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The death of multiculturalism: blaming and shaming British Muslims

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Abstract

Since 7/7, much has been said about the end, and at times, the 'death' of multiculturalism in both the public and political spaces. Considering whether much of this discourse is little more than a thinly veiled discourse about the presence, role and responsibilities of Muslims in today's Britain, the paper takes the findings of the 1997 Runnymede report into Islamophobia and uses this as a premise from which to explore those arguments and ideas that have ensued. Taking its title from an article written by Norman Lamont in the *Daily Telegraph*, the paper questions the sometimes tenuous relationship between 'multiculturalism' and notions of 'Britishness' as well as their effect and resonance contemporarily on perceptions and attitudes shown towards Muslims.

Keywords: multiculturalism, Islamophobia, Britishness, cultural relativism

1. The death of multiculturalism: blaming and shaming British Muslims

1.1. It has been a decade since the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia was established, a Commission that through its 1997 report, "Islamophobia: a challenge for us all" ("the Runnymede report") not only raised

an awareness of the growing reality of anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic hostility in Britain, but also marked the onset of what might be described as ‘the first decade of Islamophobia’. In doing so, the Runnymede report propelled the word ‘Islamophobia’ into the everyday common parlance and discourses of both the public and political spaces. Little could the authors of the report have realised, or even conceived that a decade on from penning the report, which noted that the hostility and hatred towards Islam and Muslims was becoming “more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous” (ibid: 1), that the climate would be, following a series of urgent and historical events, ever more intense and ever more worrying: for these ‘urgent and historical events’, read 9/11, the ‘war on terror’, Bali, Madrid, 7/7, the Danish cartoon furore and everything else in between. However, the situation is not as easy or straightforward as stating that the situation has merely deteriorated or worsened. In fact, whilst the Runnymede report suggested that Islamophobia was becoming ‘more explicit’ it may well be that the reciprocal has also occurred, where contemporary anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic discourses and inferences have been seen to be shifting towards being far more implicit or covert, obfuscated by debates about seemingly unconnected issues and problems.

1.2. Beyond, and possibly behind, these urgent historical events a number of other much less explicit debates have emerged and indeed are continuing that are as potentially anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic in their sentiment and meaning as the much more direct approach taken by those such as the British National Party (“BNP”) in their calls for ‘Islam out of Britain’ and the need for a ‘referendum’ on the future of Islam. However, whilst somewhat overlooked, a reference point or source to aid the explanation of the emergence of less explicit discourses can be found in the Runnymede report. As part of it established an eight-point typology from which Islamophobia could be identified – differentiating between ‘closed’ and ‘open’ views of Islam and Muslims – the typology was, with hindsight, in places weak and in others somewhat flawed. As such, it is questionable whether a decade on from publication, the typology stands up to scrutiny and remains valid or relevant. One of those main weaknesses of the ‘views’ typology was that whilst eight views were established, the last three ‘views’ were anything but views. Instead, these last three ‘views’ were much more observations or insights into the situation at that time. Whilst the typology of ‘views’ therefore can be problematic both in conception and function, one of those observations maintains a distinct resonance to the contemporary setting and the less explicit discourses that are being identified. As noting that ‘anti-Muslim discourse [can be] seen as natural not problematic’, the report noted that:

organisations and individuals known for their liberalism and anti-racism express prejudice against Islam and Muslims...” before going on to add how “... a deep dislike of Islam is not a new phenomenon in our society. What is new is the way it is articulated by those sections of society who claim the mantle of

secularism, liberalism and tolerance. They are at the forefront of the fight against racism and against Islam and Muslims at the same time. They preach equality for all, yet turn a blind eye to the fact that this society offers only unequal opportunities for Muslims.
(Runnymede Trust 1997: 15)

