Inclusive Britishness: A Multiculturalist Advance

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Scholars argue that policies of multiculturalism in different countries are in retreat or in question. Britain is often used as an example of this, and leading British politicians and commentators often criticise such a policy. Yet a long-held multiculturalist goal has been to make Britishness more inclusive and this is something leading politicians were until recently uncommitted to. We use interviews with politicians who have served in this government and the last, the measures they have introduced, their media contributions, speeches and policy documents, to show that they are now committed to this goal. At a time when a British policy of multiculturalism is said to be in retreat or in question we identify a multiculturalist advance and show that this raises a range of difficult questions about government approaches to 'Britishness'.

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Policies of multiculturalism, in different countries, are said by scholars who are both critical and supportive of them to be in retreat or in question (Bauböck, 2002, p. 2; Joppke, 2004, p. 243; Modood, 2010, p. 6). Britain is often used as an example of where this retreat or questioning occurs (Joppke, 2004, p. 249; McGhee, 2008, pp. 99–103; Vasta, 2007, p. 12). Indeed, British politicians and commentators often criticise such a policy (Cameron, 2011; Goodhart, 2004). Some suggest that this policy in Britain is being qualified, not abandoned, but few deny it is in question (Kymlicka, 2010, pp. 42–3; Meer and Modood, 2009, p. 483). Yet despite this, we show that a multiculturalist advance is still possible as leading Labour and Conservative figures in Britain now endorse a long-held multiculturalist goal that until recently they did not.

Indeed, multiculturalists have many goals, but the one that we argue has advanced is making 'Britishness' more inclusive (Parekh, 2000a). This term may be perceived differently across Britain and Northern Ireland and is significant for devolved and reserved policy areas (Andrews and Mycock, 2008; McLean and McMillan, 2005). But in this article, Britishness refers to the different ways leading Westminster politicians discuss Britain's identity, people's British identities or features that are part of the former or the latter such as national institutions, habits and sensibilities (Parekh, 2008, p. 56). Capturing the different ways in which these politicians refer to British nationhood, multiculturalists have long advocated making the latter more inclusive. Hence in 1985 the Swann Report into the education of ethnic minority children noted how ideas of 'true Britishness' suggest an 'immutable' identity in which 'the British' are seemingly only white and English. Excluding many and cultivating feelings of exclusion, 'a redefined concept of what it means to live in British society today' was advocated (Swann, 1985, pp. 7–8). While critics claim that policies of multiculturalism emasculate national identities, the 1980s and 1990s were a time when such policies in other countries were being used to make nationhood more inclusive (Uberoi, 2009, p. 822; see also Levey, 2008, pp. 6–7). Theorists of multiculturalism have long

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supported this practice and it is easy to see why by *summarising* how they conceive of multiculturalism (Modood, 1990, p. 24; Parekh, 1989, pp. 74–6).

Seen as a political response to cultural diversity, multiculturalism often takes the form of a policy to promote intercultural dialogue and remove the discrimination and exclusion that cultural minorities suffer (Modood, 2010, p. 6). Such a policy assumes that cultural diversity is ineliminable without 'an unacceptable degree of coercion' and that it is a source of intercultural learning (Parekh, 2000b, p. 196). But hostility, competition and conflict between cultural groups will make diversity seem divisive, destabilising and necessary to subdue. A *nation's* identity, or the institutions, norms, history, traditions and other features that make it what it is, thus becomes important. After all, people's *sense* of their *nation's* identity, or their *national* identities, enables them to feel that, regardless of differences in class, region, education and occupation, they share a history, traditions, norms and institutions and thus, *inter alia*, are a group (Parekh, 1995, p. 265).[1] This helps them to take collective action and 'accept and enforce collectively binding decisions' to resolve disputes (Parekh, 2000b, p. 196). Of course, cultural majorities often think that only they comprise the nation and this exacerbates their willingness to exclude and discriminate against cultural minorities. But over time people's sense of their nation's identity can change as its features, such as legal and political institutions, are made more inclusive using a policy of multiculturalism (Uberoi, 2009, p. 822). Indeed, such a policy is also often used to mandate the publicly funded media, education and arts to promote the nation as home to a diverse people who share institutions, traditions, norms and practices that regulate their collective affairs, while respecting their diversity and a history in which many communities shaped what the nation is now (Uberoi, 2008, pp. 414–5). Practices to make the nation's identity and people's sense of it more inclusive have thus long been supported by theorists of multiculturalism in Britain so that citizens are united enough to welcome and not subdue their cultural differences (Modood, 1994; Parekh, 2000b).

