*Kenan Malik*

# Living in diversity

## On the fear of the Other and anxieties about the Self

The 'community of communities' approach is responsible for the emergence of a tribal sense of identity among third-generation Muslims in Europe, argues Kenan Malik. The reaction to diversity must be political dialogue rather than indifference disguised as respect.

'Can Europe be the same with different people in it?' This is a question that American writer Christopher Caldwell posed this in his book, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe (2009)*. It is a question that has been asked with increasing urgency in recent years as the question of immigration, and in particular of Islamic immigration, has taken centre stage.

At the heart of this question lies the dilemma of how western societies should respond to the influx of peoples with different traditions, backgrounds and beliefs. What should be the boundaries of tolerance in such societies? Should immigrants be made to assimilate to western customs and norms or is integration a two-way street? Such questions have bedeviled politicians and policy-makers for the past half-century. They have also tied liberals in knots.

The conundrums about diversity have been exacerbated by the two issues that now dominate contemporary European political discourse – the migration crisis and the problem of terrorism. How we discuss these issues, and how we relate the one to the other, will shape the character of European societies over the next period.

The migration crisis is often seen as an issue of numbers. More than a million irregular migrants arrived on Europe's shores in 2015. The images of thousands of migrants desperately crossing the Aegean, or trudging their way through the Balkans, or arriving at railway stations in Hungary, Austria and Germany filled our TV screens for much of the past year. They give a sense of a continent under siege, of the whole world seemingly wanting to come to Europe.

The numbers of migrants coming to Europe are indeed large. But it is worth putting these numbers in context. One million migrants constitute less than 0.2 per cent of the European Union's population. Turkey, the country to which migrants are being deported under the deal signed with the EU, has a population that is one seventh of that of the EU, but is already host to some three million Syrian refugees. There are already 1.3 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon – 20 per cent of the population. That is the equivalent of Europe playing host to 100 million refugees. Pakistan and Iran each have over one million refugees within their borders.

Some of the poorest countries in the world, in other words, already bear the greatest burden when it comes to helping refugees. If these countries were to adopt Europe's attitude, there really would be a crisis.

Debates about immigration are, however, rarely about numbers as such. They are much more about who the migrants are, and about underlying anxieties of nation, community, identity and values. 'We should not forget', claimed Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, as Hungary put up new border fences, and introduced draconian new anti-immigration laws, 'that the people who are coming here grew up in a different religion and represent a completely different culture. Most are not Christian, but Muslim'. 'Is it not worrying', he asked, 'that Europe's Christian culture is already barely able to maintain its own set of Christian values?'

Many thinkers, Christian and non-Christian, religious and non-religious, echo this fear of Muslim immigration undermining the cultural and moral foundation of western civilization. The late Oriana Fallaci, the Italian writer who perhaps more than most promoted the notion of Eurabia – the belief that Europe is being Islamicized – described herself as a 'Christian atheist', insisting that only Christianity provided Europe with a cultural and intellectual bulwark against Islam. The British historian Niall Ferguson calls himself 'an incurable atheist' and yet is alarmed by the decline of

Christianity which undermines 'any religious resistance' to radical Islam. Melanie Phillips, a non-believing Jew, argues in her book *The World Turned Upside Down* (2009) that 'Christianity is under direct and unremitting cultural assault from those who want to destroy the bedrock values of Western civilization'.

To look upon migration in this fashion is, I want to suggest, a misunderstanding of both Europe's past and Europe's present. To understand why, I want first to explore two fundamental questions, the answers to which must frame any discussion on inclusion and morality. What do we mean by a diverse society? And why should we value it, or indeed, fear it?

When we think about diversity today in Europe, the picture we see is that of societies that in the past were homogenous, but have now become plural because of immigration. But in what way were European societies homogenous in the past? And in what ways are they diverse today?

Certainly, if you had asked a Frenchman or an Englishman or a Spaniard in the nineteenth or the fifteenth or the twelfth centuries, they would not have described their societies as homogenous. And were they to be transported through time to contemporary Europe, it is likely that they would see it as far less diverse than we do.

Our view of the Europe of the past is distorted by historical amnesia; and our view of the Europe of the present is distorted by a highly restricted notion of diversity. When we talk of European societies as historically homogenous, what we mean is that they used to be ethnically, or perhaps culturally, homogenous. But the world is diverse in many ways. Societies are cut through by differences, not only of ethnicity, but also of class, gender, faith, politics and much else.