- 1.3. It is this observation and argument therefore that this paper will use as its premise from which to consider how in the contemporary climate, anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic discourse has become less obvious, being hidden behind or even embedded within the debates and arguments surrounding issues that might more appropriately be understood as being issues relating to 'secularism, liberalism and tolerance'. Arguing that these have to a great extent been largely unnoticed or unrecognised, this paper will consider recent debates that have emerged against this backdrop of urgent history about the 'end', or even more ominously, the 'death' of multiculturalism. Whilst the Danish cartoons furore has highlighted more recently how 'freedom of speech' has become an issue that has been employed to question Muslims and Islam, so the issue of multiculturalism has been employed similarly, pre-dating the Runnymede report and also the series of urgent historical events referred to previously. However, whilst this is the case, it is only the post-9/11 context within which this paper will primarily be concerned. In this chapter therefore, two questions will be considered: the first being whether it is 'multiculturalism' or 'Muslims' and 'Islam' that is being questioned; the second, what the solutions put forward by in the recent debates about multiculturalism are and how they might best be understood.
- 1.4. In identifying a start-point to this post-9/11 setting, one might reflect on an article written in 2002 by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Norman Lamont. Writing in *The Telegraph*, from the title alone - "Down with multiculturalism, book-burning and fatwas" (Lamont 2002) - it would appear quite obvious about what, and by association whom the article was about: 'book-burning and fatwas' being a direct reference to the Satanic Verses affair and those Muslims who burnt copies of the book in Bradford whilst the 'fatwa', a similarly direct reference to the Ayatollah Khomeini's call for the death of Salman Rushdie, the author of the Satanic Verses. That Lamont chose to associate the events of the Satanic Verses affair with the issue of 'multiculturalism' is interesting what with the affair not only being an extremely important and influential juncture in the emergence and socio-political acknowledgement of Muslim identities in the British social and political spaces but also in the development and history of debates surrounding the issue of 'freedom of speech' and the limits attached to this. As such, not only did the affair mould, shape and inform the context within which Muslims became perceived and understood but so too was the emergence of a 'Muslim' identity part of the same process that was non-differentiable from an event that saw the emergence and reification of both contemporary and historical stereotypes. In addition, this also provided the backdrop against which those same Muslims – and Islam in the wider context – were being contextualised and positioned as

being in opposition to and intolerant of 'our' democratic and liberal ideals and values. For Lamont then, his issues with multiculturalism are nothing more than the latest in a timeline that began in 1989.

- 1.5. A clear frame of reference and context for the article is therefore established from the outset. Yet whilst an analysis of the title would suggest that the article might be overtly concerned with Muslims and their relationship to multiculturalism, a reading of the text would not appear to overly support such a claim. Lamont's article instead is, on first reading, something of a damning critique of a Blairite/New Labour vision of multiculturalism. For Lamont even the mere notion of Britain being multicultural was something of a point of contestation: "Multiculturalism is certainly a myth when ethnic minorities are only about six per cent of the population, even if the situation is different in London and other big cities". From here, he goes on to express a similar antagonism towards New Labour's thinking about British identities, also castigating Lord Parekh for his suggestion that 'Britishness' should not be "a fixed conception of national identity and culture" but a much more fluid one, 'a community of communities'. In the first part of the article, whilst Muslims and Islam are conspicuous by their absence, what is interesting is how Lamont, in opening his attack on Blair, points out "some of the Prime Minister's personal contradictions: an Anglican who attends Roman Catholic services, but who carries a copy of the Koran. The Prime Minister may be clear about himself, but he has managed to confuse the rest of us about the country's identity". In doing so, what exactly is Lamont suggesting? Is it that the vision of multiculturalism endorsed by Blair is misguided or skewed or is it, in reference to the carrying of the 'Koran', a criticism of the influence that the 'Koran' - a cultural representation of Islam - is having on that same Blairite vision of multicultural Britain?
- 1.6. Lamont continues to explain the need to be 'down with multiculturalism'. Quoting from Blair's favourite philosopher, R. H. Tawney, Lamont highlights how a successful society requires "obedience to the law". From here, the underlying causes of Lamont's argument become more apparent. Noting how, "Our laws are based on values, and the state has the right to intervene to protect them. Individuals cannot be left alone in their chosen communities, if that involves forced marriages, polygamy, burning books, supporting fatwas or even fighting against our Armed Forces", Lamont goes on to congratulate the "West Indians, Africans and Indians" who he saw paying tribute to the Queen Mother whilst she was laying in state. For Lamont, not only was this something that demanded recognition and subsequent praise but it was also testament to those same 'West Indians, Indians and Africans' in expressing their allegiance both to the crown and also to a 'British' identity, of which - for Lamont at least - the monarchy was one cohesive part of. An interesting amalgam of ideas therefore becomes apparent: the influence of 'the Koran', an obedience to the law, a number of things - weighted towards Islam and Muslims - that would appear to present challenges to or exist against 'our' values, those communities that require