But while accepting and rejecting certain other multiculturalist goals, the last government was not initially interested in making Britishness more inclusive (Modood, 2010, p. 7).[2] Hence in 2000 the Commission for Multi-Ethnic Britain (CMEB) said, *inter alia*, that 'political leaders should ... lead the country in re-imagining Britain ... and in ensuring the national story is inclusive' (CMEB, 2000, p. 229). The CMEB was not just attacked in the media (McLaughlin and Neal, 2004). Jack Straw said in response that he disagreed with a chapter of the CMEB's report that discussed 're-imagining' Britishness partly because it failed to recognise that Britishness had already become more inclusive, and he said nothing about his government's role in this process (Straw, 2000, pp. 2–4). Leading Conservatives in this period also suggested that Britishness had become more inclusive but they did not mention aiding this process (Hague, 1999; 2001). During this 'multicultural moment', when non-Christian and non-Jewish faith schools received state funding, the Race Relations Amendment Act was passed and a policy of multiculturalism was relatively unquestioned; leading politicians accepted that Britishness was *naturally* becoming more inclusive, but *not* that *they* should aid this process (Meer and Modood, 2009, p. 477). As they were unwilling to accept the multiculturalist goal of making Britishness more inclusive *then*, we would not expect leading politicians to do so *now* when they criticise a policy of multiculturalism so frequently. Indeed, many state that

such criticism grew in Britain after the 2001 riots in the north of England and after 9/11 (Joppke, 2004, p. 250; Modood, 2010, p. 7). But after 9/11, the team investigating the causes of the riots accepted a need to agree on 'some common elements of nationhood', but rejected a 'dominant or monoculturalist view of nationality' (Cantle, 2001, pp. 18–9). As criticism of a policy of multiculturalism grew in 2001, policy makers accepted the importance of Britishness, but rejected exclusive understandings of it. We argue that criticism of a policy of multiculturalism has not prevented leading politicians from introducing measures to make Britishness more inclusive and thus accepting a multiculturalist goal that they once did not.

But we also help to fill a gap. Scholars discuss how various policy areas relate to Britishness such as citizenship education for immigrants and children (Faulks, 2006; Kiwan, 2008) and community cohesion (Thomas, 2010). They analyse Gordon Brown's speeches relating to Britishness (Lee, 2006) and examine constitutional discussions in the two main political parties that relate to Britain's identity (Aughey, 2001). They note how the last government wanted to promote *British* values (McGhee, 2008), and how only the *English* education system does so (Andrews and Mycock, 2008). Such work is important, but it tells us only a small amount about why so many members of the last government said that Britishness concerned them and nothing about why members of this government do so.[3] Also it tells us something about the measures introduced by the last government to address such concerns, but nothing about the ones the present government is introducing or how to conceptualise the Britishness that *both* governments have promoted. We thus examine these issues using interviews with politicians who have served in both governments, their media contributions, speeches and policy documents. In doing so, we show why and how members of the last Labour government and Conservatives in the current coalition want to make Britishness more inclusive.

But how can they make Britishness more inclusive? If the latter is understood as *Britain's identity*, or the features that make Britain what it is, governing politicians have helped to make *some* of these features more inclusive. For example, legal and political institutions are features of Britain that today permit fewer forms of discrimination than they did, as governing politicians now use them to prohibit such discrimination (Modood, 2010, p. 8). As features of Britain were made more inclusive, so, by definition, was Britain identity. Similarly, if Britishness is understood as *peoples' British identities* or their *sense* of what Britain is, this was often shaped by, *inter alia*, governments using state education, which is also a way to help make these identities more inclusive (Ajegbo *et al.*, 2007; Heathorn, 2002, pp. 42–7). This would require support from the devolved administrations, but the curriculum *in England*, for example, could be used so that in history classes children learn how Britain has always had national and religious minorities (Phillips *et al.*, 1999, p. 167). In citizenship classes, children can learn about a tradition that has existed since the 1960s of accommodating the political needs of minorities through anti-discrimination measures, legal exemptions for minority religious practices and using public services to promote racial equality. Many citizens may resist such ideas, but if taught to successive generations throughout their school lives, many others may not (Andrews *et al.*, 2009, p. 374; Banks, 2009, p. 314). For them, Britain will long have possessed minorities and it now also has a tradition of accommodating their political needs, which does not justify this activity but shows that it

is possible. Equally, other factors also change people's British identities, and some of Britain's features, such as its history, values and norms, also *limit* the changes that politicians can find conceivable (Smith, 1986, p. 206). But within such limits, and among other factors that can make Britain's identity and people's British identities more inclusive, governing politicians can do so well.

We show that leading Labour figures in the last government intended to make Britishness more inclusive, as do leading Conservatives in this one. We exclude politicians from other parties because providing an *adequate* analysis that includes all or even many parties in one article is impossible. Equally, we exclude leading Liberal Democrats because, other than Vince Cable, they criticise or show little interest in Britishness even in discussions about community cohesion, citizenship, the Constitution and so on (Cable, 2005, pp. 46–7; Clegg, 2011; Dholakia, 2007, p. 204; Liberal Democrat Party, 2010).[4] This is not true of their Conservative coalition partners as Britishness has long been important for their party (Aughey, 2001, p. 68). For Margaret Thatcher, Britishness was being undermined from within by the 'permissive society' and immigration, and from without by supranational institutions (Gamble, 1994, p. 198). She wanted 'to keep fundamental British characteristics' and John Major also advocated preserving them (Major, 1999, p. 376; Thatcher, 1999). Indeed, both Thatcher and Major exhibited an English understanding of Britishness which can be found in David Cameron's speeches that criticise the previous government for promoting it (Gamble, 1994, p. 198; Uberoi and McLean, 2008, p. 45). Despite this Conservative history of *preserving* and *criticising* promoting Britishness, we show that Cameron and many of his Conservative Cabinet colleagues now promote making it more inclusive, and this is also true of senior Labour figures.