Many of the fears we have of the consequences of modern diversity are in fact echoes of fears that were central to what we now see as homogenous Europe. Consider, for instance, the debate about the clash between Islam and the West, and fear of Islamic values as incompatible with those of the West. It may be hard to imagine now but Catholics were until relatively recently seen by many much as Muslims are now.

The English philosopher John Locke is generally seen as providing the

philosophical foundations of liberalism. His *Letter Concerning Toleration* is a key text in the development of modern liberal ideas about freedom of expression and worship. But he refused to extend such tolerance to Catholics because they posed a threat to English identity and security. Until the nineteenth century Catholics in Britain were by law excluded from most public offices, and denied the vote; they were barred from universities, from many professions, and from serving in the armed forces. Protestants were banned from converting to Catholicism, and Catholics banned from marrying Protestants.

Such vicious anti-Catholicism existed well into the twentieth century, and not just in Europe. In America, the historian Leo Lucassen observes, Catholicism was perceived as 'representing an entirely different culture and worldview, and it was feared because of the faith's global and expansive aspirations'. 'It is the political character of the Roman Church', wrote the essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'that makes it incompatible with our institutions & unwelcome here.'

Today the idea of the Judeo-Christian tradition as the foundation of western civilization is taken as received wisdom. But the concept of a 'Judeo Christian tradition' is an invention of the 1930s, arising out of the attempt to create a broad front to challenge the menace of anti-Semitism. Its invention is testament to the fact that, in the eyes of many people, Jews constituted a mortal threat to European identity, values and ways of being, so much so that they became victims of the world's greatest genocide. The very existence of Castrum Peregrini is testament to that view of Jews as a civilizational menace.

From the creation of the first Ghetto in Venice 500 years ago, to Martin Luther's fulminations against Jewry, to the Dreyfus affair in France, to Britain's first immigration law, the 1905 Aliens Act, which was designed principally to stem the flow into the country of eastern European Jews, a central strand in European historical consciousness was the portrayal of Jews as the elemental 'Other'.

Europe was rent not just by religious and cultural but by political conflict, too. From the English civil war to the Spanish civil war, from the German Peasants' rebellion to the Paris commune, European nations were deeply divided. Conflicts between communists and conservatives, liberals and socialists, monarchists and liberals became the hallmark of European

societies.

Of course we don't think of these conflicts as expressions of a diverse society. Why not? Only because we have a restricted view of what diversity entails.

But even within that restricted notion of diversity, our historical picture of European societies is mistaken. We look back upon European societies and imagine that they were racially and ethnically homogenous. But that is not how Europeans of the time looked upon their societies. In the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the working class and the rural poor were seen by many as racially distinct.

A vignette of working-class life in Bethnal Green, a working class area of east London, that appeared in an 1864 edition of *The Saturday Review*, a well-read liberal magazine of the era, was typical of Victorian middle-class attitudes. 'The Bethnal Green poor', the article explained, constituted 'a race of whom we know nothing, whose lives are of quite different complexion from ours, persons with whom we have no point of contact'. 'Distinctions and separations, like those of English classes', the article concluded, 'which always endure, which last from the cradle to the grave […] offer a very fair parallel to the separation of the slaves from the whites.'

There were similar attitudes in France. In a speech in 1857, the Christian socialist Phillipe Buchez wondered how it could happen that 'within a population such as ours, races may form – not merely one, but several races – so miserable, inferior and bastardized that they may be classed as below the most inferior savage races, for their inferiority is sometimes beyond cure'. The 'races' that caused Buchez such anxiety were not immigrants from Africa or Asia but the rural poor in France.

The concept of a homogenous Europe made diverse by modern immigration crumbles when we shake off our historical amnesia. We only imagine our societies as particularly diverse because we rewrite the past, and because a very peculiar definition of what constitutes diversity allows us to ignore the diversity – and the fears and the conflicts – that then existed. European societies have always had, or were perceived to have had, 'different peoples' within their borders.

And this brings us to the second question: why should we value diversity, or

indeed, fear it? I will return later to the question of why we may wish to value diversity. But I want to begin with the question of why many fear it. Consider two contemporary French thinkers from opposite ends of the political spectrum, who both consider Islam to represent a threat, but for very different reasons: the liberal philosopher Bernard-Henry Lévy and the conservative thinker Pierre Manent.