recognition for their allegiance to the crown and finally, the role of the monarchy as part of 'our' identity.

1.7. But what is most interesting is the way in which Lamont demarcates and differentiates between those that he deems to have been able to become a part of the 'British identity', those that file past and respect the monarchy and those that exist outside that same 'British identity', those pronouncing fatwas, undertaking book-burnings and fighting against, rather than with, British troops: the latter being those that have brought about the need for Britain to be 'down with multiculturalism'. Despite neither Muslims nor Islam being directly referenced, from what was not being said rather than what was, Lamont's argument and justifications were clearly taking shape. It was not those that were already part of a cohesive British identity but instead those that existed outside of it. As Lamont had so clearly demarcated, albeit not explicitly, which groups were placed exactly where, so the blame for multiculturalism's failings and subsequent cause for its destruction was placed firmly not at Blair and New Labour's doors, but more accurately at Muslims', and also with Blair and New Labour's allowance of this. For Lamont then, it was less the concept of multiculturalism as an ideal that was at fault but instead how certain elements or communities that were a part of today's Britain were going against that ideal, through a lack of assimilation, a lack of obedience to the law, a lack of respect of 'our' values and a lack of allegiance to the monarchy. Whilst never being named, it was therefore Muslims and the requirements that Islam places upon those Muslims that was undermining multiculturalism and subsequently requiring it to be downed and rejected by the wider and more inclusive society. Lamont therefore was attacking the hegemonic Muslim community that he perceived all Muslims to be one part of, rather than the notion or concept of multiculturalism.

1.8. From Lamont's initial rallying cry of 'down with multiculturalism', so a plethora of further condemnations and denunciations have followed suit. Weaving tenuously linked threads through a myriad of different commentators, politicians, policy-makers and media voices, the same themes and issues have been covertly underlying much of the recent voracity surrounding those multiculturalism debates and arguments that have ensued in the wake of the 'home-grown bombers', the atrocities of the London bombs of 7 July 2006 ("7/7") and the failed attempts to undertake similar atrocities two weeks later ("21/7"). As Tariq Modood (2005) identified in writing for openDemocracy, in the twelve weeks following the terrorist atrocities, numerous commentators used the events as a springboard from which to espouse their arguments against multiculturalism. As Modood quotes, William Pfaff argued in the Observer that "these British bombers are a consequence of a misguided and catastrophic pursuit of multiculturalism"; Gilles Kepel on openDemocracy suggested that the bombers "were the children of Britain's own multicultural society" and that this event had smashed British multiculturalism "to smithereens"; Martin Wolf argued in the Financial Times that "multiculturalism must be discarded as nonsense"; whilst Trevor Phillips – chair of the CRE – questioned how, in the context of an "anything goes' multiculturalism",

Britain had “focused far too much on the ‘multi’ and not enough on the common culture” (ibid). Various other forums, journals and institutions with a centre-left or liberal-left bias were similarly identified as holding or sponsoring events around similar themes, some asking “Is Multiculturalism Dead?” and “Is Multiculturalism Over?”, whilst others clearly set their sights into the future and looked “Beyond Multiculturalism”. What with the impetus for all of these events and responses being 7/7 and 21/7, it is questionable whether all or indeed any of these examples were genuinely concerned with multiculturalism or whether it was the ‘problem’ within Britain’s multicultural society that such examples were rather more concerned with.