Of course, Gordon Brown was often said to discuss Britishness in order to downplay 'his own Scottishness, to allay English fears about his suitability to be Prime Minister' (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007, p. 251). Empirical evidence is seldom used to support this empirical claim, which also does not explain why Brown's *English* ministerial colleagues were discussing Britishness *long before* he became Prime Minister (Blunkett, 2001, p. 152; Denham, 2001, p. 19; Straw, 2000, p. 4). Such discussions are significant for a party in which leading figures noted how ideas of race and nation were often elided and who preferred either the internationalism of some types of socialism or the individualism and universalism of some types of liberalism, all of which were difficult to reconcile with nationhood (Blunkett, 2001, p. 151; Denham, 2005, p. 6; Miller, 1995, p. 4). This is not to deny that ideas of nationhood were salient at points in Labour's history (Howe, 1989, pp. 131–3). But Neil Kinnock once said he was a unionist 'entirely for reasons of expediency', and that 'workers being told that nation transcends class. No one who calls himself a socialist could possibly support this idea' (cited in Westlake, 2001, p. 124). We will show that many senior Labour figures today advocate the importance of Britishness, albeit to make it more inclusive.

In the next section we explain our methodology and in the third section we show why and how leading Labour figures intend to make Britishness more inclusive. In the fourth section we do the same for leading Conservatives. We conclude by discussing the difficult questions that become important once it is clear that leading Labour and Conservative figures want to make Britishness more inclusive.

Methodology

To show why and how figures in the last Labour government and Conservatives in the present one intend to make Britishness more inclusive we must examine indicators of their intentions. We thus eschew the works of commentators and journalists and focus on the educational, citizenship, constitutional and other measures relating to Britishness that were proposed or introduced by the last Labour government and Conservatives in the present one. Equally, we examine what figures in the last Labour government and Conservatives in this one said in the media and in their speeches and policy documents relating to Britishness. Policy documents are published by the government, authored by one of its members or their shadow Cabinet counterparts and focus on an issue relating to Britishness like immigration, the Constitution and so on. Speeches are given by leading Conservative and Labour figures in this and the last government, respectively, and focus on similar issues. All such material was examined from 2001 onwards because, as discussed above, before this leading politicians seemed only to accept Britishness becoming *naturally* more inclusive, but after the 2001 riots and 9/11 politicians began to emphasise an urgent need to create a 'common identity' but also to reject exclusive understandings of such an identity (Blunkett, 2001, p. 152).

Using semi-structured interviews we probed *and verified* how and why these politicians want to make Britishness more inclusive. Those interviewed had, since 2001, government or shadow Cabinet responsibilities for areas relating to Britishness such as community cohesion, immigration or the Constitution. Leading Labour politicians were more accessible than leading Conservative ones, hence we interviewed six of the former,[5] four of the latter,[6] two special advisers[7] and three senior civil servants who worked for some of these politicians.[8] Such data are *not* used to depict a Labour or Conservative position on Britishness to which *all* leading party figures adhere. They are used to show that many leading figures in these parties have introduced, or sought to introduce measures to make Britishness more inclusive. Hence, the next two sections examine why leading figures in the relevant political party say that Britishness concerns them, the measures proposed to address these concerns and why these measures are seen as a means to make it more inclusive.

Britishness and the Labour Party

Understanding why leading Labour figures want to make Britishness more inclusive requires knowing why the latter matters to them and for some of them, it *may* not. Hence when referring to former Prime Minister Tony Blair's last speech on British values, his former speech writer, Phillip Collins, notes:

> please don't think he [Blair] gave it [Britishness] any more than five seconds' thought in the whole of his life ... it's just that ... in so far as he ever talked about it and he rarely did ... he just thought that the prevailing images of the country were nostalgic, backward-looking ... predicated on ... decline, and he ... wanted to change that (interview, Phillip Collins).

Blair was seemingly more concerned with updating Britain's *image*, which helps to explain why some Labour-friendly think tanks talked about '*Rebranding* Britain' (Leonard, 1997, emphasis added). While these images of Britain could be important as they may come to mind when people *feel* British, former Secretary of State for Communities and Local

Government, John Denham, says: 'Tony never addressed British identity in a coherent way'. He and other Labour figures fail to describe what Britishness is, but former Minister for Constitutional Affairs, Michael Wills, suggests it satisfies a 'yearning to belong' that Denham says 'we almost seem hard wired to require' (interview, John Denham; Wills, 2009, p. 189). Citizens allegedly need to feel that they belong, and when this is stimulated by the same source, they feel they belong together and are a 'community', which is important for at least two reasons (Wills, 2009, p. 189).

First, this sense of community is said to cultivate the security many need to offset the 'destabilising effects of rapid global', technological and social 'changes' which some allegedly cope with by clinging to 'the *familiar*' (Wills, 2009, p. 190, emphasis added). This can make them more 'patriotic' but also more uneasy about cultural difference, thus increasing racism and support for far right political parties. Ethnic minorities are also said to need to feel secure about their place among 'the British' as 'the echoes of "there ain't no Black in the Union Jack" are not so distant' (Khan, 2008, p. 8). Second, the sense of community generated by Britishness is said to foster an attachment to the political institutions that sustain the community's shared existence. Former Home Secretary, David Blunkett, thus claims:

> your affinity and identification with the place you live and the country you're in, does make a difference to the way you see ... your own representative institutions ... people don't have faith in institutions ... that alienation is very dangerous (interview, David Blunkett).

