victims. Australia's first female Muslim senator, Mehreen Faruqi, felt the full force of the network in August last year, when 10 of its pages launched coordinated posts inciting their 546,000 followers to attack her for speaking in parliament against racism.

The posts prompted what Faruqi described as a "horrific feeding frenzy of racism, fake news and hate", soliciting vile comments like "put your burka on - and shut the fuck up!", "deport the whining bitch" and "Revoke citizenship and Deport".

Faruqi said the network represented a "new level of far-right organisation and coordination", and she places the blame squarely on social media companies.

"By allowing racist and misleading posts, social media giants like Facebook ... are profiteering from the proliferation of hate speech and abuse," Faruqi said.

"Facebook could do much more and shut these pages down but so long as they continue to profit from the reach and engagement, they don't seem to be interested in decisive action."

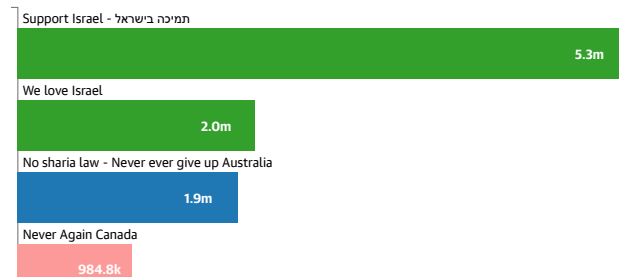
A spokesperson for Facebook told the Guardian: "Nobody can advocate or advertise hate or violence on Facebook and we remove any violations as soon as we become aware."

Total interactions on coordinated posts by far-right

Facebook pages

Showing likes, shares, comments and other reactions on posts where the content is duplicated across one or more pages, and posted within the same day

Israel Australia Canada US Austria UK



Show

'The perfect foot soldiers'

It begins with a single post, curated by Israel-based administrators.

The post typically has an attention-grabbing headline and links to an article that mimics the style of a legitimate news story.

It employs a blend of distorted news and total fabrication to paint Muslims as sharia-imposing terrorists and child abusers, whose existence poses a threat to white culture and western civilisation.

It is then published almost simultaneously to the network's 21 Facebook pages, which have a combined 1 million followers across the globe.

The content is so predictable that even Devito once complained to his Israeli counterpart. "I told her flat out, 'you're a one-trick pony'," he said. "It's Islam, Islam, Islam, Islam and more Islam. Like, enough with the Islam already, we get it."

Explainer

The hate factory: how it works

Show

The Guardian conducted an analysis to confirm the extent of coordination across the network, checking where posts were identical in content and similar in publication time across different pages.

The network published 5,695 coordinated posts at its height in October 2019, receiving 846,424 likes, shares or comments in that month alone.

In total, the network has published at least 165,000 posts and attracted 14.3 million likes, shares or comments. The content is amplified further by other far-right Facebook pages, including those run by the rightwing UK Independence party ([Ukip](#)), who share it organically.

The posts link back to one of 10 near-identical websites masquerading as news sites with generic titles like "The Politics Online" and "Free Press Front". Ad-heavy and poorly designed, the websites feature "stories" that usually combine slabs of copied text intermingled with unsourced opinion and graphic imagery.

Do you know more?

If you want to send us information via email or encrypted messaging you can find contact details [here](#). Or, you can find details about our anonymous SecureDrop service [here](#)

The Guardian worked with researchers from Queensland University of Technology's digital media research centre, who conducted an analysis of the order in which identical posts appeared across the 21 Facebook pages.

Their analysis indicates a single entity is coordinating the publication of content across the Facebook pages, likely using automatic scheduling software, and that a single entity controls the websites that receive traffic from the posts.

“It’s very obvious looking at the websites, the way that they’re structured, the way that they’re sharing design and code, and the way they share Google site IDs, that they’re all interconnected with each other,” said QUT professor Axel Bruns, one of Australia’s leading internet researchers. “They’re just cheap sites to set up, cheap sites to run ... It’s not very sophisticated and it’s just brute force, to push all this stuff out.”

