British values and British identity: Muddles, mixtures, and ways ahead

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In the final eleven months of its five-year term, the Coalition Government placed much emphasis in the education system on what it called fundamental British values (FBV). The phrase had its origins in counter-terrorism strategies that were of dubious validity both conceptually and operationally, and the trigger for its introduction into the education system (the so-called Trojan Horse letter in Birmingham) was a malicious forgery. Nevertheless the active promotion of FBV became a legal or quasi-legal requirement, was zealously inspected by Ofsted under instructions from the secretary of state, and was complemented and reinforced by new requirements under counter-terrorism and security legislation. Much damage appears to have been done already in schools and universities and more damage is likely. Much critical, corrective, and restorative work therefore needs now to be done.

For restorative work to be effective a range of measures is needed: substantial discussion and clarification through dialogue; greater respect for the professional experience and insights of teachers and subject communities, particularly in the fields of citizenship education, history teaching, religious education, and spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development; greater trust and cooperation, both nationally and at local levels, between Muslim and non-Muslim organizations and communities; greater attention to Islamic values, wisdom, and pedagogy in the field of education; renewed emphasis on the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate as a critical friend who identifies, commends, and promotes good practice; and much higher levels of due regard for the values enshrined in equalities legislation.

Keywords: British values; countering extremism; religious literacy; equalities; multiculturalism; Islamophobia.

Background: 'no clear idea of who they are'

'The British', wrote the editors of *Political Quarterly* in 2000, introducing a special issue on national identity to mark the arrival of the new millennium, 'have long been distinguished by having no clear idea about who they are, where they are, or what they are. Most of them have routinely described England as Britain. Only business people talk about a place called the United Kingdom … It is all a terrible muddle' (Gamble and Wright, 2000: 1). A few years later a character in a feature film set in Glasgow happened to introduce herself in these terms: 'I am a Glaswegian Pakistani teenage woman of Muslim descent who supports Glasgow Rangers in a Catholic school … I'm a mixture and I'm proud of it' (*Ae Fond Kiss*, also known as *Just a Kiss*, directed by Ken Loach, 2004).

Muddles and mixtures can be experienced as terrible, yes, but also can be things to rejoice in and be proud of; they can be how newness enters the world (Rushdie, 1999). Tensions, options, and choices occur at a range of different levels, including not only the national and international,

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as for the editors of *Political Quarterly*, but also the existentially immediate and personal, as for the Glaswegian schoolgirl; they occur in a range of different policy spheres, including education. How did the Coalition Government in Britain in the period 2010–15 respond to muddle and mixture around national identity, particularly in the sphere of education? That is the essential question considered in this article. The question is handled with regard to England more than to the whole of the UK. But questions of national identity in England cannot be fruitfully considered independently of developments elsewhere – not only, of course, elsewhere in the UK and these islands but also elsewhere in the wider globalizing world in which the story and stories of these islands unfold.

Prior to 2010 debates about British identity, and more specifically about English identity, had been raised in the education system by the Ajegbo Report following the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005; by the community cohesion agenda following the disorders in northern cities in 2001; and by the National Curriculum Council's decision in 1990 not to publish guidelines which had been prepared on ensuring that there should be a multicultural dimension permeating all subjects. Further back, there had been central government's decision in the late 1980s to weaken and end projects such as the Development Programme for Race Equality in the London Borough of Brent, and to de-emphasize and marginalize the conclusions and recommendations of the Swann Report in 1985. Further back still, there had been attacks on global education and multicultural education throughout the 1980s mounted by the various columnists, academics, and think tanks known collectively as the New Right, and by journals and opinion leaders such as the *Salisbury Review*.

