

Multiculturalism, Assimilation and the Politics of Terrorism *

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What I've decided to do today is to examine the argument that has emerged in recent years about the relationship, if any, between multiculturalism and terrorism. The starting point for this is to make an observation about multiculturalism and the way we talk about it. The public discourse that surrounds multiculturalism is one that has actually changed quite radically in the last six years and not just the discourse around multiculturalism but the discourse around migration generally. Migration discourse, particularly anti-migrant discourse, tended to have an economic or cultural flavour. People who did 'funny' things, cooked 'funny' food, had too many people living in one house, dropped property prices in your area, took your jobs—that sort of rhetoric. That all changed on 7 July 2005 when the tube in London was bombed in what we, I think, call the London bombings but everyone else calls 7/7 after the date. This was a really radical moment for our political conversation and completely refreshed and renewed debates about multiculturalism.

It was in many ways, and this might strike you as a controversial statement, a more significant event than 9/11. September 11 obviously has obvious significance—three thousand people died, the biggest terrorist attack on US soil, possibly one of the biggest in human history in terms of the numbers of lives lost—but 9/11 was limited in its impact in two ways. I don't mean that it was insignificant in its impact, it was clearly hugely significant, but there were limitations to its impact. One is that I think the way it looked meant that it was a totally different terrorism conversation to one that we would have had previously. This was a terrorist attack that was cinematic. It looked surreal, it looked fictional and there are probably many people in the world who still think that it is fictional but it was not old-style terrorism in that it wasn't something that had grit, something that intersected with your daily lives. It was a highly symbolic act. It is actually probably the most meticulously designed terrorist attack for the media age. It attacks a symbol that is clearly visible and it's perfectly designed. You hit one tower, you wait 15 minutes for the cameras of the world to focus attention and then you hit the second tower and so you have probably the first time ever that a terrorist attack has been caught live. I don't think that that has ever happened. It's not the nature of terrorist attacks and that's gold for terrorists because that's publicity, that's what you want.

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I've read a really interesting analysis about 9/11 from some academics who were actually looking at terrorism in film, so a slightly different area. One of the points they made was that 9/11 for a good while killed off terrorist films as a genre because there was nothing to say after that. There was nothing to escalate. September 11 was so surreal and films really gain their currency on creating scenarios that are surreal, that are beyond our experience of reality, which is what gets us excited. They don't usually put life on TV unless they're perhaps making an adaptation of an Anton Chekhov novel or something. I haven't seen that happen yet. This is not the way that film proceeds.

The other respect in which 9/11 was not significant, or not as significant as the London bombings, was that it still fit the old paradigm of terrorism as something that comes from without, as a problem that you essentially import. People come from other countries, either as migrants or just as visitors in some capacity. They come from outside and then they attack. In that way it was a more comfortable thing to deal with than London because London completely changed the paradigm. Now you had people born and raised locally who grew up and undertook terrorist attacks and not domestic terrorist attacks. Terrorism from the home-grown population is actually not new. Especially in the United States, as it happens, and it's still happening in the United States with probably a regularity that might surprise you, it just doesn't attract as much reporting. This was odd because it seemed like an international terrorist attack from within but what it was really demonstrating was that in a globalised world and in a cosmopolitan world, the distinctions between international and domestic are really breaking down.

Some academics are fond of making up words and have started using words like 'intermestic'. I'll leave it to you to decide whether or not that's useful or means anything but it does attempt to capture that the boundary between what is domestic and what is international is blurred and the London bombings really captured that. But they introduced the home-grown terrorism idea. It was not an idea that we had been preoccupied with even though we had had it in Australia. There had been terrorist attacks committed by Australians but not for a long time and not of any huge significance in the way that 9/11 or the London bombings were. This changed the discourse and it set off a new conversation about multiculturalism. Suddenly multiculturalism, which actually wasn't being discussed a huge amount, moved from a conversation about the politics of culture and perhaps the politics of economics to a different conversation about the politics of security. Now it's not that migrants were coming to steal our jobs, they were coming to kill us, and if they weren't then their kids were. That's a very different tone of conversation all of a sudden.

