

English juries need educating in Islamic culture and religion says human rights lawyer

From [prejudiced against Muslims](#). Gareth Peirce said English juries, English prosecutors and English police have proceeded "with complete ignorance of culture or religion" in the past and now "have to be educated about Islam".

The Guardian reports Peirce believes the trial of Anis Sardar at Woolwich Crown Court in May is an example of how British justice is prejudiced against Muslim defendants in the same way it was in the past against Irish Catholics accused of terrorist-related crimes.

Sardar, a British black-cab driver reportedly well known in his community for his deep knowledge of Islam, went to study Arabic in Damascus in 1997 before returning to the UK for good in 2007. He was convicted by a jury and sentenced to life with a minimum of 38 years for the murder of US serviceman and father of two, Sgt Randy Johnson, and life with a minimum 25 years for conspiracy to murder, to run concurrently.

Sardar admits to picking up a homemade bomb and wrapping it in tape but said neither he nor the bomb-makers were targeting Americans. Iraq was then engulfed in a sectarian war between Sunni and Shia Muslims and Sardar claimed the bomb he touched was one made by Sunni citizens looking to place them in the path of Shia militias.

Peirce claims "extremely powerful potential witnesses" who would have helped the jury understand the sectarian conflict in Iraq were denied anonymity, leaving them afraid to give evidence for fear of reprisals on families in Iraq.

Peirce believes the case should never have been brought to court, especially a British one, saying: "We are in a similar place to the IRA trials. If you look at them, it was English juries, English prosecutors and English police proceeding with complete ignorance of culture or religion. .. Now juries have to be educated about Islam. Anis was in Damascus because that's where you went to study pure Arabic then. . . It was an honest defence, but without context how could a jury in Woolwich grasp it?"

This trial proceeded amid complete ignorance, and it was utterly wrong to prosecute and wrong to convict him."

The judge at Sardar's trial rejected the defence claim that he had only been involved just once in bomb-making, in order to protect the Sunni community from Shia militias.

The Express also reported that in 2012 officers searching Sardar's London home as part of a separate investigation found an Arab language bomb-making manual with references to Islam on a computer disc.

Sardar's family is hoping to launch a legal appeal.

It is, of course, a basic human right to have a fair trial, which means a competent defence lawyer. But <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/new...>

I shall therefore treat her view with the contempt it deserves."