Outside the field of education, iconic landmarks in the British identity debate had included Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968, the 'Tebbit test' of 1991, the findings of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report in 1999, the moral panic and hysteria in the media which in 2000 greeted the publication of the Parekh Report on the future of multi-ethnic Britain, and debates around British identity provoked by a speech by Gordon Brown, at that time Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 2004. The wider social, economic, cultural, political, and technological context was summarized by the Parekh Report (Runnymede Trust, 2000) as including:

- globalization in its various dimensions and the consequent decline in the power and legitimacy of national governments
- increasing pluralism in personal moral values and lifestyles, particularly in relation to sexual relations and family and household structures, and associated declines in deference and trust for tradition
- the decline of manufacturing and mining industries and, in consequence, of hitherto secure employment prospects for a large proportion of the population
- decline in the prestige of Christianity combined with the realities and associated anxieties of post-imperialism.

Britain, in a famous epigram, had lost an empire but not found a role. 'Fee, fi, fo, fum,' declared a heavily built and swaggering young lager lout in a cartoon used in an in-service training course for teachers in summer 2015, 'I smell the blood of one who's a little unsure of his national identity.' (Readers who were brought up outside the UK need perhaps to know that the reference is to a children's nursery rhyme: the original words, spoken by a giant bogeyman figure, are 'I smell the blood of an Englishman.')

The Coalition Government that came to power in May 2010, this is all by way of saying, inherited a multi-layered and multi-faceted mixture and muddle of turbulent anxieties and uncertainties around national identity. For any one individual these interacted and intertwined with the changes, chances, muddles, and mixtures they encountered in their personal

lives – poignantly if over-dramatically summarized by the narrator in a work of fiction published in the 1950s as 'my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul' (Bellow, 1958: 3).

To maintain its legitimacy and therefore to stand a chance of re-election a democratic government needs to give a convincing and inspiring lead on issues of national identity and narrative, and to signal that it understands the population's anxieties and can be trusted to deal with them. For this it is helpful if there is an appreciative and supportive media, and if there is a conveniently identifiable enemy both within and beyond the boundaries of the government's jurisdiction. This is the context for the advent in the English education system, towards the end of the fourth year of the Coalition Government's five-year term, 2010–15, of 'fundamental British values' (FBV).

The FBV project

The FBV project, which came to prominence in summer 2014, did not, to repeat, come from nowhere, but was embedded in a long series of uncertainties, debates, concerns, and proposals, and was influenced by a range of contextual and contributory factors, including the impending general election of May 2015. It did, however, have some distinctive features which meant – or at the time of writing appear to have meant – that it was more powerful and influential than the otherwise similar projects which had preceded it. For example, it was launched by a high-profile speech in the House of Commons by the education secretary and by a high-profile article in a mass-circulation newspaper by the prime minister. It affected all kinds of school, including not only state-funded schools but also independent fee-paying schools, and not only schools but also nursery provision and holiday schemes. It was made explicit in the standards required in relation to teachers' professional standards. Analogous duties were placed on universities and colleges. Perhaps most significantly of all, so far as the daily routines and worries of schools were concerned, it was incorporated centrally into the Ofsted inspections framework.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, announced to a House of Commons select committee in January 2015 that 'inspecting how British values are taught is one of the most important things we are doing at the moment', since 'schools, particularly in monocultural areas, are on the frontline in terms of helping our society to become a cohesive one'. Various media articles highlighted the failure of otherwise good schools to measure up to Ofsted's notion of a cohesive society, and reported that such schools had been placed in punitive special measures in consequence. There was also a scarcely veiled threat that not only Ofsted but also the police would be involved in instances where schools or individual teachers appeared to be in breach of the new rules (Webber, 2015). Even the royal family entered the fray (Walters and Owen, 2015). The episode which triggered or exacerbated all this was the affair in Birmingham of, as the term might be, the *equus donatus troianus*; the Trojan gift horse affair. (For a preliminary polemical analysis of the narratives in which this affair was embedded, see Richardson, 2014).