Indeed, the specified danger varies; for some it seemingly relates to Scottish secession as those 'who don't feel they belong together tend not to stay together' (Wills, 2009, p. 189). Equally, despite widely available survey evidence, *some* Pakistanis are thought to 'pay a lip service to being British' (interview, David Blunkett; Heath and Roberts, 2008, p. 14). They *seemingly* do not feel part of a British community and thus care little for the political institutions that sustain it, which makes them more prone to extra-political activity (Byrne and Kelly, 2007, pp. 8–9; Uberoi and Modood, 2010).

Generating security and support for political institutions, the sense of community that Britishness is said to foster is valuable, but it is allegedly in jeopardy. This is partly because Britishness has seemingly become unclear (Brown, 2006, p. 2). The nature of Britishness before it became unclear is not discussed so it is uncertain how they can know what it has *become*, but there was also concern about those excluded and 'detached from the national community' (Straw, 2007, p. 3). We have seen how this concern relates to some Muslims and national minorities. But this lack of clarity and detachment also logically reinforce one another as it is difficult to be attached to something that is unclear. Equally, as the English who were once often confused with the British begin to feel more detached from the national community, it becomes unclear who the British are. Reinforcing one another, the cause of both is sometimes attributed to, *inter alia*, devolution and identity politics, making people less focused on their commonalities (Byrne and Kelly, 2007, pp. 10–19). Other Labour figures suggest that Britishness includes stories of 'racism, exploitation and class division' that are difficult to ignore and are unappealing (Denham, 2005, p. 8). Allegedly caused by many factors, Britishness has apparently become unclear and un-inclusive, hence it cannot foster the sense of community it once could and must therefore be altered to achieve such a sense of community.

It was thus suggested that 'national traditions' should be made more prominent, using measures such as a celebratory 'national day' (Goldsmith, 2008, pp. 88–95). Equally, a 'clearer definition of citizenship would give people a better sense of their British identity', hence a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities and a Statement of Values were discussed (Department of Justice, 2007, p. 54). Historical education was seemingly a means to explain, inter alia, how British 'people have roots in other parts of the world' (Denham, 2005, p. 8). But a belief that such measures would not influence *many* people's British identities helped to prevent their introduction. As Blunkett and Brown's former adviser, Nick Pearce notes, it is 'hard to *make* people feel things' (interview, Nick Pearce, emphasis added). Fearful that such measures would create a top-down understanding of Britishness that would 'never take root', it was hoped that a more bottom-up understanding would emerge through a government-led public debate about Britishness (Wills, 2009, p. 195). Thus Brown's adviser, Stewart Wood, says that Brown tried 'to start a debate' (BBC Radio 4, 2010), his ministers often endorsed the need for one, and a debate over a Statement of Values was described as just as important as the measure itself (Department of Justice, 2007, p. 59; Wills, 2009, p. 195). But there was little debate over those whose British identities are unformed or are more malleable. Hence citizenship ceremonies that 'reflect our national character' target *immigrants* seeking citizenship who, if their English is above a certain standard, have to pass a test on life in the United Kingdom (Home Office, 2003a; 2007, p. 4).[9] Likewise, learning about Britain's 'values' and diversity became part of citizenship classes for English *children* (Ajegbo *et al.*, 2007, p. 94; QCA, 2007, p. 33). Some in the last government were thus leading 'a discussion about redefining Britishness' (interview, Mike O'Brien) while being more prescriptive with those who success was more likely with.

Indeed, the measures introduced indicate how this '21st Century British identity' was conceptualised (Denham, 2005, p. 8). Hence, during citizenship ceremonies new citizens pledge allegiance to the political features of Britain that were also equated with being British in a pamphlet to help them 'understand the culture' of their new country (UK Border Agency, 2010a; Home Office, 2005a, pp. 13–5). However, children now also learn about 'the changing nature of UK society, including the diversity of ideas, beliefs, cultures, identities, traditions, perspectives and values that are shared' (QCA, 2007, p. 33). These measures equate Britishness with Britain's *political features* and its *diversity*, but scholars often ignore the latter or emphasise the former to note how Britishness was equated with universal values that are not distinctive and make it difficult to see how Britain differs from other Western societies (Hazell, 2008, p. 104; Joppke, 2008, pp. 538–41; Mason, 2010, p. 866). These values are, of course, realised in different historical and institutional ways in different countries, but Andrew Mason suggests that it is these realisations that are distinctive, not the values themselves (Mason, 2010, p. 868). Scholars can thus ignore how the last government equated Britishness with Britain's diversity and are critical of how it was equated with Britain's political features.