In 2010, during the debate about whether the burqa should be banned, Lévy came out 'in favor of a law that clearly and plainly declares that wearing a burqa in the public area is anti-republican'. But, he insisted 'This is not about the burqa. It's about Voltaire. What is at stake is the Enlightenment of yesterday and today, and the heritage of both, no less sacred than that of the three monotheisms.'

Where, for Lévy, Islam represents a threat to Enlightenment liberalism, for Manent it is the corrosive impact of Enlightenment liberalism that has allowed Islam to be a threat. The French have no choice but to surrender to Islam, Manent argues, because they have become decadent and 'tired of freedom'. By emphasizing rights rather than duties, our desiccated democracies have dissolved social bonds leaving nothing but a 'dust' of isolated egos. 'The most striking fact about the present moment', Manent writes, 'is the political and spiritual enfeeblement of the nation. […] If Islam is extending and consolidating its influence […] in a region where all social forms are vulnerable to corrosive critique in the name of individual rights, then there can scarcely be any future for Europe other than Islamization by default'.

Many liberals have echoed Levy's warnings, many conservatives Manent's fears. Both view Islam as a threat to European values, but disagree about what values are being threatened. For liberals, conservative Islamic doctrines run counter to the values of the Enlightenment. For conservatives, it is precisely the corrosive impact of liberal Enlightenment values that have allowed Islam to triumph.

The fear of diversity, in other words, is itself felt from a diverse range of standpoints. And fear of the Other is rooted primarily in anxieties about the Self. The Other becomes a problem – indeed the Other needs only to be conjured up – when there is social apprehension about who we are or what we stand for.

The claim that Islam poses a fundamental threat to western values draws on the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, popularized in the 1990s by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington. The conflicts that have convulsed Europe over the past centuries, Huntington wrote in a famous 1993 essay, from the wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics to the Cold War, were all 'conflicts within Western civilization'. The 'battle lines of the future', on the other hand, would be *between* civilizations. And the most deeply set of these would be between the Christian West and the Islamic East, a 'far more fundamental' struggle than any war unleashed by 'differences among political ideologies and political regimes'.

Civilizations, however, are not self-enclosed entities. They are 'civilizations' precisely because they are porous, fluid, open to wider influences. Because they are open to diversity.

There are no historically transcendent civilizational values. There is a view of European civilization as developing along a linear line from ancient Greece through the crucible of Christianity to the Enlightenment and modernity. Yet, what many today many describe as 'European' values would have left most of the major figures in that European tradition bewildered – Aquinas and Dante, for instance, and even more so Augustine and Plato. On the other hand, Aquinas and Dante certainly would have understood the values of many of their Islamic contemporaries, such as the great philosophers Ibn Sina or Ibn Rushd, values that many would now consider as existential threats to the very being of Europe.

There is, in other words, no single set of European values that transcends history in opposition to Islamic values. Nor is there a single Islamic tradition that transcends history. Norms and practices have inevitably varied over time and space. They inevitably mutated in a faith that has lasted for almost 1500 years. They inevitably diverged in an empire that once stretched from the Bay of Bengal to the Bay of Biscay, and do so even more in a community that is now spread out across the globe from Indonesia (which has the largest Muslim population in the world) to America, from Scotland to South Africa.

Consider a recent poll of British Muslim attitudes that generated a national debate. The poll was conducted for a TV documentary fronted by Trevor Phillips, former head of Britain's Equalities and Human Rights Commission, and of its predecessor, the Commission for Racial Equality.

The poll revealed a deep well of social conservatism within British Muslim communities. Just 18 per cent of Muslims thought that homosexuality should be legal (compared to 73 per cent of the general population), four in ten thought wives should always obey her husband. A third wanted girls to be educated separately from boys. Almost nine out ten thought that the law should not permit mockery of the Prophet. [1]

Trevor Phillips, who as head of the EHRC and the CRE played an important role in shaping integration policies, wrote of 'a chasm opening between Muslims and non-Muslims' and 'the unacknowledged creation of a nation within the nation, with its own geography, its own values and its own very separate future.' Europe's Muslims, he suggested, were different from previous waves of migrants because they had refused to 'abandon their ancestral ways'. 'The integration of Muslims', he concluded, 'will probably be the hardest task we've ever faced'.

Seen by itself, the poll might indeed lead one to such a conclusion. But any poll provides at best a snapshot of the views of people in one place, at one time. People, and communities do not, however, exist as a snapshot.