It was in the first week of March 2014 that a short news item appeared in the *Sunday Times* reporting the existence of a letter which purported to show a Muslim plot to take over the governing bodies of certain Birmingham schools. Its principal authorship appeared to be the paper's security correspondent. It included verbatim quotations from the alleged letter and it was obvious from these that the letter was an incompetent forgery – it could not possibly have been written by the person alleged to be its author, for it contained elementary errors of fact and a string of anti-Muslim tropes and fantasies. The full text of the letter, in so far as there was a full text, could be found on the internet and this confirmed, if confirmation were needed,

that the document was a forgery. For example, most obviously, the full text claimed that the principal plotter, in addition to a group of Muslims, was the director of Birmingham City Council's children's services. Her motivation, it was said, was to curry favour with central government by converting as many Birmingham schools as possible into academies. She was using local Muslims, it was claimed, to further her personal career. The *Sunday Times* did not refer to this prominent theme in the forged letter, nor did any other newspapers.

For at least 24 hours – a long time in journalism nowadays – the *Sunday Times* story was ignored by other newspapers and by broadcasters and press agencies. The only references to it on the internet were on the websites of the far right British National Party and other such organizations, and on the right-wing blog *Harry's Place,* which pointed out however that it was almost certainly a false flag operation, a deliberate deception to create fear and alarm. But all too often newspapers do not permit even an obvious lie to spoil a good story, and from late Monday onwards there were headlines which competed with each other to warn of terrible dangers in Birmingham posed by – the words were used interchangeably – Islamists, fundamentalists, fanatics, conservatives, hardliners, extremists, and jihadists. The headlines reached a crescendo in the *Birmingham Mail* on 7 March 2014: 'Jihadist plot to take over schools'.

Famously, a lie can be half way round the world before the truth has put its boots on. A lie travels particularly fast, without even cursory checking let alone dutiful scrutiny, when it reflects and reinforces fantasies and ignorance which already exist. The fake document known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, for example, was widely accepted at face value in its day because it accorded with antisemitic conspiracy theories which were already prevalent. Further, a lie gets easy passage when it gives emotional energy, or can readily be used to give such energy, to a pre-existing agenda. Thus the Trojan Horse forgery in Birmingham not only reflected Islamophobic tropes, fantasies, and simplifications but also acted as a gift horse for certain pre-existing agendas and interests.

The grateful recipients of the gift in this respect included an axis of three principal and overlapping groups: a) securocrats – civil servants, think tanks, intelligence services, and surveillance agencies seeking recognition and additional resources for their highly dubious set of theories about the nature of extremism and radicalization and about how to deal with these 'upstream'; b) the Islamophobia industry (Lean, 2012, and see also Ali *et al.*, 2011; Blumenthal, 2012; Fekete, 2009; Kumar, 2012; Kundnani, 2014a; Morgan and Poynting, 2012)– a network of think tanks, journalists, funding organizations, and right-wing politicians in western countries seeking to justify patterns of inequality which perpetuate the disadvantage and exclusion of Muslim communities and neighbourhoods and, in foreign affairs, to justify military invasions whose function is to defend and maintain fossil fuel supplies in the Middle East; and c) people disturbed by and opposed to, as they see them, the evils of multiculturalism, antiracism, and political correctness.

These three sets of interests were not the only ones that benefited from the *equus donatus troianus*. They are particularly relevant and threatening, however, in relation to FBV. For the record, it can reasonably be speculated that other beneficiaries from the gift included some or all of the following:

- the sections of the media that prosper and profit from peddling moral panics about plots, threats, and dangers
- politicians of all parties seeking to demonstrate, in the run-up to the May 2015 general election, that they could reliably be more negative than any of their rivals towards immigration in general and Muslims and Islam in particular
- participants in arguments for and against the academization of schools

- people involved in employment disputes, or else wanting to settle old scores from disputes in the past
- officials and elected members in central and local government
- people involved in rivalries and contests between denominations, schools of thought and theological traditions within British Islam, for example between the Barelwi and Deobandi traditions, and between different approaches to modernity.

None of these recipients looked the gift horse in the mouth, let alone studied its dental records.