1.9. Although as with Lamont, such arguments preceded 7/7. Take for example David Goodhart’s (2004a) broadside against multiculturalism in Prospect magazine. Having already described the situation in Britain today as being a place where many of us live alongside “stranger citizens” (2004b) – a somewhat unfortunate reference to citizens of non-British heritage - not only did he proscribe multiculturalism’s imminent demise but he also set out a range of arguments to question whether Britain was becoming ‘too diverse’. As a direct consequence of Britain’s multicultural policies, Goodhart also questioned whether Britain could sustain the mutual obligations that were necessary for not only maintaining a good society but also upholding various British institutions, one example being the welfare state. Arguing that “more of our lives [are] spent among strangers”, that our “common culture is being eroded”, and most controversially, “that we feel more comfortable with, and are readier to share with, and sacrifice for, those with whom we have shared histories and similar values”, Goodhart’s arguments were at best xenophobic and at worst, something far worse. Yet aside from a single mention of Muslims when referring to the former Home Secretary David Blunkett, “He has spoken about the need for more integration of some immigrant communities - especially Muslim ones - while continuing to welcome high levels of net immigration into Britain of over 150,000 a year”, Goodhart (2004a), in accordance with the precedent set by Lamont, does not identify either Muslims or Islam as being either integral to or shaping of his decisions about the future of a multicultural Britain. However, as with obfuscated discourse and coded inferences of Lamont, it is possible that a much more accurate meaning of what is being put forward can be gleaned from what is not being said rather more than what is.

1.10. This was a point of contention that Trevor Phillips sought to explore in his response to Goodhart in the Guardian shortly after his essay was published. Entitled “Genteel xenophobia is as bad as any other”, Phillips’s (2004) retaliation was a call for more honesty and open-ness from those that were participating in the debates about multiculturalism. As he put it:

The xenophobes should come clean...They are liberal Powellites; what really bothers them is race and culture. If today's immigrants were white people

from the old Commonwealth, Goodhart and his friends would say that they pose no threat because they share Anglo-Saxon values. They may not even object to Anglophile Indians - as long as they aren't Muslims.

- 1.11. For Phillips, behind the rhetoric that was being employed to denounce multiculturalism was a much more insidious process, one where the problem was being presented or shrouded in terms of multiculturalism but was more accurately one that was concerned with the 'problem' of Muslims in Britain. For Phillips, Goodhart et al would not be championing any argument against multiculturalism if Muslims were not a significant part of that problem that was seen to be inflicting Britain's multicultural society. Yet despite Phillips' protestations, the issue of multiculturalism and its ongoing relevance had once again become a critical and urgent issue for the intelligentsia and beyond into the political spaces where Goodhart's ideas seemed to gain some resonance and by consequence, credence also.
- 1.12. It was therefore somewhat surprising that within just two months of Phillips' protestations, he too had joined the debate in a way that was contrary to his earlier position. When asked in an interview for the *Times* newspaper, "Shall we kill [multiculturalism] off?", Phillips' reply was, "Yes, let's do that...Multiculturalism suggests separateness. We are now in a different world" (2004b). Given that Phillips had recently castigated Goodhart for his attack on a 'too diverse' Britain, what could Phillips have been suggesting when he spoke of a 'different world'? One can only presume that his change of heart and mind had been – somewhat questionably - informed by the Madrid terrorist attacks on 11 March 2004. This point cannot be substantiated but what with Phillips' volte-face responses to multiculturalism after 7/7, it would appear that there may be some justification for suggesting that as with his predecessors, the 'problem' of Muslims and Islam were integral to both his thinking and to his subsequent newfound message. It would also appear that this same newfound message had acquired an even greater urgency. So when asked by Rod Liddle from *The Spectator* if Islam and its 'culture' was an issue for a successful multicultural society, Phillips' response was self explanatory: "Privately I would go quite a long way down the route you're taking". Since then, and despite earlier refutations and protestations, Phillips has insisted that because of multiculturalism, Britain is 'sleepwalking' its way to segregation and ghettoisation: segregation and ghettoisation that are being drawn ever more deeply along lines of race and more pertinently, religion.
- 1.13. It is this final recognition that answers the questions that therefore need to be asked about not only what is underpinning the recent demise of multiculturalism but also about what is, in reality, being attacked and questioned by so many commentators. Buoyed by the events of 7/7 and framed within a post-Rushdie, post-9/11, post-Madrid context, opponents of multiculturalism have used the climate of fear and anxiety to have ensued to push forward and in some ways, try