Had you taken this poll 30 years ago, when I was growing up, you would have found very different results. For the contemporary social conservatism of British Muslims has not always been present. The first generation of Muslims to Britain were religious, but wore their faith lightly. Many men drank alcohol. Few women wore a hijab, let alone a burqa or niqab. Most visited the mosque only occasionally, when the 'Friday feeling' took them. Islam was not, in their eyes, an all-encompassing philosophy. Their faith expressed for them a relationship with God, not a sacrosanct public identity.

The second generation of Britons with a Muslim background – my generation – was primarily secular. Religious organizations were barely visible. The organizations that bound together Asian communities (and we thought of ourselves as 'Asian' or 'black', not 'Muslim') were primarily secular, often political.

It is only with the generation that has come of age since the late 1980s that the question of cultural differences has come to be seen as important. A generation that, ironically, is far more integrated and 'westernised' than the first generation, is also the generation that is most insistent on maintaining its 'difference'. Much the same process can be sketched out in France, in

Germany, in the Netherlands. It is a paradox that questions the conventional view of the relationship between diversity and integration. Yet it is one that is rarely discussed.

One reason for this is that we rarely take a step back to give ourselves a broader perspective on social problems. What one might call the 'snapshot' view of communities and cultures has become central to much of the discussion about diversity and integration. So, Trevor Phillips claimed in his TV documentary that British Muslims 'don't want to change' and 'still hold views from their ancestral backgrounds'.

The real problem is, in fact, the very opposite. British Muslims *have* changed. But many have changed by becoming *more* socially conservative. The question we need to address, therefore, is why has this change taken place? But blinded by a snapshot view of Muslim communities, most policymakers and ask the opposite question: why hasn't any change taken place? If we cannot even ask the right questions, it is little wonder that we fail to find the right answers.

At the same time, the fact that significant sections of British Muslim communities have become conservative, even reactionary, on many social and religious issues, does not mean that all have. No community is homogenous. To say that Christians have become more liberal on issues of gay marriage over the past thirty years is not to deny that there is a diversity of Christian views on this issue. The same is true of Muslims. There is evidence that British Muslims have become more polarized on social issues – that a large proportion have become more conservative, while a small minority is far more liberal than much of the population at large. There is polling evidence, too, that Muslims in many European countries, and in the USA, are more liberal than Muslims in Britain.

And this leads us to another of the ironies in the way we think of diversity. Many who view society as diverse often fail to see the diversity of minority communities. This is as true of those who welcome diversity as of those who fear or reject it.

Consider social policy in France and Britain. As forms of public policy, French assimilationism and British multiculturalism are generally regarded as polar opposites. Yet, from very different starting points, both kinds of policy have come to foster narrower visions of social identity, and both have tended to

ignore the diversity of minority communities, treating them instead as if each was a distinct, homogenous whole, each composed of people all speaking with a single voice, each defined by a singular view of culture and faith.

'What, in today's France', asks the novelist and filmmaker Karim Miské, 'unites the pious Algerian retired worker, the atheist French-Mauritanian director that I am, the Fulani Sufi bank employee from Mantes-la-Jolie, the social worker from Burgundy who has converted to Islam, and the agnostic male nurse who has never set foot in his grandparents' home in Oujda? What brings us together if not the fact that we live within a society which thinks of us as Muslims?' [2]

Of the five million or so French citizens of North African origin, just 40 per cent think of themselves as observant Muslims, and only one in four attend Friday prayers. Yet, Miské observes, all are looked upon by French politicians, policy makers, intellectuals and journalists as 'Muslims'. Government ministers often talk of France's 'five million Muslims'.

The use of 'Muslim' as a label for French citizens of North African origin is not accidental. It is part of the process whereby the state casts such citizens as the Other – as not really part of the French nation. Faced, with a distrustful and disengaged public, as politicians in many European nations are, French politicians have attempted to reassert the notion of a common French identity. But unable to define clearly the ideas and values that characterize the nation, they have done so primarily by turning Islam into the 'Other' against which French identity is defined.

In his 1945 essay *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Jean Paul Sartre had suggested that the authentic Jew was created by the anti-Semite. Miské makes the same point about the authentic Muslim: that it is the way that the outside society treats those of North African origin that creates the idea of the authentic Muslim, and indeed of the Muslim community itself.