Much of the comment in the press about FBV in summer 2014 seemed to assume the term had only just entered public discourse and that the context for its use was essentially educational. In point of fact the term was coined in 2011 and the original context had nothing directly to do with education, for it occurred within a definition of extremism formulated by the Home Office. The purpose of the definition was to explain how the Home Office would decide in future whether or not to talk to, work with, and fund certain organizations and individuals, particularly in its relationships with Muslim groups and communities. It was based on the theory that the root cause of terrorist acts perpetrated by people of Muslim heritage is the ideology or narrative known as Islamism. The theory is plausible to some but is considered simplistic, insufficient, and counter-productive by others. The home secretary wrote:

> We will respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat from those who promote it. In doing so, we must be clear: the ideology of extremism and terrorism is the problem; legitimate religious belief emphatically is not. But we will not work with extremist organizations that oppose our values of universal human rights, equality before the law, democracy and full participation in our society. If organizations do not accept these fundamental values, we will not work with them and we will not fund them.
>
> (HM Government, 2011: 1)

To elaborate on this intention, the Home Office provided a definition of extremism. This appeared in full in the appendix of a policy document containing more than 100 pages, and in a shortened form in a footnote in the main body of the text. The fuller version in the appendix, in its entirety, was this:

> Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.
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> (HM Government, 2011: 107)

This definition of extremism was not accompanied by any explanation, illustration, rationale, or discussion. It was conceptually unclear, since its key terms – 'rule of law', 'liberty', 'democracy', 'tolerance' – are notoriously open to conflicting interpretations, and over the years have had different meanings at different times and in different contexts. None of them refers to an absolute value; on the contrary, each has to be complemented, balanced, and qualified by another value: 'rule of law' by justice, for example, and 'tolerance' by inclusion and belonging (Starkey, 2015). The lack of conceptual clarity was compounded by the unclear punctuation. But these deficiencies were arguably unimportant in view of the Home Office's essential purpose. If its terminology were challenged, courts of law would lay down interpretations. Conceptual and grammatical clarity is, however, required when the professional careers of teachers are under consideration, and the reputation and good standing of schools, and the education received by children. In retrospect, it can be seen that the Home Office's choice of the term FBV was most unfortunate. The phrasing ought to have been something like 'the fundamental values and principles which underlie public life in the United Kingdom'. A formulation such as this would have achieved

the Home Office's aims – even though, as mentioned below, the aims were not self-evidently sensible. Further, and in the current context more significantly, if such a formulation had been adopted by the Department for Education, much confusion, anxiety, and stress in schools would have been avoided. Also much trouble would have been avoided if, before engaging in confused and confusing talk about British values, the DfE had had due regard for its public sector equality duties to think about eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations.

The Home Office emphasis on refusing to talk and listen directly to people with whom it disagreed but who have done nothing illegal – 'non-violent extremists' – was derived in part from counter-insurgency operations in Northern Ireland and, earlier in the twentieth century, from counter-insurgency policies throughout the British Empire in its efforts to resist challenges to its rule. Commenting on those efforts and processes, an experienced observer writes:

> When it comes to terrorism, governments seem to suffer from a collective amnesia. All of our historical experience tells us that there can be no purely military solution to a political problem, and yet every time we confront a new terrorist group, we begin by insisting we will never talk to them. As Dick Cheney put it, "we don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it". In fact, history suggests we don't usually defeat them and we nearly always end up talking to them … The one thing I have learned, above all else, from the last 17 years is that there is no such thing as an insoluble conflict with an armed group – however bloody, difficult or ancient … What we need are more political leaders who are capable of remembering what happened last time – and prepared to take the necessary risks.
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> (Powell, 2014: 15, 367).

Criticism and opposition

The requirement to promote FBV was met by criticism, exasperation, derision, and bewilderment. The list of values was dubbed as 'vacuous nonsense' in the *Daily Telegraph (*Daley, 2014), 'squelchy and foggy' in the *Mail on Sunday* (Hitchens, 2014), 'parochial, patronising and arrogant' in the *Guardian* (Rosen, 2014) and 'meaningless at best, dangerous at worst and a perversion of British history in any case' (Jones, 2014) also in the *Guardian*. 'If these are British values,' said a philosopher of education on the blog of the UCL Institute of Education, 'I'm a Dutchman' (White, 2014).