Bruns and his colleagues believe the motivation is commercial, and that hatred, division and political influence may be byproducts of the pursuit of profit.

“Here’s a bunch of people who - they’re not stupid but they’re highly prone to clicking on content that reflects their already held beliefs, especially content that is highly emotive and contains polarising and extreme material,” said Timothy Graham, a senior lecturer on social network analysis at QUT.

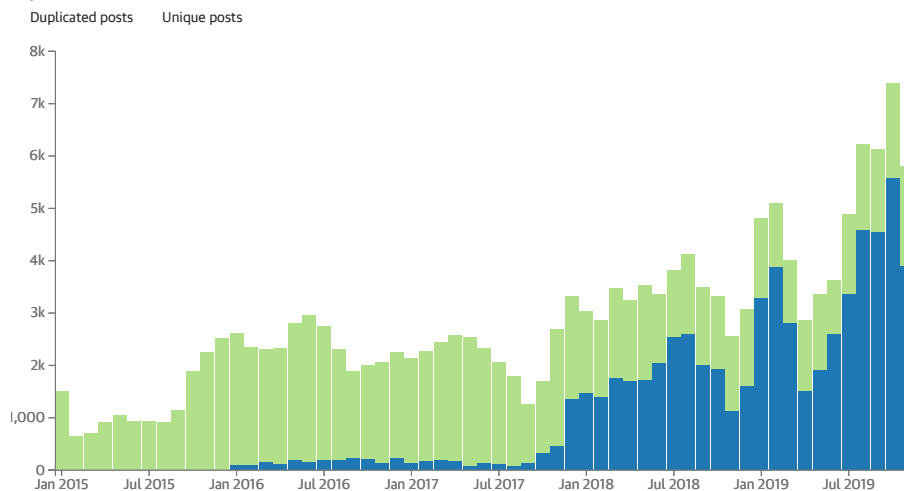
“These people are great for business. If you get them to come to your website, they’re not going to [look closely at] the content, they’re going to click through and keep [sharing] it. They’re the perfect foot soldiers.”

‘You’re the one profiting’

The network wasn’t always so extensive. The delivery of coordinated content began in 2016 through just a few pages in Israel and the US.

Unique v duplicated content within a network of far-right Facebook pages

Showing the number of posts where the content is unique or duplicated across one or more pages, and posted within the same day



Guardian graphic

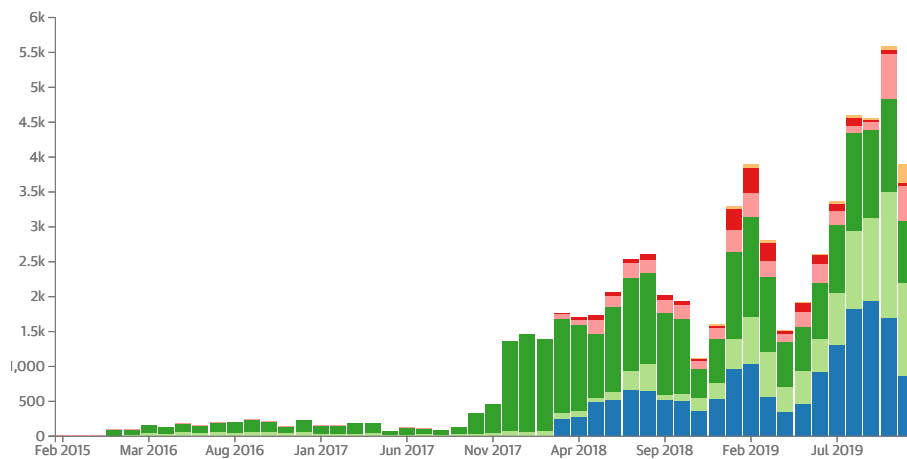
From 2018 onwards, the network began approaching the administrators of large, pre-existing Facebook pages across Australia, Austria, Canada, the US and the UK, promising content that would help grow their audiences.