But are these criticisms convincing? If so, we should take account of them, but they all *assume* that Britain's identity must possess distinctive features without explaining why, whether it stops being Britain's identity or meaningful to British citizens without them and what evidence would support these propositions. Bhikhu Parekh points to other logical and ethical problems with this assumption (Parekh, 1995, p. 256). In addition,

these criticisms exclude the possibility that distinctiveness resides in ubiquitous features that emerge, combine and resonate in unique ways, as this does *not* require distinctive features, but a detailed understanding of ubiquitous ones. Equally, Mason suggests that the realisations of universal values can be distinctive, rather than the values themselves, but this assumes a neat separation. For example, he claims that the value of democracy is realised in Britain, *inter alia*, through parliament, but surely the latter is also partially constituted by this value, and democracy takes different forms in different countries. This suggests that such values can be distinguished analytically from their instantiations, but can also take a distinctive form *in* them, and this possibility is ignored. Finally, Joppke makes the point that the 'British state' wants to 'make immigrants and ethnic minorities parts of *this* and not *any* society but it cannot name and enforce any particulars that distinguish *here* from *there*' (Joppke, 2008, p. 538, emphasis in original). Joppke may be right, but the latter is only important if it prevents these groups feeling part of Britain or makes them not want to be, and it is not clear why either is true. It is equally plausible to say that an identity based on universal values is easy for different groups to identify with because of its universal components, and evidence is needed to show which of these positions is more plausible. We do *not* seek to defend the last government, but until critics justify their assumptions and seek evidence for their claims, their criticisms are unconvincing and do not shape our account of how to conceptualise the Britishness that the last Labour government promoted; but how should we conceptualise it?

By introducing measures that equated Britishness with Britain's political features and its cultural diversity, Labour figures sought to create what can be described as a civic multicultural national identity, and Brown was explicit about the civic component:

> the question is essentially whether our national identity is defined by race and ethnicity ... Or whether there are values which shape our national identity and which all citizens can share – thus separating citizenship from race – and which can find explicit expression so that they become a unifying and strengthening force (Brown, 2004, pp. 2–3; 2009, p. 27).

Brown thus invokes what Anthony Smith calls 'the currently fashionable distinction between ethnic and civic ... nation' such that if Britishness were conceived as an ethnic national identity those sharing it would share an ethnicity and others would be excluded (Smith, 2000, pp. 40–1). But those sharing civic national identities share values and citizenship regardless of ethnicity such that all citizens can feel the sense of community that was described as so important. The latter was favoured by Brown, but such values are usually interpreted using the language, norms and sensibilities of the dominant cultural majority, and as this is also true of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship this majority has a relationship with these political attributes that many cultural minorities often do not. But a civic national identity is easier to share than an ethnic one and Britain's history is used to legitimise sharing the former. Brown thus discusses how the political value of tolerance has 'high historical significance' (Brown, 2009, pp. 27–8). To be part of how the British define themselves, a trait, it is assumed, must be historically important, hence discrimination, national minorities contemplating assimilating and governments expecting immigrants to assimilate too are what Brown might call 'occasional ... lapses' from tolerance, insufficient to prevent it being a defining trait (Brown, 2009, p. 28; Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 35; Uberoi and

McGhee, 2012, p. 63). Here and elsewhere Britain's past is *made* conducive to possessing the civic component of a civic multicultural national identity (see also Home Office, 2005a, p. 15).

The same is true with the multicultural component: we saw how Britishness is being equated for school children with Britain's diversity, and history was again used to legitimise this. Hence Blunkett, who is often portrayed as an opponent of multiculturalism, notes that 'there is a very clear recognition, as with Daniel Defoe all those centuries ago, that we are a mongrel nation' (interview, David Blunkett). Defoe's early eighteenth-century poem, which critiqued whether there is 'a true born Englishman', is (inaccurately) invoked to appeal to a tradition of accommodating diversity in Britain,[11] but Brown goes further by claiming:

> Many other countries and people are having to adapt as their societies become more complex and identities within them multiply. ... We are a living testament to the idea that pride need not be secured only by separation ... We have shown over three centuries, that a common ground of Britishness, of British identity, can be found in the stories of various communities and nationalities that inhabit these islands (Brown, 2009, pp. 26–7).[12]

Again, major 'lapses in tolerance' are ignored; but Brown notes how Britain being multi-national means that it has accommodated diversity for 'three centuries' and such accommodation is part of who the British are. What we call the multicultural component of Britishness thus *includes* Britain being multinational and *relies* on this fact for historical legitimacy, but also *uses* it as a precedent for various groups and 'their stories' to define the British people. The latter is partly what the then Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, meant by claiming that chicken tikka masala 'is now a true British national dish' (Cook, 2001, p. 2). Such aspects of Britishness are more reflective of minorities, but this is no different to the civic component being more reflective of the cultural majority. Denham thus claims: 'While a modern British identity will ... draw heavily on the history of the White British majority we cannot discover Britishness in that history alone; it will have to draw on the histories of all those who now make up our country' (Denham, 2004, p. 2). Accommodating diversity is thus not only portrayed as a part of Britishness as such accommodation also entails minorities shaping it.