French citizens of North African origin who do not think of themselves as 'Muslim', can, writes Miské, 'feign indifference' and 'appear to be French, secularist and republican, devoted lovers of our land and our territories'. But, he asks 'how long can we seriously hold on to this voluntary position when we are constantly sent back to our 'Muslim' identity?' In other words, the identity 'Muslim' is both created by the wider society, and appropriated

by those defined as 'Muslim' as a means of asserting their own agency, 'to regain possession of our diminished existences', as Miské puts it. [3]

Much the same is true of Britain. British multicultural policies do not, as in France, seek to define national identity against the Other, but rather portray the nation as 'a community of communities', as the influential Parekh report on multiculturalism put it. [4] The authorities have attempted to manage diversity by putting people into particular ethnic and cultural boxes, defining individual needs and rights by virtue of the boxes into which people were put, and using those boxes to shape public policy.

Instead of engaging directly with Muslim communities, the authorities have effectively subcontracted out their responsibilities to so-called community leaders. Rather than appealing to Muslims as British citizens like all others, the 'community of communities' approach encourages politicians to see them as people whose primarily loyalty is to their faith and who can be politically engaged only by other Muslims. The result has been, as in France, to create a more parochial sense of identity and a more tribal vision of Islam.

One consequence of this perverse way of thinking about diversity is that the most progressive voices within minority communities often get silenced as not being truly of that community or truly authentic, while the most conservative voices get celebrated as community leaders, the authentic voices of minority groups.

The Danish MP Naser Khader tells of a conversation with a journalist who claimed that 'the Muhammad cartoons insulted all Muslims'. 'I am not insulted', Khader responded. 'But you're not a real Muslim', came the reply. [5]

'You're not a real Muslim.' Why? Because to be proper Muslim is, from such a perspective, to be reactionary, to find the Muhammed caricatures offensive. Anyone who isn't reactionary or offended is by definition not a proper Muslim. Here liberal 'anti-racism' meets rightwing anti-Muslim bigotry.

The ways in which we conventionally look upon diversity, then, turn migrants into the Other, stripped of individuality, even, ironically, of diversity. Minority communities have become seen as homogenous groups, denied the possibility of transformation, defined by primarily by culture,

faith, and place of origin.

The clash between the reality of living in a diverse society and the official insistence on putting people into cultural or ethnic boxes, and the creation of a more parochial, more tribal sense of identity, can have grave consequences. Consider, for instance, the second issue that, together with the migration crisis, dominates much of contemporary European political discourse: the growth of homegrown jihadists. The recent attacks in Paris and Brussels have brought the two issues together in many people's minds.

The problem of jihadism, the argument goes, is a problem of migration, because it is the arrival into Europe of those with fundamentally different values and beliefs, and with a hatred European civilization, that lies at the root the European jihadist problem. Close off the borders, stop the influx of Muslims, and Europe will begin to be able to deal with the issue of jihadism within.

It is an argument that flies in the face of the facts. The vast majority of European jihadis are not migrants, but second or generation Europeans, and their relationship with Islam is far from straightforward. A high proportion – up to 30 per cent in France – are converts to Islam.

Many studies show, perhaps counter-intuitively, that individuals are not usually led to jihadist groups by religious faith. A British MI5 'Briefing Note' entitled 'Understanding radicalisation and extremism in the UK', leaked to the press in 2008 observed that 'far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practice regularly'. [6] The French sociologist Olivier Roy similarly observes of contemporary jihadis that 'Very few of them had a previous story of militancy, either political… or religious'. [7] A Europol review of 'C*hanges in modus operandi of Islamic State terrorist attacks*' also notes the 'shift away from the religious component in the radicalization of, especially, young recruits'. [8]

We often look at the issue of European jihadism the wrong way round. We begin with jihadists as they are at the *end* of their journey – enraged about the West, with a black and white view of Islam, and a distorted moral vision – and often assume that these are the reasons that they have come to be as they are. That is rarely the case.

Few jihadists start off as religious fanatics or as political militants. Radical

Islam, and a hatred of West, is not necessarily what draws individuals into jihadism. It is what comes to define and justify that jihadism.

So, if not religion or politics, what is it? 'The path to radicalization', as the British researcher Tufyal Choudhury put it in his 2007 report on 'The role of Muslim identity in radicalization' 'often involves a search for identity at a moment of crisis […] when previous explanations and belief systems are found to be inadequate in explaining an individual's experience.' [9]

Jihadists, in other words, begin their journey searching for something a lot less definable: identity, meaning, respect. There is, of course, nothing new in the youthful search for identity and meaning. What is different today is the social context in which this search takes place. We live in a more atomized society than in the past; in an age in which many people feel peculiarly disengaged from mainstream social institutions and in which moral lines often seem blurred and identities distorted.