Multiculturalism has found itself in the dock in a way that it hadn't in the past partly because there had been really quite a lull in Australian political conversation about multiculturalism in a way that was antagonistic to it. It had become almost orthodoxy. That became radically called into question after the London bombings. The argument into which multiculturalism was conscripted as a security discourse was an argument that multiculturalism has a causal link with terrorism, particularly home-grown terrorism, because what it does is create isolated sub-cultures that are hostile to the host culture and foment them. That is, by giving up on any demands that migrants or people with migrant backgrounds, which is a very problematic way of describing people in Australia especially, should assimilate and by putting forth a state policy that says that 'we all have the right to our own cultural attachments and we will celebrate that', what you do is you create a sociology of separateness. People who say 'fine, it doesn't mean anything to be Australian anymore so I won't be; what I will instead be is someone who is attached to my own culture', for want of a better phrase, and even with that becomes hostile to the majority and then leads to people blowing themselves up. Now I have to say that I think this argument has very little empirical evidence to demonstrate it. It's really a way of theorising about events based largely on pre-existing political dispositions. It was usually that people who had not liked multiculturalism for quite a while now had a different way of attacking it, but nonetheless the argument is there and it remains to be assessed. You may have picked up I'm not terribly sympathetic to it. I'll come to explain it in more detail.

This was the argument: cultural separatism, sub-cultures that become hostile to the host culture and, also, that this becomes a form of cultural surrender on the part of the majority culture. The majority culture has now essentially relativised itself out of existence by virtue of embracing multiculturalism which I think has been described maybe in one of the Australian newspapers as a cultural suicide pact. That was the kind of language that was being used. To assess this argument what we have to do is stop talking about multiculturalism for a moment and talk about terrorism and try to gain some understanding of the dynamics of terrorism. What is exactly going on in the world of terrorism? How is it evolving? What are the forces that play within it?

The starting point is to say 'look, terrorism is not new'. Depending on which book on the history of terrorism you read it's been around for at least 2000 years, probably longer. There are people who have called Samson the world's first suicide bomber. I am not entirely convinced that that's true. You'd have to conduct an inquiry into the motivations of him bringing down the temple. I am not sure that it was political in nature, although that comes down to the definition of politics. Anyway, I'm digressing. The point is that it is old and in many histories of terrorism the first terrorist group that will be mentioned are the Zealots of the first century, a Jewish group who were resisting Roman occupation. They were called the Sicarii and the

reason they were called the Sicarii, the Hebrew word or derived from the Hebrew word for ‘dagger’, was because that was their weapon of choice. They used to go around the market place and stab other Jews who they felt were complicit with the Roman occupation. The idea was to end the occupation this way.

Later on you had the Hashashin, a Shi’ite group from whom we get the word assassin. Hashashin actually means people who consume hashish. It’s a kind of derogatory title that was given to them and I don’t actually know whether it was true that they consumed a lot of hashish but, none the less, there you are. Another group that will be mentioned, a pre-modern group, is the Thuggee, possibly the longest surviving terrorist group in history, which survived over several centuries in India and from within the Hindu community from whom we get the word ‘thug’. I often say that terrorism has contributed significantly to the English language, if nothing else. The point here is that it is old.

Modern terrorism begins in the nineteenth century with the anarchist wave out of Russia that actually became an international wave. There are academic descriptions of the history of terrorism that divide it into four waves subsequently. The anarchist wave was the first one, then the post-colonial wave after World War I, then the new left wave around the sixties where a lot of groups tended to use Marxist-type rhetoric and a lot of the post-colonial groups that were still around started to adopt Marxist-type rhetoric around that time because terrorism has its own fashion trends as well.

Then what has been called the religious wave which really begins with the attack on the World Trade Centres in the 90s or the sarin gas attacks in Tokyo—the Aum Shinrikyo attacks—which a lot of people forget about but are very significant in signalling what people thought was a new kind of terrorism. What’s interesting in that, just as an aside, is that the fact that you have a religious wave identified speaks to the fact that terrorism, modern terrorism especially, has been overwhelmingly secular in nature and that’s typically who carried it out, even in places where it has now taken on a religious flavour such as in the Palestinian territories. It’s amazing to think that this even happened in the 90s. Hamas issued a statement defending the charge that Muslims, particularly religious Muslims, were not engaged in the resistance against Israel because it was the secular groups that were engaged in that resistance. It’s hard to imagine Hamas having to release such a document now, things have moved on. This is quite a recent evolution.