Leading Labour figures hoped to make Britishness more inclusive by turning it into what can be described as a civic multicultural national identity in which Britain's political features and accommodating diversity are defining features. The former are inclusive because they are shared *regardless of ethnicity*. The latter is inclusive because it *affirms* the diversity of Britons, which thus legitimises why the traits of Britishness can also originate from cultural minorities. Despite inaccurately assuming that some Muslims find it difficult to feel British, this was then an inclusive project and a *version* of the past was used to legitimise it, which is perhaps not unusual (Renan, 2001, p. 166). But recall that the CMEB proposed political leaders making Britishness more inclusive when a policy of multiculturalism was relatively unquestioned and there was seemingly little support among leading Labour figures. Yet while not endorsing other aspects of the CMEB's declared vision, at a time when many say such a policy is in 'retreat' or in question, leading Labour figures sought to make Britishness more inclusive. Far from retreat, the

prospect of making Britishness more inclusive may have advanced, especially if, as we will show, leading Conservatives are also pursuing this goal.

Britishness and the Conservative Party

As with leading Labour figures, to understand why leading Conservatives want to make Britishness more inclusive we need to know why it is important to them. Former community cohesion spokesman Paul Goodman claims that 'just as individuals we get by, by having ... ideas about our own identity, just as families do ... nations do'. People are curious about who and what they are as it tells them where and with whom they belong and this curiosity is thus exhibited by groups they are a part of such as nations, hence 'Americanness ... is important in America ... and Britishness is important ... in Britain' (interview, Paul Goodman). Like Labour figures, little is said about what precisely British-ness is, but it is said to offer self-understanding and belonging which is described as particularly important during this perceived period of 'rapid social changes' (CPNISPG, 2007a, p. 23). Allegedly causing many to become unsure of who they are and where they belong, Britishness helps to explain both, and when it does not, 'the void' can apparently be filled by more problematic identities, as the former community cohesion spokesman and current Attorney General, Dominic Grieve, explains:

> Where there is a void of this kind it is inevitably filled by something else ... As an unconscious understanding of time and place and one's own position in it disappear, so self-confidence erodes and with it, the ability to both welcome, understand and tolerate difference. It creates the politics of cultural despair – the recruiting ground of the BNP and Hizb Ut Tahrir (Grieve, 2008, p. 8).

Where some might turn to Scottish, Welsh and other identities there is a fear that an extremist identity will flourish among some English and Muslim people if Britishness does not offer self-understanding and belonging (Uberoi and Modood, 2010).

Offering the *same* sense of self-understanding and belonging to all citizens, Britishness is also said to be important because people in Britain thus come to see themselves in similar ways, as belonging to the same place, thus engendering loyalty. This loyalty is not, as with some Labour figures, vertical in nature and directed at legal and political institutions; instead it is horizontal, a loyalty citizens have 'towards each other' (CPNISPG, 2007a, p. 7). This is seen as important partly because some Muslims are thought not to feel British (Jones, 2007, p. 9) and to be disloyal to their fellow citizens, but also if all citizens are thought to be loyal to one another their need to fear and suspect a small minority is reduced (CPNISPG, 2007b, p. 4). Mutual loyalty is also said to help improve relations between different groups, seemingly creating 'empathy' between them too (Mirza *et al.*, 2007, p. 90). Such empathy can help citizens to understand each other better, which in turn may also help them to mix more easily and even instil 'confidence ... to learn from each other' (Grieve, 2009, p. 3). Loyalty among citizens thus improves relations between them, creating something similar to what Labour figures called a sense of community which also cultivates support for the union that keeps British citizens together. But notably for the party that has historically been so attached to the Union, the latter is not used as a reason for why Britishness is important.

Instead, Britishness is described as a source of self-understanding and belonging which reduces the appeal of extremist identities while encouraging mutual loyalty among citizens, all of which could seemingly be lost. This is because Britishness offers the same sense of self-understanding and belonging to all because it seemingly reflects common traits that 'centrifugal forces' are undermining. These include declining religious observance, continuing immigration and devolution (CPNISPG, 2007b, p. 23). Presented with centrifugal forces, mustering centripetal ones is said to be difficult because of an *English* 'reserve' which makes it both inimical to promote commonalities and hard for immigrants to detect them (Cameron, 2006a, p. 2; 2007, p. 8).[13] But there is also apparently a broader 'self-loathing and confusion in the West' exhibited in Britain through shame over empire and racism such that there is 'failure ... to defend' its ideals (Mirza *et al.*, 2007, pp. 7, 92–95). Where centrifugal forces separate, reserve and shame are said to prevent centripetal action, and a traditional conservative fear of the state is also exhibited (Oakeshott, 1962). Excessive state interference has allegedly caused people to retreat from activities they might do for themselves and that they might do together, causing them to become more atomised but less independent (Letwin, 2003, p. 2). But the last government is also accused of undermining Britishness by surrendering certain powers 'to transnational institutions most notably the European Union'; others say that national symbols and culture were seen as sources of 'hierarchy' that could seemingly be undermined through a policy of multiculturalism (Gove, 2009a, p. 198; Grieve, 2008, p. 3).