The FBV project was accompanied and reinforced by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, and the consultations which preceded it (HM Government, 2014; Nabulsi, 2015). This required schools and universities, amongst others, to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism', and therefore to 'take seriously their responsibility to exclude those promoting extremist views that support or are conducive to terrorism'. Underlying the new legislation there were theories about radicalization and extremism which are at best dubious and controversial and at worst ignorant and counterproductive (Ahmed, 2013; Grossman, 2014; Kundnani, 2014a, 2014b; Rosenhead, 2015; Versi, 2015; Woodhead, 2014).

Criticism and opposition to the FBV project, and to the new security and counter-terrorism measures with which it was closely connected, were widespread. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) agreed the following motion at its Easter 2015 conference:

> Conference believes the Government's narrative on fundamental British values (FBV) is ill-considered, ill-defined and counterproductive. This kneejerk national policy 'solution' to localised governance issues risks becoming the source of wider conflict rather than a means of resolving it. Conference therefore asks the Executive Committee to monitor how FBV is policed. There are likely to be many unintended consequences of this policy which the Committee needs to ensure

are well publicised during calls for a more sensible reasoned approach to values in our schools and colleges.

<div align="right">(Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2015)</div>

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) voiced similar concerns, noting

> … that schools should be places where young people can discuss events in a spirit of enquiry and openness and that teachers are well placed to facilitate such discussions and deal with the expression of unacceptable viewpoints; that many teachers may feel uncertain about engaging in such discussions with students and may feel the need for guidance and quality professional development on how to do this; that the government's promotion of British Values, the Prevent agenda and the use of Ofsted to monitor these is having the effect of closing down spaces for such discussion and that many school staff are now unwilling to allow discussions in their classroom for fear of the consequences.

<div align="right">(Press Association, 2015)</div>

The NUT said further that where schools have evidence that students may be vulnerable or at risk as a result of exposure to groups promoting violence or extremism, then this should be dealt with under existing safeguarding procedures rather than new procedures which may require them to report concerns directly to the police or law enforcement agencies, which could have the effect of criminalizing students. The fears expressed in the ATL and NUT resolutions were shown within weeks to be wholly justified (Birt, 2015; Francois-Cerrah, 2015; Taylor, 2015).

The importance of not closing down spaces for discussion was also emphasized by institutions of higher education. The Russell Group of universities, for example, declared in its response to the government consultation on the counter-terrorism bill:

> Enabling free debate within the law is a key function which universities perform in our democratic society. Imposing restrictions on non-violent extremism or radical views would risk limiting freedom of speech on campus and may potentially drive those with radical views off campus and 'underground', where those views cannot be challenged in an open environment. Closing down challenge and debate could foster extremism and dissent within communities. Universities are required by the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 to ensure freedom of speech within the law on campus … Clarification is needed concerning how universities will be expected to place limits on free speech which in itself does not risk breaking the law; otherwise universities may be open to legal challenge. The intention to include non-violent extremism within the scope of Prevent work in universities is a particular problem as it conflicts with the obligation to protect free speech.

<div align="right">(Russell Group, 2015: paragraphs 3.1–3)</div>

The same essential point about not closing down spaces for thoughtful discussion was made by the Muslim Council of Britain:

> It has been demonstrated that non-violent extreme ideas are not the precursor to violence in sharp contrast to the underlying assumption in the Prevent legislation. However, it is not improbable that restricting the expression of non-violent ideas, however extreme, may itself lead to violence by causing self-censorship in public – an approach that will increase discussion of such topics in private spaces, a more fertile ground for potential radicalisation. According to a report by Professor Arun Kundnani, the best way to prevent terrorist violence is therefore to widen the range of opinions that can be freely expressed, not restrict it. Whilst not being so definitive, the MCB believes that providing space for extreme but non-violent ideas to be aired in public is key to allow grievances on ideology, identity and foreign policy to be vigorously and aggressively discussed and challenged in open debate, particularly among young people who feel excluded from mainstream politics. These spaces must be open and allow free debate without fear of being labelled an extremist or attracting the attention of the security services.

