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Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

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Martin Amis is on his shock box again, this time confessing to "racist urges".

His grandfather and father were racist, and his children, he believes, and theirs will become less so. The genetic strain will pass. As if.

I feel really, really mean writing this rebuttal, so soon after a conciliatory, in part affectionate (and somewhat patronising) open letter to me from Martin Amis published last week in The Independent. Last year I talked to Amis for hours about European Muslims like myself who are at ease in both worlds. Since then, depressingly, the author has gone on to make inflammatory, generalised comments about Muslims.

Amis: admits to 'racist urges'

Amis said he has impulses (and others must, too) to punish all Muslims - strip-search and deport them until they get their house in order. I hit back at him in print.

In response, the author explained these were "thought or mood experiments" and that he really believes "we must build all the bridges we can between ourselves and the Muslim majority". Days on he blows up that promise, with the admission that he feels racist tingles and spasms of prejudice.



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Sorry, Martin, racism is not an involuntary seizure or biological characteristic, and even if it were, you can train yourself out of it. We don't surrender to all genetic, inherited imperatives. After all, we learn not to pee as soon as we feel the compulsion. In East Africa, where I was raised, most Asians believed black people were barely evolved from apes. I imbibed these prejudices. I had to unlearn that and it was hard, still is sometimes. In my play, Nowhere to Belong: Tales of an Extravagant Stranger, I deal with the agony of that battle within. My father didn't speak to me until he died because he could not bear it that a black teenager played Romeo to his brown-skinned daughter.

Although racism still blights lives, Britain is not the racially hostile place it once was. Millions of decent white Britons worked on their racist attitudes and changed the country. Today even the Tories have cleaned up their party and do not indulge those who vent racist urges during after dinner speeches or in public spaces. Boris Johnson, too, is on a fast learning curve. He won't, I bet, be using the word "piccaninny" during his mayoral campaign, even on impulse. He will become a better man for that restraint.

Boorish, ignorant folk may, and do, harbour a visceral loathing of "coloureds" but Amis, a man of fine sensibility and an elite education, has no excuse to give in to his base instincts.

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Amis wrote that we could not rid himself of an innate 'tribalism', and the fact that such boundaries sometimes extend to race is both obvious, and should be openly stated and accepted. Football crowds are guilty of the same characteristic, anyone cheering for England in the world cup is doing the same. It is an 'us and them' mentality that is in-built in humanity. This is what Martin referred to, and I applaud him for doing so.

- Mike, Edenbridge, Kent

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