and legitimise their agenda. Whilst multiculturalism, such critics argue on the surface at least, elevates difference and therefore enhances segregation, what underpins and clearly informs those arguments and provides legitimisation is the insistence and inference upon the 'problems' – perceived or otherwise – of Britain's Muslims. Consequently, Britain's Muslims become established as something of a Trojan horse where much of the discourse that ensues is undeniably anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic. For those critics that argue against multiculturalism, the argument goes that if Muslims themselves fail to integrate and ultimately assimilate into a culture that one might assume is not 'too diverse', then the problems are not to do with anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic discrimination, prejudice or hatred – overt racism in another contextual place and time – but instead, the failure of those communities to integrate and assimilate and little else. And because Muslims fail to integrate and assimilate, it is they that are seen to be undoing and ultimately killing multiculturalism. What is overlooked in this argument however is that neither 'integration' nor 'assimilation' is a pre-requisite of multiculturalism. Counterposing integration and assimilation against multiculturalism therefore offers only hegemonic solutions to hegemonic problems.

1.14. How this manifests itself and subsequently finds form is through an onslaught on Muslims as a hegemonic community, where the religion of Islam is employed as a battering ram: a religion that is conceived and determined to be either uniquely evil or uniquely backward, incidentally both of which were established as 'closed views' of Islamophobia in the Runnymede report. What then is the discourse saying: is it an attack on multiculturalism, or is it more so Islamophobia? As Parekh states, attacks on multiculturalism – whether implied or simply assumed – are in the current climate largely equitable with attacks on Muslims and Islam, where the employment of the word 'multiculturalism' in the associated debates is nothing more than a code for the 'problem' of Muslims and Islam (Parekh:). Underpinning the discourse is as such a clearly anti-Muslim anti-Islamic bias, one that rarely gets identified and named in the public and political spaces but reflects the warning shot fired a decade previously by the Runnymede report. Hidden either covertly or at times overtly, Muslims and Islam are as a result understood and established as being inculpably blamed for all the ills of contemporary society. For those with lingering doubts, a much more explicit example of this is available. Whilst those examples considered have been shown to be much more couched in their response to an argument against multiculturalism, its failings and ultimate demise, a year before the events of 7/7, Rod Liddle in *The Spectator* was much more frank. Putting forward the thesis that not only was multiculturalism dead, but he also argued that it was 'Islam' that was killing it (Liddle 2004). Maybe then it is time for those detractors, as Phillips suggested, to 'come clean' about what is really underpinning their arguments and objections and who precisely they are seeking to attack and question.

1.15. As regards the second issue raised at the outset of this paper, it is the proposed solutions within the discourse of the end of multiculturalism debates

