



PRESS RELEASE

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Islam is a religion capable of change

IMMIGRANTS OR BRITISH? THAT IS THE PROBLEM

**Did the terrorist attack in 2005 block the integration of Muslims in the United Kingdom?
Not according to Professor Manning**

How much did the 2005 bombs in London contribute towards worsening the positive climate which Britain and more in general British society had succeeded in creating by transforming the power it held with the Commonwealth into the successful melting pot at the end of the 20th century?

This was essentially the question dealt with by Professor Alan Manning before a large public in the renaissance Palazzo Geremia, however he also considered other interesting undercurrents.

The Professor – introduced by Roberta Carlini, journalist, contributor to *L'Espresso* and coordinator of the site www.sbilanciamoci.it – reeled off an enormous quantity of statistical and sociological data to illustrate the situation as regards the integration of numerous groups of immigrants, both first and second generation, not only Muslims but also from other religions such as the Hindu, Sikh and other minorities.

However, there is no doubt that the attention was concentrated on Muslims: “The attacks were a huge shock because the terrorists were born in Britain. The 'will' of one of the terrorists was emblematic in terms of identity explained the economist, stating as it did: “Your democratically elected governments have carried out atrocities against my people and your support makes you directly responsible, just as I am for having protected and avenged my Muslim brothers and sisters”.

Manning – who lectures in Economics at the London School of Economics, having been a researcher at MIT and Berkeley, and who is also on the editorial committee of prestigious scientific magazines – investigated four areas with his students: identity, values, behaviour and religiousness.

The first thing to emerge was that Muslims consider themselves to be first Muslims and then British. Critics have affirmed that this is not thanks to them but rather due to the fact that British society is so open that it requires no effort to adjust to it. As regards identity, a fundamental passage is that “for all groups it is being treated well by others that promotes a sense of identity and belonging”.

As regards values, the graphics highlighted high levels of tolerance among the various groups of immigrants, but there is less consideration of the concept of freedom of speech. Faith in the institutions is even higher than among the British, if we consider the legal system or the government, while it is lower as regards the army, probably due to military expeditions in the countries of origin of many of them.

Behaviour was analysed in terms of three variables: equality between the sexes, homosexuality and marriage. In the first area the prosecution would say that the gap in schooling is greater in Muslim communities. This was perhaps true but it is changing rapidly: the gap is diminishing in groups born more recently, both for those born in the United Kingdom and for those born abroad. So there is a change, with a movement towards sexual equality, although it is difficult to understand how quickly this is happening.

It is true that Muslims are socially more conservative than the white British population, but it is also true that they are becoming more similar in terms of all the variables analysed. Is there hostility towards homosexuality? Yes, but not more than there was among our grandparents.

If we analyse religiousness the fall is minimal: this means that the behavioural changes described above are taking place among people who continue to be fervent and practicing members of their religion.

So is all well? Not altogether. One negative aspect emerging from analysis of the data is that a small minority of Muslims are adopting extreme points of view. There are not many of them, but they exist. Another problem is that the opinions of British whites on immigrants are often inaccurate. These two groups fuel each other in turn: the fundamentalists want to make us believe that they are more numerous than they actually are, while on the hand for many non Muslims fundamentalists represent the general image of Muslims.

So what were the conclusions of Professor Manning? The multicultural approach of Great Britain should be considered positive, succeeding in making immigrants part of the country. However there is a segment of the population – defined by him as "white nationalist" – that feels itself neglected and menaced by other cultures.

"I remain optimistic for the future. The principles enacted in 1966 on the melting pot may be useful, so long as we don't rest on our laurels" he concluded.