So that’s just a very brief history but as for the dynamics of the current terror threat that a nation like Australia faces, that’s an interesting question because here we run into probably the biggest debate amongst terrorism studies people and academics at the moment and it’s the Sageman v. Hoffman debate. Marc Sageman, one of the ‘rock

stars' of terrorism studies, has come up with this idea that terrorism has evolved to be a leaderless phenomenon. This is a new development in terrorism. Typically terrorist groups would be hierarchically structured, quite well organised and networked. You would understand who the leader was, who the second in command was and how that would feed down into a more or less conventional, basically corporate-type structure. Counter-terrorism was easy: you just sought the person who was highest up the chain that you could and you took them out in one way or another. The person that detonated the bomb was not actually that important from a counter-terrorism point of view—maybe from a criminal justice point of view—but as far as counter-terrorism is concerned that's not really the person you are after. The person you are after is high up the chain and if you can take out the CEO then you take out the group, or go some way towards it. So Sageman is saying essentially terrorism now has evolved where it is not conducted by groups that are networked in this way and have a clear leadership structure. It's now conducted by groups of guys, that's not my paraphrasing that's the term that's used—'group of guys' theory—this is what it has become. Part peer pressure, part anti-social behaviour and the sociology that is associated with that and the psychology that's associated with that but not people taking orders from a field commander, in many ways self-starting.

Opposed to that is another 'rock star' of terrorism studies, Bruce Hoffman, who has said essentially that if terrorism is leaderless then I can retire from my job. Of course it has a leadership in its structure and that's a very important thing to consider. The reality is that there are examples of both of these things in the world and I suppose which side of the debate you fall on depends a little bit on which part of the world you are interested in and what groups and what attacks you are interested in. There are still old-school terrorist groups that are active, or are at least pretending to be active, that are networked. What Sageman is focusing mainly on is this emerging thing of 'al-Qaedaism'.

What's implicit in this, and this is important to understand, is that if you take that view then al-Qaeda becomes pretty irrelevant except perhaps as a symbolic entity, that al-Qaeda becomes meaningless—not meaningless but nowhere near as important as perhaps we think. If you could kill, or demonstrate that Osama bin Ladin had been killed, it would change nothing. In fact it might make the problem worse because you've now created someone who is even more symbolically potent than he was previously. Interesting question actually, if you are advising President Obama and you know that Osama bin Ladin is dead or has been killed do you tell him to release that? Would you advise him to do that? What would the consequences of that be? Well, that's a difficult question but your answer to that question probably indicates to some extent whether you're on the Sageman side of the argument or Hoffman side of the

argument and what I'm doing is appallingly simplistic but for this forum it's the only way I can get through it. That is very important to the central debate.

What I want to say about it is that the threat that is symbolised by al-Qaeda, but is probably more accurately described in Jason Burke's terms as 'al-Qaedaism', focusing on that I tend to be much more on Marc Sageman's side than on Bruce Hoffman's side of the analysis. What I would say in the case of Australia is it seems overwhelmingly true that the terror threat that's faced here is a leaderless phenomenon. So even if you believe that Hoffman is right generally by taking a global view I don't believe that you can say that with any real confidence about Australia and the threats that the Australian authorities are having to face. My reasoning for that is that you have people who have been arrested and charged and some acquitted and some convicted and in every case that's involved groups. There's the odd case of people who have made contact with al-Qaeda—al-Qaeda central I mean—and often those people have left and have not carried out any attacks and are probably not occupying the thoughts of security agencies in the way the other groups are. The groups that have plots that they want to carry out—or even if they haven't had plots, have expressed desires to carry something out—overwhelmingly we are seeing that they are disconnected from well established terrorist groups, not really part of them, they don't really have contact with them.

Even in cases where people have supposed that there were contacts—I am thinking here not in Australia but of the Times Square bombing plot that obviously failed that Faisal Shahzad was trying to carry out—there was an early suggestion that this was the work of the Pakistani Taliban and then there was a suggestion that he had been to Pakistan and trained with them so that he was an agent of the Pakistani Taliban. In the end, and he said as much in court more or less after we had figured it out anyway, he wasn't an agent of anybody. Yes, he had been there and he had got some training—clearly not very good training—but he was not acting for them. This was a self-starting thing.