In March 2018, the network gained access to a Canadian pro-Israel page dubbed Never Again Canada, which has 232,000 followers. A previous BuzzFeed News investigation into Never Again Canada showed it was regularly [sharing content about the Jewish Defence League, an FBI-designated rightwing terror group](#), and coordinating content with other pages.

Coordinated content posting by far-right Facebook pages, by target country

Showing the number of posts where the content is duplicated across one or more pages, and posted within the same day

Australia US Israel Canada Austria UK



Guardian graphic

The network reached its peak in October this year with coordination across 21 pages. Each time a local page-owner agrees to let one of the Israeli administrators in, they become unwitting though not necessarily unwilling participants in the globally coordinated distribution of online hate.

Some page-owners, like Villereal, who runs Pissed off Deplorables, had no idea their new Israeli counterparts were making money from the following they had built.

“It’s a little disheartening to sit here and think I’ve been doing this for two years and I haven’t made a dime, and I allowed someone to come in who’s built the little back channel but they’re going to use my clientele to make money,” he said. “You know, it’s like I own the store, I built it and everything like that, and you’re the one profiting.”

Those behind the network went to great lengths to hide their identities, concealing personal information from websites and using different Facebook profiles when contacting the owners of existing far-right pages.

But by following a trail of digital breadcrumbs, the Guardian’s investigation traced the network back to a key player: a man going by the username Ariel1238a.

Finding Ariel

In December 2017, Ariel1238a made a seemingly benign request for help on an obscure search engine optimisation forum.

“I’m looking for more ways to monetize my site,” he wrote. “My niche is about politics.”

For the past two years, the same username has popped up regularly on similar web forums.

Writing in broken English, Ariel1238a frets about drops in his click-through rate, the inability to host “violent content” alongside advertising sourced through Google AdSense, and the low revenue return per-click on native advertising site Taboola. “I’m not satisfied with the profits they bring,” he told one forum.

He also complains about Facebook’s efforts to crack down on “fake news”. When the social media giant announced in April that it would step up its efforts to combat misinformation on the site, Ariel wrote: “Facebook has released another step on the way to its end, matter of time.”

Ariel1238a is not a web expert. He asks rudimentary questions including how to set up a business email domain and increase traffic to his sites. Yet his websites, he tells the forums, serve “leading countries” including the UK, US, Australia and Canada and have, he boasts, “something like 1m pageviews per month”.

The posts give no suggestion that Ariel1238a will become a driving force behind a wave of anti-Islamic hate across Facebook.

In fact, online profiles linked to Ariel1238a betray no political or ideological position at all. Instead, his digital footprint suggests that before he turned to exploiting the far-right’s obsession with Islam for profit, he had for years engaged in a number of unsophisticated online money-making schemes.

A now dormant account on a blog-publishing service links him to a “free sex dating” site, a “religious dating” site and a fan page for the fourth season of the Israeli Big Brother television series. He has dabbled in online directories for gyms in Tel Aviv, Botox injections, an online sim card store and a site described simply as “Online sex | Camera sex”.

▲▲ Ariel1238a is not a web expert. He asks rudimentary questions including how to set up a business email domain and increase traffic to his sites.

Using web archiving services and domain registry information, the Guardian has been able to confirm the username Ariel1238a belongs to Ariel Elkaras, a 30-something jewellery salesman and online operator living on the outskirts of Tel Aviv.

Soon after the Guardian contacted Elkaras for comment, several of the network's websites were either taken down or had large amounts of content removed. The public posts on his Facebook profile were also removed.

Elkaras did not respond to multiple requests for comment via email and phone, but the Guardian was able to track him down.

When we turned up at his apartment in a town near Tel Aviv in Israel, an older woman answered the door. She called out to Elkaras, who arrived wearing a T-shirt and sweatpants.