<div align="right">(Versi, 2015:10).</div>

What, then, shall we do?

In the light of the criticisms and opposition outlined above, it is clear that much critical, corrective, and restorative work needs now to be done. It is to be hoped that the next government will welcome and facilitate such work, and will itself take a lead on matters where it has an obvious responsibility – and avoid intervening in instances where the principal responsibility lies with others.

The first priority is that there should be substantial conversation amongst teachers, and between teachers and the wider community, about ways forward. The importance of such conversation was highlighted in the Church of England's response to the DfE consultation in August 2014. A national conversation, it said, would 'help build a stronger sense of the way in which shared values create stronger communities'. The response continued:

> The common good is not just the aggregate of numerous individual goods but a shared perspective across diverse communities about the conditions for communities and individuals to flourish. Emphasising diversity without building shared values can be as damaging as enforcing uniformity where real differences exist. The ways we, as communities and a nation, develop the language and practices of equality, diversity, community and the individual have changed rapidly in recent years and the proposed national conversation on values would be one way to build confidence and coherence in the wake of changes that have been unsettling for many and remain in many ways unresolved.
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> <div align="right">(Church of England, 2014)</div>

The Church of England response also, incidentally, rebuked the government for confining the conversation so far to the summer holidays and for not involving maintained schools:

> We believe that there is a need for an important public debate about the values underpinning our education system, and how our society engages with dissenting voices, but that a consultation on independent schools standards, held predominantly in the summer holidays, is not a sufficient vehicle for such a substantial conversation … [W]e believe that this present consultation, narrow and technical as it is, cannot be a sufficient vehicle for addressing what is such an important issue.
>
> <div align="right">(Church of England, 2014)</div>

In the absence of the kind of national conversation that is needed and that the Church of England asked for, it is up to individual schools, and groups of schools, to conduct the necessary discussions at their own grassroots levels. The conversation needs to involve communities, parents, pupils, and governors, and is vital at school level for taking ownership of what it means to develop a broad and balanced curriculum, and for helping to map a pathway into the future.

The conversation needs also, of course, to involve unions and subject associations. In this respect it is admirable and promising that the ATL and the NUT made robust declarations at their Easter 2015 conferences, as cited above. Also, several headteachers of independent schools have spoken out forcefully against the FBV project (Goodwin, 2014; Ward, 2015). More detailed critiques and proposals are at the time of writing being considered by subject associations and communities concerned with citizenship education, history teaching, religious education, and SMSC development. These curriculum areas have in common that teachers need professional skills in dealing with difficult and controversial issues (Akram and Richardson, 2011) and promoting critical thinking and discussion skills (Thomas and Cantle, 2014). They also have in common that they can promote religious literacy (Dinham and Francis, 2015, Clarke and Woodhead, 2015). Clarke and Woodhead (p.44) comment that many people now work in a climate where 'religious literacy is or should be a requirement for a very wide range of jobs in both the public and private sectors'. An important aspect of religious literacy is appreciating that in all religious traditions there is an overlap of religion as faith or belief and religion as identity, and that religion as identity

can in certain socio-economic circumstances be associated with violent conflict ('extremism'). Humankind's religious imagination, a religiously literate person knows, can be associated not only with heroic acts of great kindness but also with heinous acts of great cruelty. 'Our gods', a recent book about educational priorities has recently warned, 'the things we worship or at least hold dear, are not without danger. Religion is not safe, but secularism is not safe either. Education is certainly not safe …' (Davies, 2014: 1).