Diminishing commonality was apparently made worse by the last government and the common attributes of Britishness are thus said to have become unclear, hence 'we hear it more and more, what does it mean to be British?' (Cameron, 2007, p. 6). But the Conservative Party National and International Security Policy Group also notes that there are some whom Britishness never reflected; hence there is a need 'to understand the contributions which all traditions, whether primarily ethnic or national, have made and are making to our collective identity' (CPNISPG, 2007b, p. 23). Without explaining what Britishness was, it is again said to have *become* unclear and un-inclusive, and needs to change to foster the sense of self-understanding, belonging and mutual loyalty that is thought so important. There is a need to 'rebuild Britishness' (CPNISPG, 2007b, p. 23). But what means are advocated to accomplish this? We should expect a different approach from Labour, which is criticised for treating Britishness as a 'public relations invention' (Mirza *et al.*, 2007, p. 90) exemplified perhaps in the 'cool Britannia experiment' (Grieve, 2009, p. 5). Brown is also criticised for his 'state Britishness' (Warsi, 2008, p. 2) and Grieve states that politicians must 'let go a bit' so that 'the common themes which form any national culture and identity will emerge of themselves'. But he also says that government can 'take steps to facilitate this evolutionary process' (Grieve, 2008, p. 16). As with Labour figures, there is a fear of top-down solutions that are nonetheless seen as at least partially unavoidable.

However, such 'top-down' solutions may seem hard to identify. Hence, like the last government, Grieve advocated a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, but at the time of writing only an inquiry has been established to examine its creation (Cabinet Office, 2010, p. 11; Grieve, 2008, p. 16). Equally, the current immigration reduction measures are not

justified using reasons relating to Britishness (UK Border Agency, 2010b). Cameron said in *opposition* that to 'strengthen Britishness' immigrants must learn English and those now applying to join their partner in the UK 'must demonstrate basic command of English', but in *government* this is not justified by referring to Britishness (Cameron, 2007, p. 8; Home Office, 2010).[14] Finally, as the coalition agreement does not mention introducing measures to clarify Britishness or make it more inclusive, it is hard to see how they can be introduced (Hazell, 2011, p. 3).

But measures advocated in opposition relating to Britishness have been openly introduced; hence improving British history teaching has long been advocated and Education Secretary Michael Gove now says that 'all pupils will learn our island story' (Gove, 2010, p. 1; Grieve, 2008, p. 16). Referring to the history syllabus in England, the historian Simon Schama has been asked to help change it (Gove, 2010, p. 4). Historians are divided as to whether British history is really inadequately taught (Evans, 2011). But beyond children there is recognition, as with Labour figures, that 'governments can only' stimulate 'national debate' (interview, Dominic Grieve). Dialogue and discussion are thus portrayed as enabling a new form of Britishness to emerge naturally, and again government has a role – not just by leading the discussion, but also by facilitating greater interaction between citizens and more involvement in their local communities such that the necessary dialogue occurs. This local involvement was described by Edmund Burke as a means to foster 'love' of 'the *little platoon* we belong to in society' which 'is the first link ... by which we proceed to love our country' (Burke, 1996, p. 559, emphasis added). Hence Cameron began to discuss his 'Big Society' in 2009, but introduced it after becoming Prime Minister and it is partly designed to empower communities allegedly stifled by the state, by devolving power to them so that they can do more together (Cameron, 2009, p. 7; 2010, p. 3). Such civil society activity is not restricted to Conservative party politics and, despite such proposals suffering setbacks, as Cameron himself admits, they are described as giving more power to the 'little platoons' (Conservative Party, 2010, p. 38).

Again such measures suggest the hope that what we call a civic multicultural national identity will emerge. Hence Gove has announced plans to review the National Curriculum, and elsewhere he equates Britishness with institutions. He says: 'if we can develop a better understanding of our past – how *institutions* have evolved and changed – then we'll have a better understanding ... of how *institutions* can give expression to our shared sense of identity' (BBC Radio 4, 2010, emphasis added). Institutions are said to comprise and express Britishness, which coheres with the civic understanding of the latter advocated by Cameron, who claims that 'few nations are more suited to making a multi–ethnic society work ... After all, Britishness evolved in part as a way of uniting the ethnically different nations of these Isles under a common civic identity' (Cameron, 2006b, p. 3; 2011, p. 6). Again, Britishness is equated with a civic national identity because it is easier for different groups to share and, as before, history is used to legitimise this. Hence Grieve says that Britain 'has *never* had a ... marked cultural identity ... the British character is marked by ... structures' (interview, Dominic Grieve, emphasis added). The fact that such structures and institutions unavoidably use and reflect language, norms and sensibilities and thus cannot exist in an acultural form is not seen. But learning about these structures and institutions can apparently help foster a 'British agenda and British identity', hence 'a new syllabus' is

required covering 'such issues as rule of law, free speech, liberty of the individual, sovereignty and the role of Parliament, accountability of the Executive and independence of the Judiciary' (CPNISPG, 2007b, p. 27).