In the past, disaffection with the mainstream may have led people to join movements for political change, from far-left groups to labour movement organizations to anti-racist campaigns. Such organizations helped both give idealism and social grievance a political form, and a mechanism for turning disaffection into the fuel of social change.

Today, such campaigns and organizations often seem as out of touch as mainstream institutions. What gives shape to contemporary disaffection is not progressive politics, as it may have in the past, but the politics of identity. Identity politics has, over the past three decades, encouraged people to define themselves in increasingly narrow ethnic or cultural terms.

At the same time social policy has, as I have already observed, exacerbated these trends, helping create a more fragmented, tribalized society.

A generation ago, today's 'radicalized' Muslims would probably have been far more secular in their outlook, and their radicalism would have expressed itself through political organizations. They would have regarded their faith as simply one strand in a complex tapestry of self-identity. Many, perhaps most, Muslims still do. But there is a growing number who see themselves as Muslims in an almost tribal sense, for whom the richness of the tapestry of self has given way to an all-encompassing monochrome cloak of faith.

Most homegrown jihadis possess, however, a peculiar relationship with Islam. They are, in many ways, as estranged from Muslim communities as they are from western societies. Most detest the mores and traditions of their parents, have little time for mainstream forms of Islam, and cut themselves off from traditional community institutions. Disengaged from both western societies and Muslim communities, some reach out to Islamism. Many would-be jihadis, Olivier Roy observes, 'adopt the Salafi version of Islam, because Salafism is both simple to understand (don'ts and do's)' and because it is 'the negation of […] the Islam of their parents and of their roots'. [10] It is not through mosques or religious institutions but through the Internet that most jihadis discover both their faith and their virtual community.

Disembedded from social norms, finding their identity within a small group, shaped by black and white ideas and values, driven by a sense that they must act on behalf of all Muslims and in opposition to all enemies of Islam, it becomes easier for wannabe jihadis to commit acts of horror and to view such acts as part of an existential struggle between Islam and the West.

How, then, should we look upon diversity? I have questioned the fear of diversity. But why, and how, should we value it?

When we talk about diversity, what we mean is that the world is a messy place, full of clashes and conflicts. That is all for the good, for such clashes and conflicts are the stuff of political and cultural engagement.

Diversity is important, not in and of itself, but because it allows us to expand our horizons, to compare and contrast different values, beliefs and lifestyles, make judgments upon them, and decide which may be better and which may be worse. It is important, in other words, because it allows us to engage in political dialogue and debate that can, paradoxically, help create a more universal language of citizenship.

But the very thing that is valuable about diversity – the cultural and ideological clashes that it brings about – is precisely what many fear. That fear can take two forms. On the one hand there is the nativist sentiment: the belief immigration is undermining social cohesion, eroding our sense of national identity, turning our cities into little Lahores or mini-Kingstons.

And on the other there is the multicultural argument, that respect for others

requires us to accept their ways of being, and not criticize or challenge their values or practices, but instead to police the boundaries between groups to minimize the clashes and conflicts and frictions that diversity brings in its wake.

The one approach encourages fear, the other indifference. The one approach views migrants as the Other, whose otherness poses a threat to European societies. The other approach views the otherness of migrants as an issue that society must respect and live with.

Few events better express both the fear and the indifference than the fallout from the events of New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015. Large numbers of women were allegedly that evening robbed and sexually assaulted by men, many of whom were described as being of Arab origin. At first the authorities tried to cover up the events, pretending that nothing had happened. When details eventually emerged there was inevitably outrage.

The authorities' initial response stemmed not just from a fear of the reaction and of racists exploiting the issue, but also from a sense that such events were inevitable in a diverse society in which different values and beliefs and practices clashed, and it was better quietly to let 'Arabs be Arabs' than to have a robust and difficult public debate about the issue. And when the truth began to filter out, public fury was directed not just at the men responsible for the sexual attacks, nor just the authorities who tried to cover up the incident, but also at migrants as a whole, becoming a reason for opposing all migration to Germany. Both perspectives view migrants as the Other, as people fundamentally different from Us, though they differ in how deal with the otherness. Fear and indifference, indifference and fear, twisted into a tight knot.

