

An Islamophobic lie goes round the world

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Famously, a lie can be half way round the world before the truth has got its boots on. A lie travels particularly fast, without let or hindrance, when it reinforces and chimes with prejudices which already exist. The fake document known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, for example, was widely accepted at face value in its day because it accorded with antisemitic conspiracy theories which were already prevalent.

And now in Britain in March 2014 credence is being given to an Islamophobic lie about Muslim plotting to 'take over' a number of local schools in a city in the West Midlands. The story is self-evidently a hoax but is nevertheless widely believed, since it conforms with and confirms pre-existing tropes about British culture being swamped and submerged by Islam. Soon there will be so much egg on so many faces that the truth, when it emerges in the full light of day, will be even more unbelievable than the lie.

Gullibility can be amusing, as when people are taken in by spoof stories each year on April Fools Day. It is not amusing, however, when it taps into and amplifies a racist prejudice such as Islamophobia, and when people are harmed by it. In the present instance the people being harmed include large numbers of children and young people in British schools. (Yes, British, not just English, and certainly not just in one city. One of the first websites to recycle the story when it first broke on 2 March was that of the BNP in Scotland. The story has been widely recycled in the national press, not just the West Midlands press.)

According to the clumsily constructed spoof document quoted from in various newspapers, there are two or maybe slightly more than two Muslim people in Birmingham who have won the trust of senior officials and councillors by giving the impression they are respectable and who are plotting now with these officials and councillors to take over four local schools and run them on Islamic principles (or 'principals', as the alleged plotters themselves put it at one stage.) They call their scheme 'Operation Trojan Horse'; confidently assert that the Muslim concept of jihad condones and commends unethical and underhand behaviour; and congratulate themselves on having caused a lot of disruption. And they say they say their leader is someone who is a very widely respected Muslim educationist, and chair of governors at one of their city's, and indeed one of Britain's, most impressive and outstanding schools.

The truth will eventually emerge. Amongst other things it will hopefully cast light on the motives of whoever constructed the fake document, and those who have given credence to it for their own ends. The latter may include left-wing critics of the academies programme and right-wing critics of Ofsted. Critics of academies or of Ofsted who have helped spread the story have tacitly supported Islamophobia, even if this was not their prime purpose.

In the meanwhile, the best single source for fuller information is an item on Inayat Bunglawala's blog, Inayat's Corner, posted earlier today (10 March). It provides links to all the main coverage so far, and to a robust rebuttal by the chair of governors alleged to be master-minding the so-called plot. It is also fair-minded, and open to

the possibility that the document underlying the story is not, or not entirely, a fake.
The address is

<http://inayatscorner.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/more-developments-in-the-muslim-plot-to-take-over-schools-story/>.

Source: blogpost on Insted Consultancy website, Monday 10 March 2014