that are of particular concern. So for Goodhart, multiculturalism had created a society that was perilously verging on being 'too diverse' that in consequence, has to some degree diluted 'British culture'. In suggesting this, that which is underpinning the discourse and associated arguments with such a notion of multiculturalism – that is, Muslims and Islam if we take on board the observations made previously – is that which is understood as attacking 'us': who 'we' are, what 'we' stand for, 'our' way of life and 'our' culture. As such, the language that becomes integral to these debates becomes draped in notions of cultural, racial, ethnic and religious difference that are counterposed to a largely un-fixed concept of Britishness. A useful reference point is to once again return to the premise established by Lamont. As he acknowledged at the outset, there was an apparent 'fear' across Britain and beyond about the loss of national identity, a 'fear' that needed to be addressed rather than brushed aside. However it is once again the point that Lamont makes about the role of 'the Koran' in confusing "the rest of us about the country's identity" that is vital to fully understanding what is being suggested here. Whilst Lamont leaves this observation open-ended and without concrete clarification, one might legitimately presume that what is being inferred is that 'the Koran' – as cultural icon for Islam and Muslims – cannot be equated or located within what is 'ours'. That is, what might legitimately be seen to be and understood as being 'British': that which relates to that which is 'us', 'our' culture, 'our' ways and 'our' values. As he concludes, "the Queen's Golden Jubilee gives people a chance to celebrate their real identity, not some synthetic version".

1.16. Two interesting points worthy of issue thus emerge. First, how the discourse of 'new' or cultural forms of racism are being employed to offer 'solutions' to the 'problem' and second, how Lamont is suggesting that 'our' real identity is inextricably linked with the monarchy. As regards the first point, it might be argued that having analysed Lamont's discourse, the language and ideas underlying his solutions to the apparent problem relating to multiculturalism function within a remit of what might be termed 'new', or more recently 'cultural' racism. A phenomenon first identified in the early 1980s by Martin Barker (1981) within the rhetoric and discourse of the early Thatcher government, it is interesting that this was the same Thatcher government that Lamont held a significant position in. In this discourse however, Barker identified that the foci for racism was clearly shifting away from more traditional markers typically founded upon skin colour, to newer markers based upon 'difference': 'difference' - in all its myriad forms – as defined or conceived as being that which went against or counter to that which was normative and 'normal' of being 'British'. This demarcation of 'difference' therefore can be located and identified in the discourse of Lamont and others. Who this demarcation of difference belongs to can also clearly be located and identified: those 'fighting for the Taleban, [undertaking] forced marriages, polygamy, burning books, [and] supporting fatwas'. Barker also noted in the processes of new racism that difference was so exaggerated that even the mere inference of such differences could be

understood as challenging 'our way of life' or posing 'a threat' to who 'we' are and how 'we' live.

- 1.17. In today's public and political spaces, the 'threat' that Muslims are most commonly seen to present is typically framed in debates associated with terrorism and securitisation. However, as regards the debates surrounding the life or future of multiculturalism, this perceived 'threat' becomes evident along the lines of new racist discourse where 'Islam' and 'Muslims' are seen to be incompatible with the dominant or perceived overriding culture and its heritage: that is, being 'British' and being 'us'. So prevalent is this that similar processes can be identified beyond Britain where the situation may be even more dangerous and incendiary as in Denmark (cartoons), France (hijab and social disorder) and the Netherlands (Theo Van Gogh) as well as underlying the arguments against Turkey's accession to the EU. Indeed this might be the 'Muslim question' that Parekh is clearly referring to (Parekh). If this is so, then not only is an attack on multiculturalism little more than a coded attack on Muslims and Islam, it is also an attack on who 'we' are. The 'solutions' therefore that are purported as regards the 'Muslim question' – possibly more appropriately the 'Muslim problem' – are therefore rooted in the belief that a reassertion of 'our' identity and the eradication of 'difference' are what is clearly required and indeed necessary.
- 1.18. As regards Lamont's inference that 'our' identity – that is, 'our' real identity - is in some way associated with the monarchy, it is worth reiterating the conclusions drawn previously about how 'a reassertion of 'our' identity and the eradication of 'difference' are what is clearly required and indeed necessary'. Take for example Goodhart's suggestion that 'outsiders' "should be encouraged to become part of the British 'we'", or Phillips' rhetorical question, "what makes us British?" that he answers by suggesting that because "we've focused far too much on the 'multi' and not enough on the common culture..." it is now, in a post-7/7 context necessary to "...remind [our people] what being British is about." For Liddle, it was the need for a "core of Britishness" that would solve the 'problem' of multiculturalism. But what is meant when such commentators use the terms 'British' or 'Britishness', and would this really solve the 'problem' of multiculturalism? One answer to this might be located in considering the relationship between multiculturalism and nationalism, a relationship that can be at times awkwardly and dangerously entangled. This relationship is almost inversely proportional: if multiculturalism is understood to succeed, then it could be argued that nationalism and the sense of a coherent national identity has in some ways failed. If however nationalism is in the ascendancy and a surge in national 'pride' is identified, then others might counter argue that multiculturalism has consequently failed. In this way, maybe it is the success of Britain as a multicultural society and the subsequent identification of Britain as multicultural that could be that which is temporarily misunderstood, in that the problems of today's society are a result of the watering down and eventual eradication of 'our' national identity, national pride and national culture: the who 'we' are, what 'we'