Through a translator, Elkaras denied knowledge of or involvement in the network but said he had once been "included in a group, something about Israel". He refused to answer questions about his job, other than to confirm he dealt with computers. "Yes, but it's not your business," he said. "[The network] is nothing related to me."

When the Guardian asked about the username Ariel1238a, he said: "I don't know." He closed the door, but shortly after followed a reporter out on to the street and demanded to know how the Guardian had found him.

Elkaras was the only real person the Guardian was able to connect to the operation. We were unable to verify whether Rochale, Tehila, or the other names used by the Facebook profiles that contacted page administrators, were the names of real people.

Messages obtained by the Guardian show Rochale telling a local page administrator she doesn't know how to make money online and that she doesn't know who runs the websites she sources her content from.

"I only share posts on your page because this topic is important to me," she wrote.

While initially describing Tehila as "a Pam Geller type", Devito later admitted he had never actually seen or spoken to her. Asked how he knew she was real, he said: "We don't, to be brutally honest."

Of the page administrators who returned requests for comment from the Guardian, only one claimed to have physically seen Tehila via Skype but declined to provide evidence. Asked how he knew he was speaking to a woman, the administrator, who declined to reveal his identity, said: "It sure looked like one."

None of the page administrators the Guardian spoke to for this story were aware that the Israeli group was making money from the scheme, or that their pages were part of a larger network.

"They weren't upfront about it because as much as I saw in the message ... there was no talk about making money," a pro-Trump page administrator based in Nigeria told the Guardian.

Political influence and Facebook's failures

In April last year, Zuckerberg sat before an army of cameras and offered a mea culpa to the world.

Facebook, still reeling from the Cambridge Analytica scandal, had failed its users, Zuckerberg said. The company had struggled to stop its platform being used for coordinated political interference and the spread of disinformation and hate.

"It's clear now that we didn't do enough to prevent these tools from being used for harm," Zuckerberg said. "We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility, and that was a big mistake. And it was my mistake."

Two months later, the Israeli-based network gained access to its 13th far-right Facebook page, expanding the already sizeable audience for its disinformation.



The Facebook chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, testifies before the House of Representatives energy and commerce committee in April 2018. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The network has operated with relative impunity for almost two years.

“Believe it or not she hasn’t done anything to get the page in trouble,” Devito said of his Israeli administrator. “I haven’t gotten anything from Facebook that ‘you’ve been posting inappropriate content that’s violated our community standards’ or anything of the sort. I’ve been very fortunate in that regard.”

As the network grew, so did its ability to influence the thinking of voters. By the time the Australian election came around in May, the pages were providing a significant platform for far-right candidates, including One Nation and Fraser Anning, a senator widely condemned for calling for a “final solution” to immigration.

The network boosted Anning and One Nation with 401 posts in the lead-up to the election, which attracted 82,025 likes, 18,748 comments and 33,730 shares.

A One Nation spokesman, James Ashby, said the network would not benefit the party, and engagement on leader Pauline Hanson’s personal page was far greater. “I would suggest the 401 posts you refer to has attracted a nanoscopic number of likes, comments and shares in comparison,” he said.

A spokesman for Anning said he was previously unaware of the network and did not believe it had helped his campaign.

It was a similar story in Canada. In the lead-up to the October election, the network pushed out 80 coordinated posts critical of Trudeau that were liked, shared or commented on 30,000 times.

In the UK, the network has savaged Corbyn. More than 510 coordinated posts have attacked the Labour leader since mid-2016, attracting 15,384 likes, 17,148 comments and 16,406 shares.

[Facebook’s own definition of “coordinated inauthentic activity”](#) reads like a blueprint for the network the Guardian has uncovered.

“Coordinated inauthentic behaviour is when groups of pages or people work together to mislead others about who they are or what they’re doing,” Facebook’s head of security policy, Nathaniel Gleicher, explained last year. “We might take a network down for making it look like it’s being run from one part of the world, when in fact it’s being run from another.

