

Islamophobia – still a challenge to us all

“What British Muslims Really Think” – critiques, comments and concerns, May 2016

Over the last few weeks, the Sunday Times and Channel Four, supported and amplified by the Daily Mail, the Spectator and the ICM polling organisation, plus also a former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Trevor Phillips) and sundry journalists and other commentators, have been trying to tell the world what, so they claim, ‘British Muslims really think’.

Their efforts have been seen, critiqued and ridiculed as intellectually shallow, conceptually inadequate, religiously illiterate, factually misleading, methodologically flawed, professionally unethical and morally irresponsible. This paper is a guide to the principal criticisms that have so far been made, and contains links to 16 key articles.

First, it’s relevant to note the article in the Sunday Times by Trevor Phillips on 10 April that is referred to throughout the following list. The text of the article is behind a paywall, but can be read free of charge at <https://www.facebook.com/yahya.birt/posts/10153497650196596?pnref=story>.

The following day there was a lengthy version of the article in the Daily Mail. This can be read at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3533041/Warning-UK-Muslim-ghettoes-Nation-nation-developing-says-former-equalities-watchdog.html>

The research by ICM underlying Phillips’s article is described in detail at <http://www.icmunlimited.com/media-centre/polls/icm-unlimited-survey-for-the-channel-4-programme-what-muslims-really-think>

1) Islamophobia – 20 years on, and still a challenge to us all

Omar Khan, director of the Runnymede Trust, provides a clear and powerful restatement of the arguments in Runnymede’s 1997 report, showing that its description of Islamophobia is also an accurate account of the Channel Four programme, and of the Sunday Times and Daily Mail articles in 2016: <http://www.racecard.org.uk/equality/islamophobia-20-years-on-still-a-challenge-for-us-all/>

2) Britain’s Muslims through Trevor Phillips’ looking glass

Arzu Merali, one of the founders of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, unpicks the many ways in which the Channel Four programme was illogical, and reflects and reinforces Islamophobic stereotypes and fantasies: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/chasm-looking-glass-21871934>

3) What British Muslims really think about Channel 4's show

Carmen Fishwick and Sarah Ward at the Guardian quote the critical views and reactions of a range of Muslim people in various parts of Britain following the Channel Four broadcast on 13 April. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/14/what-british-muslims-really-think-about-channel-4s-show>

4) The double standards of Trevor Phillips

Peter Osborne, formerly chief political commentator for the Daily Telegraph, shows that the Channel Four programme was merely a parade of anti-Muslim prejudice, dressed up as research:

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/double-standards-trevor-phillips-12578508>

5) The propaganda genius of 'What British Muslims really think'

Ayshah Syed, currently working as an editor at Islam21c, analyses in detail the rhetorical and cinematic techniques used by Channel Four to portray all Muslims as essentially 'other': <http://www.islam21c.com/politics/the-propaganda-genius-of-what-british-muslims-really-think/>

6) What Muslims Really Think programme is based on a flawed poll skewed to find a 'them and us' narrative

Zubaida Haque, a social policy analyst, shows how the so-called findings of the poll underlying the Channel Four programme were already present in the way it was designed and conducted.

<http://www.racecard.org.uk/culture/media/whatmuslimsreallythink-programme-is-based-on-a-flawed-poll-skewed-to-find-a-them-and-us-narrative/>

7) Not all British Muslims think the same – whatever Channel 4 might claim

Aatif Nawaz, a comedian who features in the Channel Four programme, outlines his profound disappointment with it. 'The role of the scapegoat,' he writes ruefully, 'is one British Muslims are all too familiar with.'

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/15/channel-4-islamophobic-bandwagon-british-muslims>

8) Trevor Phillips and the Runnymede Trust's Islamophobia report – what really happened

Khalida Khan, a campaigner against Islamophobia in Britain for the last 30 years or more, recalls the creation of the Runnymede commission on Islamophobia: in the early 1990s: <https://khansistersblog.wordpress.com/2016/04/11/trevor-phillips-never-been-an-advocate-for-muslims/>

9) So, what do British Muslims really think?

Kenan Malik, author and broadcaster, offers some initial thoughts based on the Sunday Times article: <https://kenanmalik.wordpress.com/2016/04/12/so-what-do-british-muslims-really-think/>

10) What too many believe about Muslims but shouldn't

Tahir Abbas, professor of sociology at Fatih University, Istanbul, argues that the Channel Four programme was 'exaggerated, inflated, ideologically loaded, methodologically defunct and entirely unhelpful'.

<http://blogs.soas.ac.uk/muslimwise/2016/04/13/speakers-corner-prof-tahir-abbas-what-too-many-believe-about-muslims-but-shouldnt/>

11) What do Muslims really think? This skewed poll certainly won't tell us

Mikdaad Versi, assistant secretary general at the Muslim Council of Britain, writes that 'discussions and proposals to promote integration and cohesion are always welcome. But the starting point should not be that Muslims are the problem, "not quite British enough", and must be civilised into a pre-existing notion of Britishness':

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/12/what-do-muslims-think-skewed-poll-wont-tell-us>

12) Mr Phillips, I'd like to ask you a question

'Why,' asks Siema Iqbal, a GP based in Manchester, 'are Muslims repeatedly being interrogated about their thoughts and religious beliefs? ... As a British Muslim I worry we are sleepwalking towards assimilation which is one-directional and relies on minority communities giving up on their beliefs and cultures in order to be accepted, in this case to fit in with "British Values"'

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-siema-iqbal/mr-phillips-id-like-to-ask-a-question_b_9689310.html

13) Are British Muslims really a nation within a nation?

The MEND advocacy and research organisation points out a range of omissions, faults and inconsistencies in the Channel Four programme and the related research: <http://www.islam21c.com/special/web-posts/are-british-muslims-really-a-nation-within-a-nation-mend/>

14) The strange history of secularism twists debate about British Muslim attitudes

Humeira Ikdidar, a lecturer in politics at King's College London, argues that the ICM report needs to be contextualised within consideration of secularism, and of the place of religion and belief in modern societies. 'Insisting on integration,' she says, 'without any questioning of dominant assumptions and beliefs, values and ideas, carries strong echoes of colonialism. How and why the UK's "centre of gravity" came to be defined through its opposition to Muslims needs to be

opened up if this report is to be an exercise in bringing us all together':
<https://theconversation.com/the-strange-history-of-secularism-twists-debate-about-british-muslim-attitudes-55079> via @ConversationUK

15) Trevor Phillips' research on British Muslims is dangerous and wrong

Maha Akeel, director of information at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) argues that the Channel Four programme 'plays into the hands of those who seek to spread hatred.' 'At a time of heightened tensions,' she says, 'we need nuance and accuracy. Instead, we're presented with sensationalism and bigotry ... Averting the dangerous mistrust between religious communities must be one of the key objectives of our time. It is time for accurate research, not witch hunts or trials by media.' <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/trevor-phillips-research-on-british-muslims-is-dangerous-and-wrong-no-wonder-islamophobia-is-on-the-a6980331.html>

16) Six things wrong with Trevor Phillips' latest crusade

Abdul-Azim Ahmed, an academic specialising in the study of British Islam, itemises major weaknesses in the Channel Four programme. 'Trevor's comments,' he concludes, 'are based on an unrevealing, methodologically unsound survey that does little more than confirm the prejudices of those who are convinced of a "Muslim problem", and hamper the efforts of those who are seeking to actually address the challenges of 21st century Britain':
<http://www.onreligion.co.uk/blogs/6-things-wrong-with-trevor-phillips-latest-crusade-2/>
