

Dark legacy of Birmingham's 'Trojan Horse' episode

Posted on Friday 20th June 2014

Despite the findings from the investigations into 21 Birmingham schools by Ofsted being published on Monday, the shadow cast by Operation **Trojan Horse's** (<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jun/09/downing-street-launches-snap-ofsted-visits-after-extremism-claims>) allegations are likely to loom large over the city's Muslims.



Undoubtedly, some incidents highlighted by the reports – specific incidents in specific schools as opposed to anything resembling a more widespread or systematic plot – did indeed make for uneasy reading, and so the need for appropriate action to be taken is without question both right and proper.

While the legacy of the allegations will be felt for some time among Birmingham's schools, there is very real potential for detrimental impact within the city's Muslim communities who are still reeling from the fallout of the now defunct **Project Champion** (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-13331161>).

When more than 200 'spy' cameras were placed around two of the most densely populated Muslims areas in the city just a few years ago many of Birmingham's Muslims felt – as my research with Dr Arshad Isakjee showed – the impact of the cameras had been less cohesion, more tension between different communities and, most worryingly, increased feelings of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim **hatred across the city** (<http://etn.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/07/05/1468796813492488>). Following the row over the Trojan Horse affair, there is little doubt some will argue 'there is no smoke without fire'. For some, the sheer scale of the response from central government might offer a semblance of evidence to support such claims, not forgetting of course that investigations by West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council and the Department for Education remain ongoing. Nonetheless, there will be more suspicion and mistrust being shown towards Muslims and their communities.

As my own **research into Islamophobia has shown** (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Islamophobia-Christopher-Allen/dp/0754651401>), higher and increasingly hostile levels of suspicion and mistrust can be extremely problematic, as they tend to underpin many of the stereotypes that typically inform and shape negative attitudes about both Muslims and Islam.

Roundly viewed as problematic and threatening, Muslims become seen as an ever-more homogenised and undifferentiated 'other', incompatible with 'our' norms, values and way of life. So embedded and uncritically accepted do these become that they become increasingly normalised, taken for granted and seen to be common sense. In other words, it 'makes sense' to be suspicious and mistrusting of everything Muslims do.

This is evident in the wake of Operation Trojan Horse's allegations. What might be seen to be respectable and respectful behaviour in any other community – namely wanting to be involved in your children's education and wanting to support, and participate in, the school they attend – has the potential to be viewed very differently. For Birmingham's Muslims the ordinary and the everyday could quite easily be seen to be something far more extraordinary, worrying and even insidious.

For them, being involved in your children's education could be misconstrued as another sign that confirms the workings of a hidden conspiracy; of being 'the enemy within' or indeed any other Islamophobic construct. This was borne out and felt by Birmingham's Muslim communities in the same way it was with Project Champion previously.

Today, the city's Muslims and their communities will be experiencing heightened levels of scrutiny and questioning, and will feel ever more anxious and fraught. In turn, this will engender feelings of isolation and marginalisation that will result in many more Muslims feeling that they do not belong – even to the city where they were born, grew up and continue to live.

Even more importantly, Birmingham's Muslims will once again feel they are a 'suspect community'.

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