"Critical multiculturalism, and the response of British society to diverse Islamic belief and Muslim political positions"

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Abstract

Possibly the most difficult issues facing the community of nations are those that have arisen over the past twenty years since Osama bin Laden was persuaded to adopt the doctrine of takfir. The atrocities on 9/11 (2001) and 7/7 (2005) inspired American and British military responses whose ramifications are now evident in the rise of the army called Islamic State. Bin Laden’s decision has to be understood in the context of a century-long critique of Western, capitalist society by a succession of Muslim intellectuals, most effectively represented, initially, by the Muslim Brotherhood. As the Brotherhood rejected violence, the door seemed to open for the violent Jihadis, aided by the Americans in the fight against the Soviet army in Afghanistan. The context in which these problems should be placed includes the simultaneous rise of peaceful Salafis, the relative silence of the Sufis (despite their prominence in Turkey), the role of the Shi’a in Iran and the Alawites in Syria, and the low profile of those Muslims who are more comfortable with late modernity.

This talk will address these issues through the lens of ‘critical multiculturalism’, a discourse the speaker has developed to enable a twin-track approach to the issues thrown up when Muslims form minorities in a country like England, practising Islam in a wide variety of forms, and identifying in many different ways with Islamic politics as that appears on the global stage. One track simply welcomes the contributions made by those Muslims settled and settling here. The other track opens up channels for dialogue and debate where important value differences emerge.