Further, the conversation must include Muslim individuals, organizations, and communities. So far, Muslim voices in recent debates about Britishness and multiculturalism in the education system have not had a fair hearing, despite a growing literature about both theory and practice. (Examples include Ahmed, 2015; Coles, 2008; Khan, 2013; Hoque, 2015; Hussain, 2008; Iqbal, 2014; UK Race in Europe Network, 2009; Wilkinson, 2015.) One consequence is that the debates themselves have not been sufficiently well informed. Another is that young British Muslims are in danger of supposing the debates are not of importance or interest to them, and they may in consequence be alienated by the citizenship education lessons and programmes that are provided in mainstream schools. This is particularly likely insofar as the discourse of politicians and some of the media implies that a central purpose of teaching British values is to control and regulate young Muslims rather than to empower them. 'The issue of great concern for most Muslim communities,' writes a Muslim observer, 'is not that they see a conflict between Muslim values and British values but that their children are growing up in a society in which such an imaginary binary opposition is constantly propagated by both politicians and extremist elements within their communities' (Mumisa, 2014).

The imaginary binary opposition between Muslim values and British values is a component in the wider imagined opposition between 'Islam' and 'the West', and this is one of the six principal features of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims identified by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in its guidelines for schools throughout the OSCE region (OSCE, 2013: 26–7). Young Muslims need to appreciate that Islam is not the cause of Islamophobia, and they need moral, intellectual, and emotional strength to resist and oppose it. Further, even more importantly, they need to join with others to combat, reduce, and remove it. This includes taking pride in their heritage, refusing to see themselves as helpless victims, and refusing to adopt an us vs. them view of the world in which all non-Muslims are disrespected. Of course, there are analogous educational priorities for non-Muslims as well.

In the past, the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate was not only to ensure schools' accountability but also to act as a source of advice and warning to the government of the day, and to play an authoritative part in identifying, commending, and promoting good practice in schools. The latter two responsibilities, which are those of a critical friend rather than a punitive investigator or subservient functionary, have not yet disappeared completely. They have been much weakened during the last 25 years, however, and the Trojan Horse and FBV affairs have massively reduced the esteem in which Ofsted is now held. It is not yet out of the question that Ofsted could contribute valuably to the national and local conversations about British values and identity that the country needs. For this to happen, though, Ofsted needs to exhibit far more sensitivity, depth of thought, and humility than have so far been evident.

In 2012 Ofsted published a briefing for inspectors on equalities in schools. This was frequently re-published over the following two years, most recently in April 2014, just as the Trojan Horse affair began to gather momentum. It was an admirable summary of what schools need to do in relation to the specific duty to gather and publish equality information. With appropriate modifications, it was also an admirable study of what the Department for Education (DfE) needs to do in this regard. Such publications reflect the government's insistence that public bodies should be transparent: 'Publishing information about decision-making and the equality data which

underpins decisions,' it had said, 'will open public bodies up to informed public scrutiny. It will give the public the information they need to challenge public bodies and hold them to account for their performance on equality. Moreover, knowing that such information will be published will help to focus the minds of decision-makers on giving proper consideration to equality issues' (Government Equalities Office, 2012). But in May 2014, just as it began to become publicly involved in the Trojan Horse affair, Ofsted removed this admirable document from its website. It is difficult to avoid suspecting that this was because it knew its investigations into the affair were not going to be conducted with due regard for its public sector equality duties, and that it did not wish to be held to account for this. The most important parts of the document were, however, published in a journal specializing in equalities in education (RET Editorial Team, 2014).

Be that as it may, equalities legislation would have been highly relevant to the investigations conducted by Ofsted and to those which were conducted under the auspices of the DfE and Birmingham City Council. If these investigations had been carried out with regard to the public sector equality duty, their methodologies and conclusions would have been markedly more sensitive, more just, and more helpful. Certainly the public sector equality duty (PSED) must be taken centrally into account from now on in relation to the FBV project. If it is, the muddles and mixtures around British values and identities referred to throughout this article will stand a chance of being understood and clarified, and constructively and creatively lived with.

Notes on the contributor

Robin Richardson was until his retirement an educational consultant who worked frequently for local authorities and schools, and for the predecessors of the Department for Education. Previously he was director of the Runnymede Trust and, before that, chief inspector for education in a London borough and adviser for multicultural education in a shire authority. Since 1990 he has been the author or editor of many publications on multiculturalism, Islamophobia, and equalities. His website is at www.insted.co.uk.

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