

# After Paris, questions for us all



## [Letters to the Editor](#)

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**I** Muslim men observe a minute's silence after their prayers inside Birmingham Central Mosque to remember the victims of last Friday's attacks in Paris

I wish to respond to Dr Aislinn O'Donnell's article in the Irish Independent (November 20).

Dr O'Donnell tells us that teaching about world religions and ethics "might counter the risk of Islamophobia in Europe and the increased potential for discrimination that we are witnessing". Simply put, one cannot "witness" either "risk" or "potential". At best, such things can be inferred.

If Dr O'Donnell means that adherents of Islam have experienced increased discrimination in the immediate wake of the Paris murders, then a few well-documented examples of concrete, significant injuries might be convincing.

But if instead, Dr O'Donnell means only that, post-Paris, some of Islam's adherents feel less comfortable with their neighbours, then, although such a regrettable situation has a claim on us, as do all of society's many ills, this is not the crisis which demands the community's immediate attention.

Why? Sometimes a minority subjectively experiences feelings of victimisation because it has been actually injured by wider society. But this is not always the situation: sometimes the subjective experience of victimhood comes about, not for objective reasons, but only because the minority stereotypes its neighbours' thinking. A considered judgment as to which is going on in our shared post-Paris Europe requires solid evidence.

Furthermore, Dr O'Donnell downplays the potential benefits of the UK's new counter-terrorist legislation and programmes by pointing out that they are based on a "discourse about radicalisation" supported by "scant empirical evidence". But in regard to the educational reforms she proposes - ie, teaching about world religions and ethics - she puts forward no empirical evidence at all. Instead, she only notes that her proposals "might" or "could" lead to benefits, and she asserts in a wholly conclusory fashion that such education is "part of a good education and part of understanding the human story".

Likewise, Dr O'Donnell never explains what she believes caused the Paris murders and similar past events or what she believes could counter the formation of the sort of personalities that display all too great a willingness to engage in murder and mayhem on a grand scale against civilian targets.

In fact, we all know that it is this very real possibility - the omnipresent depressing likelihood of future Paris-like attacks - which is the urgent crisis that demands our immediate attention and our best efforts. All our lives and our children's lives depend on it.

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