“This could be done for ideological purposes or it could be financially motivated. For example, spammers might seek to convince people to click on a link to visit their page or to read their posts.”

But Villereal said he had not heard from Facebook since the Israel-based administrator began distributing content from his page.

“I haven’t had no notifications from Facebook or anything like that about the content they’re posting: like spam risk or fake accounts or community violations or anything like that.”

Faked news, real consequences

In March this year, a 55-year-old Donald Trump supporter from upstate New York, Patrick Carlineo, placed a call to the office of Minnesota Democrat Ilhan Omar.

After getting through to a staff member, he **accused Omar of being a terrorist before saying**: “Why are you working for her, she’s a [expletive] terrorist. Somebody ought to put a bullet in her skull. Back in the day, our forefathers would have put a bullet in her [expletive].”

Carlineo, who pleaded guilty to placing the call last month, had for years been allowed to post violent and racist content to Facebook. In April, the Guardian revealed how he had **frequently used the platform to taunt Muslims, attacking them with racist slurs and saying he wished he could confront a group of Muslim politicians with “a bucket of pig blood”**.

The call was not an isolated attack. A Somali American, Omar, 37, is one of the first Muslim women in Congress and the **first to wear a hijab in the House chamber**. Since her election, she has been a lightning rod for attacks from the right.



Identical Facebook posts attacking US senator Minnesota Democrat Ilhan Omar across alt-right Facebook accounts. Photograph: The Guardian

Political opponents have pushed conspiracy theories and **shared violent content about her on social media**. In April the congresswoman **said** she faced an increase in death threats after Donald Trump accused her of downplaying the September 11 attacks.

She is also the most frequent target of the network. In the past two years, the Israeli group has pushed out more than 1,400 posts targeting Omar across the 21-page network which in turn have been “shared” more than 30,000 times.

“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: Facebook’s complacency is a threat to our democracy,” Omar told the Guardian. “It has become clear that they do not take seriously the degree to which they provide a platform for white nationalist hate and dangerous misinformation in this country and around the world. And there is a clear reason for this: they profit off it. I believe their inaction is a grave threat to people’s lives, to our democracy and to democracy around the world.”

In November, a major study into **Islamophobia** from Charles Sturt University in Australia found a significant jump in the number of violent attacks against Muslim people, particularly women wearing head coverings.

Faruqi, a frequent target of abuse on and offline, said the far-right was relying on social media to “legitimise their hate and recruit”.

“Muslim women politicians tick both of their misogyny and racism boxes, so I end up as a target of a lot of their racist content,” she said.

“I’ve experienced a huge increase in racist and abusive social media comments, emails, phone calls and even handwritten letters since I’ve been in the public eye. There’s no doubt in my mind that many of the people behind these vile messages are emboldened by others on social media and Facebook pages like this.”

With David Smith in Washington

MAY 2021 VOX

The moment of reckoning

By Mehreen Faruqi

Any addressing of parliament's abuse, misogyny and sexism must also tackle its racism

I am a lifelong feminist and activist. But even I've been struck by the unbridled rage and seemingly boundless energy of Australian women in 2021. All eyes are on Canberra as women across the country demand an end to sexism, rape culture, and the mistreatment of women both in parliament and the community. It is so long overdue.

I can't help but consider, however, that this movement runs the real risk of only achieving change for a select group of privileged white women, despite the best intentions of many.

Let me be clear. I'm so thankful that parliament is having its reckoning. I'm glad women MPs and staff, past and present, are speaking out about the discrimination, harassment, abuse and violence they've endured. They – we – deserve justice. But we must pose the question: would these experiences have come to light if they did not affect the privileged? Stories of women who are, for the most part, white and upper class are in the spotlight. We must include the stories of women of colour in parliaments and the community who are ignored by the media and political establishment.