Shahzad is unusual in the world of terrorism in that he's a lone wolf, which is odd. Terrorism is usually a group activity and there are important psychological reasons for that because you need the process of escalation in a group to carry out those sorts of attacks. He is representative of this leaderless phenomenon in that this is self-starting, perhaps plugging in at times to an infrastructure that is out there, but not necessarily, and not following orders. There is nobody that you could take out to have prevented him from acting that way and in Australia we see a similar phenomenon. Even where there was some suggestion that links were being created between people in Australia and al-Shabab in Somalia and it turned out those links were basically non-existent and if they were existent at all, were meaningless really. The Shabab themselves said 'we

don't know who these people are' which is, incidentally, not something that terrorist groups would say for no reason. Usually they'll claim everything that they can. It's part of the point of propaganda by deed. That's what the original anarchists called terrorism.

This is one of the characteristics of the contemporary terrorist threat: that it is decentralised radically, it has no particular leader, it does not take orders from anyone in particular. Nobody is in control of it, there is no one that can give the order for it to stop. It is a centrally self-starting activity that is deeply embedded, I would say irrevocably embedded, in the structures of globalisation. This sort of terrorism could not have existed in a pre-globalised age. Here something like al-Qaeda becomes important, more for the videos it releases online than for attacks it tries to carry out. If you trace attacks that al-Qaeda has committed you find that there are actually relatively few, which is why in media reports they'll often talk about 'al-Qaeda linked' or 'al-Qaeda inspired'—because it's really the only way to describe it. Even those attacks that are often described as al-Qaeda linked are not really. Some of them are, but really they are linked by global media—global communications.

One of bin Ladin's most important roles is as a film-maker, as a motivational speaker. He sends out messages into the world and he doesn't have any control over what people are going to do with them but there is a hope that it will inspire some level of action, an action that he approves of. He is not the head of a terrorist organisation that is vast and global and has the capacity to strike anywhere. That's not really the way it's working. Nobody is in control of that. It's not to say that we're not dealing with something that is vast and global and could potentially strike anywhere. It's just that no one is in charge of it. That's not a comforting thought but that is, none the less, the way I read the situation.

Another important feature of this is that unlike terrorism throughout history, particularly through modern history, this is a form of terrorism that is not necessarily anchored in the nation state. Traditionally, the way a terrorist group would act is they would act for a patch of land either to try to change the government that presides over it or to secede from a government that presides over it. So separatist terrorism or revolutionary terrorism and the conduct of the terrorist group was overwhelmingly concentrated in the nation state and confined to that logic. One of the key features of al-Qaedaism is that it is global. I say global—not international—because international, although that's a very common word to describe, is not a word that I favour because international still has imbedded within it Westphalian logic. It's still about the logic of the nation-state. It still talks about an entity that exists in or between states. Al-Qaedaism doesn't do that. It seeks to bypass the nation-state as an organising principle for politics. It will attack the nation-state because it's there to be

attacked and it's an important part of the political reality but it's not necessarily the analytical mode of global terrorism. That's why I think it's global.

What that means is that in order to come to terms with this we need to understand the narrative that informs it, that drives it. Narrative isn't everything but in the case of global terrorism it's the narrative that makes it global. It's the narrative that helps it exist as a decentralised phenomenon. Narratives are important in traditional terrorist groups as well. You need to inspire whatever group of people you've got but in a traditional terrorist group hierarchy and command are just as important. In this sort of terrorist group that's not necessarily the case because there's no hierarchy, no clear hierarchy anyway. It's often described as a flat or horizontally structured phenomenon. Narrative is crucial. The question to ask is what is the narrative that has led to this sort of evolution where terrorism itself has globalised? That's a long conversation but in short it stems from the failure of domestic terrorism from nation-based terrorism throughout the Muslim world. It had been tried, don't forget this, and the early religious terrorist groups—early Islamic terrorist groups—were also nationally focused.

In groups like the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt or Islamic Jihad the focus was to Islamise the Egyptian State. They assassinated a president. They murdered tourists. Why would you murder tourists in Egypt? How else are you going to cripple the economy in the hope of triggering a revolution? As it happens it didn't work out so well. They assassinated a president but not much changed. They killed a whole lot of tourists in the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor in 1997—a lot European tourists. It did hurt the economy and Egyptians largely blamed the terrorists, not the government. They didn't like the government, as we have recently discovered, but they didn't blame the government for that. Nation-based terrorism, or what we might call traditional forms of terrorism or Westphalian terrorism, failed.

