

Why do we allow discrimination based on culture?

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So, the Olympics has come and gone and it's been a triumph; our athletes have done us proud and the UK has a whole new raft of sporting heroes and heroines. But that's not all – Saudi Arabia got off the hook, misogyny has been normalised, and multiculturalism has been disingenuously defended ... all in a few short weeks.

Let me start by conveying my genuine congratulations and admiration for Team GB, who put in such a wonderful performance – uniting the country and providing so many exciting, proud and memorable moments. As someone who can't be bothered to run for the bus, I applaud your achievements and am a just a little bit jealous (I've never been any good at sport, but would like to be).

Prior to the Olympics however, you may recall that Saudi Arabia got itself into bother by attempting to send an all-male team. The International Olympic Committee (which governs such things) said they weren't having that, and demanded that Saudi Arabia send some women. So it did. Sarah Attar — an American of Saudi descent — came for track-and-field, and 16 year old Wojdan Shaherkhan was sent to represent the country in Judo. And all was well with the world again. Except, the women representing Saudi Arabia would do so covered from head to toe and Wojdan Shaherkhan was close to being sent home in a row over whether or not she could wear the hijab while competing. Having initially said no, the Olympic bosses gave in and allowed her to cover her head. And all was well with the world again. Everywhere from the *Guardian* to the *Daily Mail* this was lauded as a huge success – a giant step forward for women. Progress had been made, they said. But had it? Or had we just normalised and accepted the separation and covering of women, and can we now expect more of the same in the future? Will Egypt's women, or Algeria's women, or Turkey's women now be required to cover from head to foot and if so, will we accept that as duly as we have done on this occasion? My question is – how much further to the edge will we allow women to be pushed?

The IOC has accepted the veiling of women. They have accepted that there is no third option – a woman either covers from head to toe, or she doesn't compete. But there is a third option: kick out all countries that treat women as second class and do so because they treat women as second class. You'll hear many comparisons between this situation and that of apartheid South Africa, and it is a good comparison. South Africa was barred from many sporting events during the apartheid era and it was barred because it treated black people as lesser citizens. This was right – apartheid South Africa deserved this isolation and condemnation. But let's continue the comparison. Let's say that the IOC refused to allow South Africa to compete because it refused to send black athletes. Now, let's say South Africa relented and sent a black athlete or two, but did nothing to change apartheid at home. Would this have been enough? Would this have been accepted as the solution? I seriously doubt it.

Now let's imagine that the two black athletes sent to the Games by South Africa were only allowed to compete if they clearly marked themselves out as being black, and wore different kit to the rest of the competitors. Would this be accepted? Black athletes being covered so that nobody was

exposed to their blackness, and this would be ok? Again, I seriously doubt it. Double standards as always – racism is bad and illegal and immoral. Misogyny? Oh, that's just culture.

Speaking of culture, multiculturalism made it into the media a couple of times throughout the Games and unfortunately, it was pretty much a case of same-old, same-old. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, for whom I have great respect, wrote [a brilliant article in the Independent](#) rightly criticising the moronic (and deeply wrong) whinging about "plastic brits" coming over here and taking our gold medals. She wrote of the wonderful Mo Farah, Jessica Ennis, and other non-white British athletes who represented our country. But what she wrote about had nothing to do with culture and everything to do with skin colour or nationality.

Anyone who doesn't like non-white athletes representing us is a racist and should be openly called to account and condemned. Anyone who objects to the skin colour of anyone else is a racist who deserves to be called to account and openly condemned. Anyone who objects to the forced marriage of young girls or the mutilation of their genitals is **not** a racist and does **not** deserve to be condemned as one. Alibhai-Brown is talking about race, not culture, and they are not the same thing. This is what has got us into the trouble we are in.

The parents of Shafiea Ahmed were convicted of her murder during the Olympic period. The Cheshire schoolgirl had been suffocated by her parents in an apparent 'honour killing' for being too westernised. Following the conviction of her parents, the newspapers went in to overdrive. How can this happen? How can young girls like Shafiea be suffering like this, and [how can there be so few prosecutions in comparison to the reported cases?](#) [As I have previously outlined](#), there is ample evidence that multiculturalism, and how it is manifested in the UK, is causing a blind eye to be turned to the often barbaric treatment of girls and women, because it's "their culture". People are starting to notice this and are finally speaking out.

As part of a defence to the backlash against multiculturalism that allows young women and girls in the UK to live a life of misery, Barbara Ellen asked the following question in the *Guardian*: "[Do people seriously believe that tolerance towards other races and cultures is a "problem", equal to, or worse, say, than intolerance towards other races and cultures?](#)" Do you see what she did there? Not only did she declare that race is something to be tolerated (why? There's nothing to tolerate in a person's skin colour), she used race and culture interchangeably. Therefore, if you criticise a culture, you are criticising a skin colour, and hence you are a racist – which is not only a morally contemptible position, but also one which can ruin a career, a reputation, or even involve you in criminal charges. And they wonder why people are reluctant to criticise cultural practices.

We need to get this clear – race is not culture. Race is a skin colour or national or ethnic grouping and it gives no indication whatsoever of who a person is or what they stand for. Culture, on the other hand, is a series of actions which are routinely carried out within any defined community and are usually based on tradition or religion or both. If we define culture as a set of actions, and some of those actions amount to the forced enslavement and rape of young girls, then that can and should be condemned – culture or not. Cultural practices have always been condemned, fought against, and changed. It has happened all across history; it is called progress.

Wasn't it the culture of apartheid South Africa to treat black people as second class citizens? Wasn't it the culture of the Deep South to keep slaves or segregate black from white? Yes it was, but we fought it anyway and we changed the culture for the better. This is what needs to happen now. We've got to start holding criminals to account and prosecuting and punishing people when they commit crimes – no matter what 'culture' they profess. We must do this because it is the only way to provide equal protection to the victims of crime.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown is wrong on this. Mo Farah, Jessica Ennis and all the other non-white British competitors who proudly represented their country are not a sign of the success of multiculturalism, but of integration. Mo Farah doesn't ghettoise himself in to a Somali-only community and despise the British flag or way of life. He is proud to run for Britain and proud to wave its flag – the very opposite of what is encouraged in multiculturalism.

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Anne Marie Waters was a member of the NSS. The views expressed in our blogs are those of the author and may not necessarily represent the views of the NSS.

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