In my own experience, the culture of sexism in Australian parliamentary life is compounded by racism and white supremacy. Take my name, an integral part of my identity, my culture and my background. Getting someone's name right is a sign of respect. It's an indication you see them as an equal. Yet my colleagues get my name wrong all the time. In a public Senate hearing, I had to patiently correct then senator Ian Macdonald several times. He kept pronouncing it incorrectly anyway.

Even worse was the time the MP Craig Kelly, during a community meeting in parliament, mispronounced my name and then told the room full of people of colour that "we should have simple names".

I wish that was as bad as it gets. In the NSW Legislative Council, when I was speaking about the government's irrational exuberance in expanding coalmining, one MP commented that I should cook with cow dung as a million families do in the subcontinent. Another accused me of using "terrorist sorts of tactics" when I was raising a procedural point.

More recently, while speaking in the Senate on the Christchurch mosque shootings – a subject of immense personal significance and seriousness to my community – one Liberal senator repeatedly screamed over me that the terrorist was "a socialist". This completely dismisses what the New Zealand royal commission found to be the "extreme right-wing Islamophobic ideology" that motivated the terrorist.

It's galling that MPs feel so comfortable in the chambers of parliament to fling racism across the aisle, safe in the knowledge that Hansard doesn't record their interjections.

This doesn't scratch the surface of what is said in the rooms and corridors outside the chamber. A colleague in state parliament told me that one Liberal MP had given me a nickname that referred to a popular South Asian dish. And the sexism and harassment my colleague Lidia Thorpe has faced from men in the building in her first months as a Greens senator saddened me immensely, but did not surprise me.

For women of colour, the direct racism is matched with indirect marginalisation of our perspectives. During the parliamentary debate on the Coalition's industrial relations omnibus bill in March, I pointed out that, as well as the bill being anti-worker, it was racist and sexist. The bill's effect of increasing the precarity of casual and part-time workers, reducing collective bargaining power and suppressing wages, I said, would particularly harm those over-represented in low-paid and precarious work: women and migrants.

This comment was the subject of ridicule. Identifying the discriminatory impacts of legislation that the government claims isn't gendered or racialised hits a certain nerve with the privileged. Mere mentions of systemic racism are often dismissed in

the Senate as not based in reality. The white men the Australian parliament was built for – the cohort who still dominate its chambers, corridors and cafes – seem to find it almost unbearable when someone like me enters their space and points out that racism and sexism are not only expressed through blatant actions such as racist name-calling or sexual assault, but through entire systems and institutions such as the parliament. Not that they often acknowledge the name-calling or assault in any case.

It's impossible to feel safe in a workplace with constant reminders, from the likes of One Nation, of why people like me don't belong here. When parliamentarians call for a ban on Muslim immigration, question the value of multiculturalism or talk about immigrants in condescending ways, their comments might not be directed at me, but they may as well be.

And all that's before you add the toxic masculinity of parliament that has been highlighted this year. It's no secret that our parliaments are aggressive workplaces where shouting matches and sledging are the norm. You are expected to develop a thick skin and act "like a man". If you don't, then you are easily written off or sidelined. The "rough and tumble" of politics has real consequences for those of us who refuse to behave like the white men and show no interest in conforming to their system.

In this, my working life in parliament is nothing like the outside world. I've worked in many places in my professional engineering career, including consulting firms, local government and a large university. Most of them were dominated by white men. But none of them were anything like parliaments, where you are so marginalised, so invalidated, and made to feel so small.

It is all too clear to me that I'm an outsider in parliamentary chambers. I grew up a world away in Lahore. I'm a brown-skinned migrant. I didn't come to parliament through the usual pathways of student politics or a job as a staffer. I had no networks or "boys' club" connections. I think that's a good thing. A parliament must reflect society, not be an elite institution. But until that happens, being an outsider does mean that you are shut out. It means you are not taken seriously. You watch as MPs in other parties bypass you to negotiate with your male colleagues. It means many MPs consider you not worth befriending or don't acknowledge you with anything other than the most superficial of conversations.