At the same time you have a group of people who were called, and called themselves, the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, fighting the Soviets or contributing to the fighting of the Soviets. I think that a lot of Afghans don't think that they did a lot, but nonetheless they were there, with US support as part of their proxy war against a Cold War enemy and here are the beginnings of the globalisation of this terrorist movement. Among them are people like bin Laden and suddenly you have people who have become internationally connected but you have global horizons here. They weren't really fighting for Afghanistan; they were fighting for this global Muslim community. This was the beginning of a very important idea. The global community that it would act on behalf of.

You develop this narrative which is very clear when you actually read the statements of bin Laden, for example, which very few people do. I think that's part of the problem actually, that it's not good reading. In fact it's thoroughly boring reading. What we know about bin Laden tends to be what others say about him. What we know about his motivations and what we know about why he says he's doing it often doesn't come from him. When you read through it, apart from getting through the boredom of it, it actually becomes pretty mundane and pretty clear. This rhetoric develops about the near enemy and the far enemy, the near enemy being the dictatorships in the Muslim heartlands, the Middle East. Remember bin Laden began as a Saudi dissident. His aim was to get rid of the Saudi royal family. Eventually he and others who had been through similar experience developed this narrative that says 'the reason you can murder or assassinate a president and nothing changes is because this is not a national phenomenon that you are dealing with, this is a global phenomenon. The dictators that you hate and want to get rid of are supported by Washington. If you want to get rid of them therefore you have to strike Washington'.

The attempt is really to change the near enemy but the argument's now globalised, the struggle is now global because the only way you can change the near enemy is to attack the far enemy. There is other discourse, other rhetoric about how the nation state itself is something that keeps Muslims, this global community of Muslims, which doesn't really exist and never really has, but is keeping this community weak and oppressed and divided. Why is it that you have Muslims sitting on untold riches of oil in the Middle East? Then you have other Muslims starving in Africa. Why is that? It's because of this nation-state model that keeps them divided. It makes them compete against one another. Where did that nation-state model come from? It came from colonisation. So here is the narrative. It's historical, it's global, it explains a lot and it provides a template for action that is global which is important where things that are national have failed and hence it becomes the next wave, the next evolutionary step in contemporary terrorism. But it needs a global narrative; it needs something that really is global.

How do you explain how it appeals, for instance, to Muslims living in the west? Here it gets interesting. The argument essentially becomes: the reason that the far enemy is conspiring against the Muslims to keep them divided is because there exists a vast global conspiracy against Muslims everywhere. They just don't like Muslims. They want to wipe them out essentially, if they can, or at least dominate them. Domination took the form of colonisation but you will find, young Muslim audience member who lives in a western nation, that they are no less contemptuous of you. You will find that ultimately the alienation and oppression and sense of humiliation that you feel in your society exists because that's the way the world works and what you experience is different really only in degree not in essence from the experience of the Muslim in the

Palestinian territories or Chechnya or Kashmir or Southern Philippines or Southern Thailand or previously in the Balkans. It's a really interesting narrative because what it's doing is creating, not necessarily an equivalence, but a clear theoretical continuity between the localised experience of someone living in a western nation, never been to the Muslim world necessarily, doesn't have a historical connection—they might be Pakistani origin, but they care about Iraq—certainly not a national or Westphalian connection but they have a globalised connection that's based on a shared sense of identity and that connects their local experience to global experiences that they might be upset about. It's one thing to observe what's happening in Chechnya, for instance, and be upset about it. It's something else entirely and something else much more powerful to connect that to your experience and say that they come from the same place.