What neither approach begins to address is the question of *engagement*. Engagement requires us neither to shun certain people as the Other with values, beliefs and practices that are inevitably and fundamentally inimical to ours, nor to be indifferent to the values and beliefs and practices of others in the name of 'respect', but rather to recognize that respect requires us to challenge, even confront, that values and beliefs of others. It requires us to have an robust, open public debate about the values, beliefs and practices to which we aspire, accepting that such a debate will be difficult, and often confrontational, but also that such difficult confrontational debate is a necessity in any society that seeks to be open and liberal.

The retreat from engagement is perhaps best expressed in one of the most explosive issues of recent times – that of free speech, and the question of where one draws the boundaries, especially in the giving of offence. From the global controversy over the Danish cartoons to the brutal slaughter at the offices of Charlie Hebdo, the question of what is, and should be, acceptable in a plural society has become one of the defining conundrums of our age.

There has come to be an acceptance in many European nations that it is morally wrong to give offence to those of different cultures or faiths or beliefs. For diverse societies to function and to be fair, so the argument runs, we need to show respect not just for individuals but also for the cultures and beliefs in which those individuals are embedded and which helps give them a sense of identity and being. This requires that we police public discourse about those cultures and beliefs, both to minimize friction between antagonistic groups and to protect the dignity of those individuals embedded in them.

As the British sociologist Tariq Modood has put it, that 'If people are to occupy the same political space without conflict, they mutually have to limit the extent to which they subject each others' fundamental beliefs to criticism.' [11] One of the ironies of living in a plural society, it would seem, is that the preservation of diversity requires us to leave less room for a diversity of views.

I take the opposite view. It is precisely because we do live in a plural society that we need the fullest extension possible of free speech, because it is both inevitable and important that people offend the sensibilities of others. Inevitable, because where different beliefs are deeply held, clashes are unavoidable. Almost by definition such clashes express what it is to live in a diverse society. And so they should be openly resolved than suppressed in the name of 'respect' or 'tolerance'.

But more than this: the giving of offence is not just inevitable, it is also important. Any kind of social change or social progress means offending some deeply held sensibilities. Or to put it another way: 'You can't say that!' is all too often the response of those in power to having their power challenged. To accept that certain things cannot be said is to accept that certain forms of power cannot be challenged.

The notion of giving offence suggests that certain beliefs are so important or valuable to certain people that they should be put beyond the possibility of being insulted, or caricatured or even questioned. The importance of the principle of free speech is precisely that it provides a permanent challenge to the idea that some questions are beyond contention, and hence acts as a permanent challenge to authority. Once we give up the right to offend in the name of 'tolerance' or 'respect', we constrain our ability to confront those in power, and therefore to challenge injustice.

It is not, however, simply Muslim, or minority, sensibilities that should be able to be offended. Liberal or European sensitivities, too, should be open to affront. Yet, too often those who demand the right of newspapers or novelists to offend Muslims, often are less robust when it comes to views that may offend liberal norms. Double standards are rife.

In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, the French government organized a march through Paris in defence of free speech, a march that was attended by over a million and a half people and 40 world leaders. It also arrested more than 50 people, including the comedian Dieudonné, for seemingly showing sympathy with the gunmen. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders presents himself as a warrior for free speech. But he wants to ban the Qur'an because he considers it hate speech. *Jyllands-Posten*, the Danish newspaper that published the Muhammad cartoons had, a few years earlier, refused to publish cartoons about Jesus by the caricaturist Christoffer Zieler because they might 'provoke an outcry'. And so it goes on.

The fundamental importance of free speech is that it is the very material of social engagement. When we restrain freedom of expression what we are really restraining is the capacity for social engagement. But social engagement has to be a two-way street, or it is nothing at all. Double standards undermine the very possibility of real engagement.

So, finally, let me return to the question that is the title of this talk: how should we live in a diverse society?

First, we need to recognize how narrow a view of diversity we have today. And that our narrow concept of diversity is at the very heart of many of our problem. If we look upon our differences in political or moral terms, they are often negotiable. If we see them in ethnic or cultural or religious terms, almost by definition they are not. Our peculiar perception of diversity has

therefore made social conflict more intractable.

Second, we need to combat the pernicious impact of identity politics, and of the way that social policies have accentuated that pernicious impact. The combination of the two has ensured that social solidarity has become increasingly defined not in political terms – as collective action in pursuit of certain political ideals – but in terms of ethnicity or culture. The answer to the question 'In what kind of society do I want to live?' has become shaped less by the kinds of values or institutions we want to establish, than by the group or tribe to which we imagine we belong. From this perspective, diversity becomes a prison rather than the raw material for social engagement.