The brutal reality is that parliament can be a lonely place for a migrant, Muslim woman of colour. In 2013, I was the first Muslim woman to enter any parliament in Australia. Things haven't changed much since. It's not just about the number of MPs like me, it's about the way the place works and whose voices it amplifies and deems valuable.

In discussions about representation, much is said about the importance of being the first of a group to be represented in a powerful institution. There's no doubt that it is an enormous honour and privilege to be that person for numerous communities. But you're the first for a reason. Against all odds, you've managed to get elected and found a way into a place that is far from welcoming. You then have the immense responsibility of trying to change it for the better. That's why I've decided to be myself, to refuse to change to fit the hyper-masculine, white culture of the place, despite the toll it takes. After all, I got involved in politics to shake things up, to make it easier for others like me to make this journey. I'll take the heat, but I will not get out of the kitchen.

It will take much more than resistance from the few MPs of colour to shift the people, culture, procedures and backward norms that permeate parliament.

It strikes me that parliament's moment of reckoning on sexism and men's treatment of women has coincided with ever-escalating racism. If our fight for equality is to be with and for all women, this must be our moment to build both a feminist and anti-racist country.

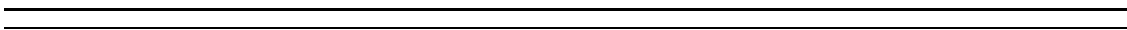
This is our opportunity to coalesce the rage we feel against injustices, and to unite in ways we never have before.

MEHREEN FARUQI

Mehreen Faruqi is a Greens senator. Her forthcoming memoir and manifesto, *Too Migrant, Too Muslim, Too Loud*, explores her time in parliament and our current moment of reckoning.



By Mehreen Faruqi
May 1, 2021





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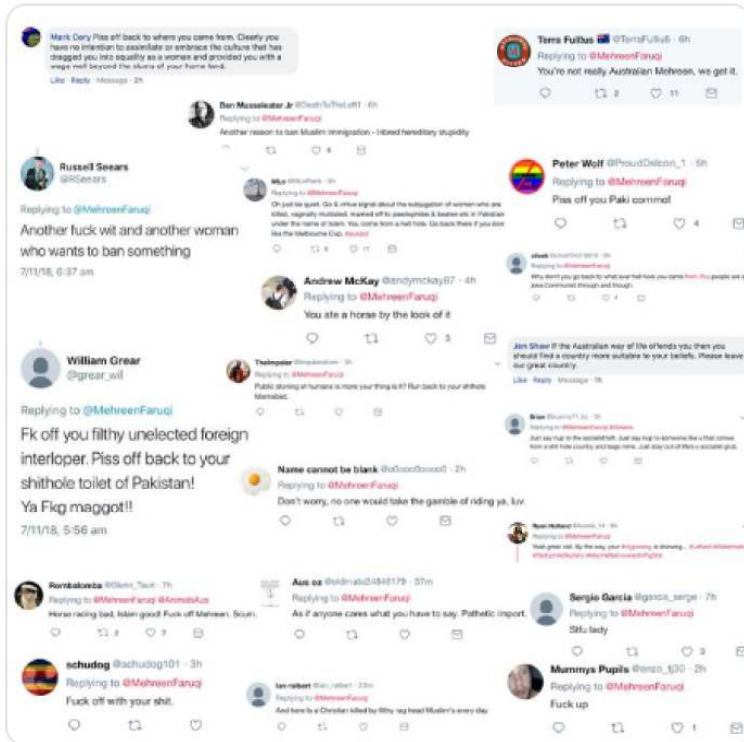
Post

Mehreen Faruqi @MehreenFaruqi

Yesterday I spoke out against the gambling industry and cruelty of horse racing.

These are just a few of the comments I received in return.

This is what happens when people of colour speak out on almost any issue.



9:15 AM · Nov 7, 2018

574 Reposts 140 Quotes 1,001 Likes 3 Bookmarks