An example that illustrates that is the murder of Theo van Gogh, the film-maker, in the Netherlands—so often described as a murder but really it was a terrorist attack. The reason it's a terrorist attack was that it had clear political motivations. Mohammed Bouyeri, who was the man who carried out the attack—North African decent, living in the Netherlands—didn't actually want to kill Theo van Gogh. His primary target was to find a Dutch politician. That proved too difficult so he targeted Theo van Gogh instead more as a substitute. He was really upset at the way that Dutch politics had evolved. As far as he was concerned Dutch politics had taken a really strongly anti-Muslim flavour. Lots of immigrants had been deported suddenly, people who had been living in the Netherlands for five years, somewhere in the order of 20 000 people, were suddenly deported. The anti-Muslim rhetoric in the Netherlands was growing steadily. So he has this experience of alienation 'this is a society that doesn't want me' and then he goes online. He starts running into this sort of narrative explaining his frustration, his anger, in global terms—'It's not just about me and my life that I don't like, it's about this global phenomenon now'—and giving him a plan for action. And so this connection between his real world experience and these ideas he confronts in the virtual world have an impact on his identity in the way that he chooses to fall and ultimately the way he chooses to express it through violence. Instead of being some kid who is upset about living in the Netherlands or about Dutch society or something like that, he's now a soldier in a global war. That sounds much more grandiose. That's a much more significant sense of purpose and hence the appeal.

Identity is really crucial because what's implicit in the global terrorism narrative is that you essentially choose which one identity you want to have. You can be Muslim or you can be Dutch, British, Australian or American or whatever it is, but you can't be both. And the reason you can't be both is because they will never have you and because that other identity, that national identity that they are urging you to take on is

ultimately, particularly in Europe, a product of colonisation and a way of trying to 'beat' the Islam out of you. So ultimately that's what it is, in this narrative. That means, it seems to me, that the most potent message that could be internalised that would resist that narrative or make it less effective through a series of social experiences and public rhetoric, is one that emphasises the possibility, in fact celebrates the possibility, of what I call dual authenticity. That is not one that presents you with a false choice (you may not think it's false), not one that presents you with a choice between one and the other but one that accepts the possibility of realising both in an authentic way. This is a tricky thing to realise. It's a tricky message to send but I think that the imperative for it is reasonably clear.

The alternative, which says 'you choose one or the other', is essentially an assimilationist kind of politics. What it does is present you with that choice just from the other end. So whereas the global terrorist narrative says 'you have this identity choice to make, you can't do both, you have this identity choice and you must choose, it is incumbent on you to choose your identity as a Muslim as part of the effort that is required of you to liberate the Muslim world from the yoke of oppression'. And it's important to remember that this is a liberation discourse. That's one choice that's being urged upon you. If the other choice is 'no, you must choose your national identity essentially at the expense of any other identities or prioritise it above', not that they can be synthesised or that they can co-exist but that this is about priority, one must crowd out the other to some extent. If that's the message then the risk you run is that not everyone will choose your side. Some will, no doubt about that, but not everyone will.

Here's the way that identity works: identity has a very intimate relationship with vulnerability. You all have multiple identities. I am not diagnosing you with some kind of psychiatric disorder, it's a fact of your life, you can't help it. You have national identities of varying strengths. Some of you may not identify strongly with your nation, others might, but it's part of who you are. You have identities as parents, as children of parents, as people who work in particular sectors, as people who barrack for certain football teams, as people who have had certain educational experiences, as people who live in a particular suburb, as people who have certain ethnicities. These are all aspects of your identity. What is it that makes you choose one aspect to express over another? It's not a conscious choice necessarily, one just seems more important to you than another at a particular point in time. Well there are many things that could do that but what I want to submit before you is that one of the things that is crucial is your sense of vulnerability about a particular aspect of your identity. If some aspect of your identity suddenly becomes a site for attack or threat—physical or emotional or otherwise—it starts to matter and you cling to it. Or you reject it.

The best way I can think to illustrate this is a woman that I know who does cross-cultural training for corporations, which the last time I heard her talk about it I think means explaining to corporations how not to offend potential clients in Asia. She's an interesting case. She's Scottish and she's Catholic. She grew up in Scotland, she knew she was Catholic. She was made to feel that. She then moved from Scotland to the north of England. There people didn't mind as much that she was Catholic but she was very Scottish. She then moved from north of England to one of the elite universities—and there no one really cared that she was Catholic and no one really cared that she was Scottish but they found it rather intriguing that she was working class. And through each stage of this journey, different aspects of who she was mattered to her differently. Proud to be Scottish, proud to be Catholic, proud to be working class.