Third, we need to recognize that the issue of social fracturing is not simply an issue of migration or of minority communities. One of the features of contemporary Europe is the disaffection that many have with mainstream politics and mainstream institutions. It is one of the reasons for the rise of populist and far right groups, a disaffection fuelled by a host of social and political changes, that have left many, particularly from traditional working class backgrounds, feeling politically abandoned and voiceless, and detached from mainstream society.

There are certainly issues specific to immigrants and minority communities, but they are best understood in the context of the wider debate about the relationship between individuals, communities and society. Societies have become fragmented because these relationships have frayed, and not just for minority communities.

Finally, a guiding assumption throughout Europe has been that immigration and integration must be managed through state policies and institutions. Yet real integration, whether of immigrants or of indigenous groups, is rarely brought about by the actions of the state. Indeed , the attempts by the state to manage diversity has been at the heart of many of the problems.

Real integration is shaped primarily by civil society, by the individual bonds that people form with one another, and by the organizations they establish to further their shared political and social interests. It is the erosion of such bonds and institutions that has proved so problematic and that explains why social disengagement is a feature not simply of immigrant communities but of the wider society, too. To repair the damage that disengagement has

done, and to revive what I call a progressive universalism, we need, not so much new state policies, as a renewal of civil society.

*This is the text of a speech that Kenan Malik delivered in May 2016, at the [launch of Gisèle House](#) at [Castrum Peregrini](#) in Amsterdam, where courageous figures of civil engagement in art and culture are commemorated with a view to contributing to a more inclusive society. Malik is also involved in the Castrum Perigrini Dialogue, a series of debates organized in collaboration with the European Cultural Foundation on fragmentation and solidarity in Europe.*

## Footnotes

1. See 'C4 survey and documentary reveals what British Muslims really think', Channel 4, 11 April 2016, [www.channel4.com/info/press/news/c4-survey-and-documentary-reveals-what-british-muslims-really-think](www.channel4.com/info/press/news/c4-survey-and-documentary-reveals-what-british-muslims-really-think)

2. Karim Miské, 'It's the Islamophobe who makes the Muslim', Open Society Foundations, 26 April 26, [www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/it-s-islamophobe-who-makes-muslim](www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/it-s-islamophobe-who-makes-muslim); first published as 'C'est l'islamophobe qui fait le musulman' in *Le Monde*, 31 March 2011, [www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/31/c-est-l-islamophobe-qui-fait-le-musulman_1501456_3232.html](www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/31/c-est-l-islamophobe-qui-fait-le-musulman_1501456_3232.html)

3. Ibid.

4. Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain / Runnymede Trust (eds.), *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, Profile Books, 2002 (corrected version)

5. For more on which, see Kenan Malik, 'Do we need a "safe space" from Donald Trump?', *The New York Times*, 21 December 2015, [www.nytimes.com/2015/12/21/opinion/do-we-need-a-safe-space-from-donald-trump.html](www.nytimes.com/2015/12/21/opinion/do-we-need-a-safe-space-from-donald-trump.html)

6. Alan Travis, 'MI5 report challenges views on terrorism in Britain', *The Guardian*, 20 August 2008, [www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism1](www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism1)

7. Olivier Roy, 'What is the driving force behind jihadist terrorism? A scientific perspective on the causes/circumstances of joining the scene', speech delivered to the BKA Autumn Conference, 18-19 November 2015, [life.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2015/11/OLIVIER-ROY-what-is-a-radical-islamist.pdf](life.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2015/11/OLIVIER-ROY-what-is-a-radical-islamist.pdf)

8. See Europol, 1 December 2015, [www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/changes-in-modus-operandi-of-islamic-state-terrorist-attacks](www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/changes-in-modus-operandi-of-islamic-state-terrorist-attacks)

9. See here: [217.35.77.12/CB/england/papers/pdfs/2007/TheRoleofMuslimIdentityPolitics](217.35.77.12/CB/england/papers/pdfs/2007/TheRoleofMuslimIdentityPolitics)

inRadicalisationastudyinprogress_id1509393.pdf

10. Roy, 'What is the driving force'

11. Tariq Modood, 'Anti-essentialism, multiculturalism and the "recognition" of religious groups', *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 4 (1998), 394