are loyal to, and what 'our' way of life is. It is possible therefore that it is multiculturalism that is being seen and subsequently understood as not only challenging what we understand as being 'British', but more dangerously, dismantling, eradicating and ultimately remaking it in an entirely different image. To fully understand this, it is necessary to understand how the notion of 'British' was initially conceived and how this has changed in recent years.

- 1.19. As regards national identity, Durkheim explained how such was founded upon and rooted in the establishment of and adherence to 'social facts' (Durkheim 1982: 50-59). For him, 'social facts' were those things that any given society or nation become emotionally attached to, for example in the British setting this might be the good old cup of tea or the monarchy as per Lamont. In doing so, social facts function by providing familiarity as well as instilling a sense of nostalgia and security, becoming somewhat natural or normative of who or what 'we' are. If one considers the emergence of Britishness as an identity, what with it being coined only in the late 18th century, the social facts that provide us with familiarity and a sense of being 'us' are also rooted firmly in this same historical period: a period when the 'Empire' and the monarchy were both extremely powerful and highly influential. The notion of 'British' therefore emerged at a time when Britain was – in some people's interpretation – truly 'Great'. As such, the emotional attachment to Britain's 'Greatness' and what made it 'Great' remain fixed to this particular historical time and context and also to what being 'British' is all about. Britain, and more importantly Britishness, therefore find familiarity plus a sense of nostalgia and security in such ways that it understands and differentiates itself in terms of being dominant, superior, 'Great' and so on.
- 1.20. Following the major changes that have occurred in Britain since the end of the Second World War, most prominently the demise of the Empire and the influx of immigrants from Commonwealth countries, many of the social facts have increasingly diminished, to the extent that some are even invalid, thus leaving the notion of what it is to be British as little more than a series of nostalgic moments in some far-off and distant collective memory. As such, being British and Britishness have been thrown into a state of flux, where the familiarities of the old world order – Great Britain – no longer reflect either the contemporary setting of Britain in the 21st century or its position in an increasingly shrinking world. The social facts about being British therefore do not adequately answer the questions about who and what being 'British' is, thus creating a void that awaits being adequately filled. Thus ensues a situation where being 'British' and indeed 'Britishness' itself are also in a state of crisis where little concrete evidence can be put forward as to who or what 'we' are.
- 1.21. Offering a good dose of 'Britishness' as a response to what is perceived to be a failing multiculturalism may not necessarily therefore offer the solution to the problem. As Modood explains, 'Britishness' is currently trapped within a political struggle:

on the right are exclusivist, even racist notions of Britishness that hold that non-white people are not really British and that Muslims are an alien wedge. On the left is the view that there is something deeply wrong about rallying round the idea of Britain, about defining ourselves in terms of a normative concept of Britishness – that it is too racist, imperialist, militaristic, and elitist (Modood 2005).

