THE PROBLEM OF BIRMINGHAM

Posted on January 12, 2015 by Eddie

Some thoughts about what it feels like to have your country misrepresented and the best way to respond.
Category: Observations

> *"In Britain, it's not just no-go zones, there are actual cities like Birmingham that are totally Muslim where non-Muslims just simply don't go in,"*

This absurd claim was made on Fox News yesterday by an someone called Steve Emerson from "the premier counterterrorism institute and data center".

It's hard to know how to respond to such idiocy. One response is to let the facts speak for themselves (The Muslim population of Birmingham is around 20%, not 100%).

Another, probably more effective, strategy is to laugh. There was a wonderful response on Twitter with the hashtag #FoxNewsFacts, which is well worth investigating. A couple of my favourite tweets were:

https://twitter.com/dacy_essex/status/554389125651259392

https://twitter.com/robmesure/status/554396661225885697

Another response, one which was all too common, is to say something along the lines of 'what do you expect from stupid Americans, they don't understand the world at all'.

Firstly, this sort of silly stereotyping is just as ridiculous as the original statement from Fox News. There are plenty of Americans who do understand the wider world. You can't make generalisations about the population of such a large country any more than you can make simplistic statements about the population of a city like Birmingham. Those who reacted to this story by classifying Americans in this way were falling into exactly the same trap as the Fox *expert*.

Perhaps the best response to this issue is to take some time to reflect on what it feels like to have your country or city misrepresented by a foreigner. The thing is that the media are full of this sort of silly generalisation. It's true that things are rarely as blatant and silly as the story about Birmingham, but the way in which Africa, for example, is presented is hardly nuanced. How do Africans feel about the way in which Western media present their continent?

As outsiders, we all need to avoid making blankets statements about groups that we don't know a great deal about; whether they be nations, world religions or those Christians in the church down the road.

Steve Emerson did apologise for his remarks, referring to Birmingham as a beautiful city - which confirmed to many that he really knew nothing about the place!