To this day my wife will not stop attacking me for having completed my schooling, just two years, at a private school. Because she's at university, she's an academic herself from a state school. It really matters. Why? Because there aren't that many state school kids there. Everyone was from a private school. This is something that marks her out as different. If you are in a situation where some aspect of yourself is highlighted and makes you vulnerable then you start to do something. You will either emphasise it, often in quite an assertive, sometimes even an aggressive way—perhaps get cocky about it—or you completely deny it. Anyone who knows a migrant community sees this happen. Jamal becomes Jim. Malek becomes Mike. All these things happen because there is a vulnerability there. Some just shun it and some embrace it. You mark me out as different, alright I'm different and I'm going to explain why my difference makes me better than you. You have a choice; those two responses will happen so if you give people that choice you'll get both.

The problem when you start thinking about this in the context of terrorism is that you don't need many. The problem with assimilation as politics is that it doesn't understand the impact it has on identity formation and it doesn't understand that often the result of it is the very opposite of the thing that it claims to be trying to achieve. You may not get multiculturalism through assimilation. What you will get is parallel mono-culturalism: people just forming enclaves because it's easier to follow the path of least resistance. If I'm going to come into a country and essentially be told that I have to give up all these other aspects of myself—as though any of us in Australia would actually do that if we left—then everywhere I go it's going to be a problem. Wherever I go politicians are going to talk about it. Fine, I'll live in a neighbourhood with a whole lot of people who are just as weird as me. We'll talk our own funny language, cook our funny foods and we'll be perfectly happy.

One of the things that staggered me most was that in 2005, I think it was, when there were riots in France, people of North African descent who are still called immigrants despite the fact that they're third generation, sometimes more. When that happened I read a rash of commentary about the failures of multiculturalism. As though the French had ever been multiculturalists. I am not saying that as a derogatory statement. It's an avowedly assimilationist nation. But none of that assimilation had caused a great deal of French pride and you ask these people why? Because that's the way that identity formation works. I have no doubt that there are plenty of people of North African descent in France who are proudly French and say 'I am not North African, I am French'. I don't know that you get to make the choice. And so this is where multiculturalism comes into its own as part of the conversation. Not as something that foments and causes terrorism in a way that's empirically difficult to identify, explain and demonstrate. And not necessarily as the solution to all problems of terrorism but as something that might at least ameliorate a very important aspect of the radicalisation process of this particular form of terrorism, this highly decentralised—we might even call it postmodern—form of terrorism that currently occupies Australia's thoughts. Could be.

Despite the fact that so many of the grievances that occupy the minds of those promulgating the global terrorist narrative emanate one way or another from the United States, the United States has per capita far less of a problem with home-grown radicalisation than Europe does. It's interesting to think about. Does the United States have a policy of multiculturalism? Not really. It has a policy that goes beyond multiculturalism. The State does not get involved in determining culture. If it does, people in the south, people in the west, people in the northwest and the Pacific west and in New England, they are all going to go to war. Which culture is going to win? It's an interesting thing to think about and Australia, I think, is somewhere in between. We don't have the baggage of the old world that Europe has and so in these questions of identity, we have a lot more flexibility than Europe has and therefore we are less locked into the radicalisation cycle that I think Europe suffers from.



Question — How can we discuss multiculturalism and focus it only on multiculturalism and how positive it is rather than disdaining it and tainting it with the word terrorism? Could you give us some positive way forward for multiculturalism?

Waleed Aly — I think the short answer to your question is that you can't quarantine the conversation that way. There is no way I can think of or would necessarily even desire that says we'll only be able to talk about it in these celebratory terms. While I

am generally sympathetic to your position because I do like multiculturalism, although for me it depends a bit on how you define it. It remains, like any government policy or fact of life, open to critique. I've read lots of interesting critiques of multiculturalism—critiques such as they don't like multiculturalism because it doesn't pay sufficient respect to cultural minorities because it gives them only a negative form of recognition; a kind of tolerance rather than a kind of celebration and acceptance. There is a critique of multiculturalism. It is a different one from the critique we often hear but it is a critique none the less.

So my point is that these things can be critiqued and it is fair enough to do that. I think what needs to happen, though, especially to those who are sympathetic towards multiculturalism (and I would not assume that everyone in the room is or even most are) but what I think needs to happen is that the arguments about it need to proceed on the basis of some kind of understanding of human nature, and that is where the anti-multiculturalist arguments fail resoundingly in my view. Because I think what they do is that they demand conduct and attitudes of other people that they would never be up for themselves. I'm quite happy to have that argument and I think we should be happy to have it as a society if need be. The problem I have is not with the debate; the problem is that the debate often gets to proceed without any sense.

