

Beyond 2015: Shaping the future of equality, human rights and social justice (12 and 13 February 2015)

Session 5: Where do we want to be? Future studies – how do we want UK society to look in ten years' time?

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What will the future look like? What do we want an equal society to look like? The traditional way we measure equality is through statistics. We look at statistics like employment and if I am coming from it from a race perspective, which I know best of course, we might look at the number of young black unemployed men being 56%, which is a shocking statistic. We might look at political representation and the number of ethnic minority MPs, which is far below the proportion of minorities in this country. We might look at representation in business and talk about boardrooms and look at how many or how few major companies have any ethnic minority representation on their boards at all. We might even look at the media and look at the number of journalists employed by the newspapers and in broadcasting and say how under represented ethnic minorities are there too. All tell a story, but they don't tell the whole story. Even if employment rates were equivalent for ethnic minorities and the white population, that doesn't tell you what jobs they are doing or what level they are at. Even if we have proportionately the same number of minority MPs as white MPs, it doesn't tell you what positions they are in or what influence they have, or whether they are actually free to speak on behalf of ethnic minority communities or have to toe the party line that is given from on high. If we have minorities at board room level in a company, are they again just toeing the corporate line and only employed, when they think like the directors and chief executives who are already there, rather than being able to have their own individual and different perspectives on issues. In the media, what kind of influence do they have on the editorial output of the organisations that they work for?

We talk about statistics because we like to keep things nice and simple. We see that in the movies too. 'Selma' is out at the moment, which everyone says is a wonderful film with brilliant performances. It is a feel-good movie in which by praying and being nice to people and marching, we got the vote. End of film, victory, haven't we done well! Last year we

all saw '12 Years a Slave' which was a fantastic film. We looked at slavery, then we moved on. Things are so much better now. Congratulations! We saw the 'Mandela' film a year ago as well, telling the story of apartheid, which is now in the past, so there is no need to worry about that. We can move along now! So we have moved on from those very simplistic views of inequality and now we have a much more complicated set of inequalities.

There are no longer 'no blacks, no Irish, no dogs' signs outside landlords' properties, but that doesn't mean that inequality and exclusion in private rented property has gone away. Only a year ago in a BBC investigation, undercover journalists went round to lettings agencies posing as landlords and saying 'I have a property to rent but I don't want any black people' and nearly all the lettings agent said 'Fine, we can do that'. The investigators then sent in a black undercover journalist to ask for a property – and he was refused it. They sent in a white journalist straight afterwards and he was shown and given the property. Some of the lettings agents themselves reported that about 80-90% of landlords say they don't want any black people. This is a shocking statistic and this is in London, the great success story, the multicultural melting pot of Britain!

This is happening in Britain now. What we need to do is find a way of getting underneath these statistics and find out what is really happening. Undercover reporting is one way of doing it, but what we really need in our society is to look beyond equality statistics and look at inclusion. Our goals should be that people are not only respected but feel respected and feel they can play a full role in British society, without any of the cultural exclusions that are so prevalent today. I will throw this over to the academics here - we need a simple snappy measure of inclusion which can be quoted in the media in the same way as jobless statistics are, and which shows how far we still have to go.

I look outside here and I see a Union Jack flying and I think about the Conservative Party and their plugging of British values and Britishness as supreme, unique, above any other society's values. What does that say to any minority, to anyone who has a history which is from beyond this country? It says 'You may live here, you may even be born here but basically your background is nothing compared to our background. The

only way you can fully be a member of our society is if you learn what we do and copy what we do, because what we do is so much better than what you are used to doing'. It sends out a message of exclusion which is very popular and plays very well with the Party, which fears UKIP and losing votes to UKIP supporters. But in terms of the message it sends to Britain's minorities, it is quite clear. We saw this with the Charlie Hebdo story. I don't need to say it was a horrific massacre and what happened was atrocious, but Charlie Hebdo was an Islamophobic racist magazine which targeted and mocked Muslims in a society in France, which is very Islamophobic. I am not Charlie, je ne suis pas Charlie, I don't subscribe to their values at all, it is horrific what happened but it doesn't mean I then have to stand with the values of Charlie Hebdo. I absolutely do not. But in the aftermath of what happened, it almost seemed that you had to sign up to those values or somehow you were in cahoots with the terrorists and sympathising with them. Absolutely not! These false black-and-white scenarios – you are either with us or you are against us and with the terrorists – are far too prevalent in modern British society.

I looked at the Evening Standard recently. They had a panel, ahead of the elections, with ten experts to tell you everything you need to know about the forthcoming General Election. London, let me remind you, is a city which has 40% racial minorities and of the ten experts, all were white. That is from a newspaper whose website says 'This is London'. Well this is not London. Despite the fact that minorities have been here in large numbers and playing a significant role for well over 60 years, they still haven't found any voices to from those communities to speak, they haven't given anyone an opportunity to become an expert in the field of politics in London, of all places. They could have had an expert panel on business, on the arts, on culture and on sport and it would still have been all white, because that is the way the Evening Standard is. These things shouldn't happen in modern day Britain, in modern day London, in the world in general. Editors should bit see an all-white panel of experts and think 'Oh that's okay, that's fine, we have a couple of women on there, that's enough'. We need to be fully inclusive at all levels. It is not just something for us as minorities to get; it is something which all of society needs to understand. We see it in the social mobility argument which is very much focused on class. And the same things which keep out working class people are the things which keep out

minorities, the way the 'elite' let us say, who already have power maintain that power and maintain that sense of superiority, not just against minorities. It is not just about race, it is about true equality, meaning equality for all minorities and for everyone who is not part of the group who currently runs the country. In conclusion, it is important that when we look to the future we have to ask: Are we really including everyone? It is not enough to just tick boxes and say we have got our ethnic representation, it is about people at all levels always thinking about all parts of society. True equality is not just about race, it helps everyone.