1.22. So when answers are sought as to what ‘Britishness’ is, so the responses are either culturally or civically insignificant: trapped between the culturally banal and trite – fish and chips, queuing, cups of tea, or even more cynically binge drinking, - and the civically indistinguishable – democracy, free speech, equality and human rights – that almost all other modern nations equally aspire to. In the discourse of the debates to have emerged concerning the demise of multiculturalism, not only are Muslims and Islam put forward as being against all of these, but also that they present a challenge, and more worryingly, a threat to them also. If this is what Britishness is reduced to, so the need to respond becomes potentially forceful and something of a vengeful act of self-defence: self-defence against those who are alleged to be posing the threat and that is none other than Muslims and the presence of Islam in Britain. Repeatedly, therefore, the evidence would suggest that rather than the current debates that are understood to be either attacking or questioning multiculturalism as a concept or political ideal, underlying these same debates is much more insidious and covert attack, one that is focused much more upon the presence, role and responsibilities of Muslims and Islam and the perceived problems that these – rather than multiculturalism – are presenting to the future of Britain and British society.

1.23. Irrespective of the nature of the current debates and arguments surrounding multiculturalism, neither Islam nor Muslims are incompatible with either Britishness or multiculturalism. The events of 7/7 and 21/7 were not therefore evidence that multiculturalism was dead nor even that certain communities and religions needed to be vilified. The reality is indeed quite the opposite. As David Hayes wrote shortly after the bombings, the best option available is one of a more ‘radical multiculturalism’ (Hayes 2005). If as the old adage goes, ‘extremism breeds extremism’ then maybe Hayes provides a unique solution. Instead of allowing an atrocity devised by ‘extremists’ to destroy who ‘we’ are and our ‘way of life’ – where Britishness is undoubtedly multicultural and clearly has been for a number of decades – why not then reciprocate this and employ extreme ‘radical multiculturalism’ to not only defeat the extremists – both Muslim and non – in their desire to drive a wedge between Muslims and everybody else whilst at the same time undermining those critics – from both the full breadth of the political spectrum – that insist that Muslims and Islam are incompatible with today’s society. This then will go some way towards the most neglected fact about multiculturalism and that is that multiculturalism is far from dead. Instead, it

is an everyday occurrence and reality of millions of different Britons that goes somewhat unnoticed and without any necessary or special recognition whatsoever.

1.24. Whilst the Runnymede report is therefore ten years old and the 'first decade of Islamophobia' might be coming to something of a traumatic and unclear end, the fact remains that it is still necessary – possibly even more so – to be aware of the processes of and discourse associated with anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic expression. Whilst the report identified that the rhetoric being articulated by those sections of society that claimed the mantle of secularism, liberalism and tolerance was at the time somewhat 'new', in the contemporary climate whilst these same sectors are continuing to propagate and perpetuate similar thoughts, these can no longer be understood or determined as something that was new. Yet despite this being the case, the fact that these same sections of society are continuing with such a practice – unchallenged, unchecked and to some degree unacknowledged – highlights potentially how over the past decade such rhetoric and discourse has become ever more natural and even less problematic. Less problematic that is as regards the acceptance and resonance of such a discourse and its meanings where Islamophobia has become – and possibly continues to become – ever more naturalised and normative. And because of this, those that are at the forefront of liberalism, those that lurk in the shadows of such political inventions as 'progressive nationalism', those that are espousing tolerance, those integral and vitally placed in the bludgeoning equalities and human rights sector continue to pursue their campaigns against injustice and all forms of intolerance at the same time as they too wage war and embed their prejudices and discriminations towards Islam and Muslims further and further into so much of their rhetoric. Still, ten years on from being initially warned about the very same fact, they and many others overlook the fact that society continues to offer only unequal opportunities for Muslims. Still, ten years on, that which is underpinning much of what continues to be articulated from within these sectors of society – a process that cuts across traditional political divides of right and left – remains rooted in the blaming, problematisation and dislike of Muslims and Islam. Whilst the Runnymede report therefore stated that the hostility and hatred shown expressed about Muslims and Islam was increasingly 'more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous'. In the increasingly urgent contemporary climate, it might be more appropriate to suggest the same being maybe rather more implicit, more naturalised, but just as equally dangerous.

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