Question — I would like you to comment on the possible implications of your view of terrorism (that it is essentially leaderless) for our refugee policies. We keep refugees who come by boat in detention for two purposes. First of all to determine whether they are in genuine fear of persecution, and that's usually determined fairly quickly as I understand it. Then we keep them for prolonged periods for security assessments which seem to be very difficult to undertake. During that period of detention there seems to be a growth of radicalisation because people become so frustrated at being kept in detention for such prolonged periods. In light of your comments about terrorism do you think our policy is misguided and counter-productive?

Waleed Aly — I think that the policy is misguided anyway. I think that the level of frustration that asylum seekers are experiencing is misunderstood because what we often don't understand is not just the waiting here, they have often got on boats because they have been waiting in Indonesia, having been processed by the UNHCR for years and years and they are not resettled. The counter-terrorism argument I don't think is actually about the refugees themselves. What is implicit in the leaderless phenomenon of terrorism is that you move from a world that was quite easily contained by the application of hard power to a world where suddenly everything has symbolism and that symbolism really matters because you are into a whole murky territory of identity formation and psychology and socialisation and experience and

social psychology. Everything is symbolic in that world. So from a counter-terrorism point of view I am not so worried about refugees experiencing a hard time. They may become radicalised in the detention centre because they want to get out but my experience with refugees (and I don't claim to have vast experience) is that once they are out they are just happy to be out and they just want to get their heads down and get on with life. It is what the imagery of the policy is like to those watching. Now what is that imagery? That's really complicated because in my experience in migrant communities some of the most staunch anti-asylum seeker rhetoric comes from migrants. So it is not easy to say that this will alienate a whole lot of people. It is a question of whether or not they look at the asylum seeker and identify that that in some way represents them. Now for Muslims, there is every risk of that. 'Why are we bashing up on these asylum-seekers? Well, because they are Muslims. It fits with everything else'. You can see how the narrative gets constructed.

A more serious example I think than the asylum seeker one was the Mohamed Haneef case. How many people of south-Asian extraction or not even of south-Asian extraction would have lent a SIM card to a cousin when they were overseas together? Probably thousands, if not millions in Australia. How many would look at someone like Mohamed Haneef, about whom it transpired there was nothing, and say 'that could have been me'. Hard to put a number on that. How does that feed into the narrative that they are out to get you and there is nothing that you can say or do. Well for some people it will feed in very strongly. For others not—it will actually depend on their state of mind and their social experience to that point. But that is the kind of symbolism that bothers me a bit more from a counter-terrorism point of view.

Question — My question, and correct me if I am wrong, is that you said that it is hard to keep two identities. That means it is hard to be an American Muslim, it is hard to be a European Muslim these days. Do you think that it is equally hard to be an Australian Muslim?

Waleed Aly — No I don't think it is hard at all. I don't think it is hard to maintain those two identities. What is hard is to change the tide of the political conversation to one that recognises implicitly and explicitly that dual authenticity is possible and that provides the social conditions for it. I think that we tend to fall into the trap in our public discourse that says 'well, you can sort of be both but you have got to be one first'. I think that it is actually a ridiculous question, particularly when you talk about religion because religion and nationality actually exist on totally different realms. Do we have any retirees in the room? I don't ask you if you are a retiree or an Australian first. To ask that question sounds absurd, because you are perfectly capable of being both. The reason that question gets asked about Muslims is because there is an assumption that their intention and that at one level or another they kind of have to be

and so you have to prioritise one over the other. That is a very difficult logic in our conversation to change. Particularly in a conversation that is dominated by national politicians whose frame of reference for everything is going to be Westphalian. It is going to be the nation-state. So that's difficult.

Your question can you be an Australian and a Muslim at the same time is not actually a question for most Australian Muslims. At least it wasn't until it became a big social question and they said 'well maybe I can't be'. People who are doing well, like small business owners running successful businesses, either born here or who came here very young, are telling me 'I was integrated, now I'm dis-integrating'. That is something to think about, I think.