But this national identity also has another component. Hence while being critical of a policy of multiculturalism, former Security Minister, Pauline Neville-Jones, says that 'we have to develop a history syllabus which ... relates ... the kind of country we are now ... to our imperial history and to why it is that people who are ... not indigenously British, are here and are Brits' (interview, Pauline Neville-Jones). Research does suggest that ethnic minorities are less interested in a history that does not relate to them (Andrews *et al.*, 2009, p. 374; Grever *et al.*, 2008, p. 85). Hence to include them, the education system could enable future generations to learn about how the British became more diverse and, Gove claims, 'Britishness is about a mongrel identity' (Gove, 2009b). Thus, like Blunkett, Gove invokes Defoe, and both Neville-Jones and Gove refer not only to a civic understanding of Britishness but also to a multicultural one of accommodating diversity. Again, a history of racism or assimilation is unimportant compared to a history of accommodating new British citizens who, Cameron claims, like Cook, contribute new British traits. Just as 'Britons change, so subtly will Britishness' (Cameron, 2006a, p. 4). But politicians also have to facilitate cooperation at the local level in all areas, including where there is a high level of ethnic separation.[15] Local mixing and cooperating will again allegedly help a 'shared British agenda and British identity' to emerge which presumably reflects the diversity of those mixing and cooperating (CPNISPG, 2007b, pp. 27–8). Indeed, while criticising 'state multiculturalism', Cameron advocated 'a ... national identity *open to everyone*', and suggested that its creation would be partly aided by 'active participation' in local communities (Cameron, 2011, pp. 5–6, emphasis added).

Cameron thus endorsed a long-held multiculturalist goal even while criticising multiculturalism, and some of his colleagues also want to distance themselves from understandings of Britishness that *earlier* leading Conservatives are famous for (Lynch, 1999, p. 153). Hence, whereas the former Conservative party chairman, Norman Tebbit, claimed that many Asians fail to pass the 'Cricket Test' by supporting the sporting team of their ancestral home instead of British ones, according to Neville-Jones 'what is not any longer on the agenda is the Tebbit Test' (interview, Pauline Neville-Jones). Whether this is because a strain of New Right political thought that was always more amenable to inclusion or certain paternalist strands of Conservatism have gained salience is unclear (Joseph, 1986, p. 7). Especially since issues like losing the 'nasty party' image must be considered along with continued failure to gain significant support among allegedly naturally conservative Asian voters (Ashcroft, 2012, p. 13; Lynch, 1999, pp. 150–3). But regardless of potential causes, Damian Green, former Immigration Minister, said, in opposition that there has clearly been 'a journey' towards expressing a 'national narrative that works for everyone', as John Major's claim about 'old maids biking to communion ... doesn't mean anything to an urban Brit'. But there will also be 'new elements' of Britishness, hence Green says that 'one of the better points made by a Labour politician was Robin Cook's famous chicken tikka masala one' (interview, Damian Green).

Whereas before there was seemingly no support among leading Labour and Conservative politicians for making Britishness more inclusive there is now clear support among them;

hence there has been an advance towards this multiculturalist goal. But the latter has also endured through previous periods when a policy of multiculturalism was in question, such as after the Rushdie affair as this goal was first advocated in the 1985 Swann Report:

> we are not seeking to fit ethnic minorities into a mould which was originally cast for a society relatively homogeneous in language, religion and culture, nor to break this mould ... we are instead looking to recast this mould into a form which retains the fundamental principles of the original but within a broader pluralist conspectus–diversity within unity (Swann, 1985, p. 8).

As this quotation suggests, fostering commonality so as to cultivate cohesion is not opposed to a policy of multiculturalism, yet governmental attempts to foster these goals suggest to many scholars that such a policy is retreating (Joppke, 2004, pp. 250–1; Vasta, 2007, p. 4). What matters is whether these goals are secured by compelling cultural minorities to assimilate or by redefining the 'common mould' so that it can include all citizens and not just the cultural majority. Theorists of multiculturalism, as we have seen, defend the latter and this is now what leading Labour and Conservative figures publicly strive for as well. Some of these figures do criticise a policy of multiculturalism, but we have seen with Cameron how this can occur while endorsing a long-held multiculturalist goal. Hence such criticism and attempts to foster commonality and cohesion are unsuitable indicators of whether a policy of multiculturalism is retreating. The latter can only be discerned by examining how various components of Britain's policy of multiculturalism have changed over time while examining the successes and failures of those striving to include new components in this policy and change old ones during the same period. This would show where components have been scrapped and budgets cut, where multiculturalist aspirations have been thwarted, thus clarifying where there has been retreat, but also where there has been no change and where advances may have occurred. Certainly we have identified one such advance in this article because despite hostility towards a policy of multiculturalism, a long-held multiculturalist goal that was once not accepted by leading politicians is now accepted.

Conclusion

Leading Labour figures in the last government and Conservatives in the present one want to make Britishness more inclusive. If we combine this political will with what we showed in the introduction, that governing politicians have *some* ability to make Britishness more inclusive, then the measures introduced may be effective. Certain questions thus become important, such as how is Britishness understood by these politicians, and how should it be? We saw that politicians are unclear about what Britishness is, and as the latter might have many referents we might, for example, ask whether it is Britain's identity or people's British identities that are to be made more inclusive. Both can be described as important, as the features of Britain's identity can cultivate pride, loyalty, ambivalence or shame. Equally, in certain forms people's British identities can provide an identity that all British citizens can share despite differences in race, religion, class and so on, and if meaningful, they can enable all British citizens to feel part of a group and thus help them, as we noted earlier, to accept collectively binding decisions, achieve collective goals, and so on. Further, both senses of Britishness are related; hence debates about what 'being British' means emerged as familiar features of Britain like empire and Protestantism were disappearing and relatively unfamiliar

features, like mass immigration and minority nationalism, were appearing. Changes in Britain's identity seemed to destabilise people's British identities, and an understudied relationship exists between these two forms of Britishness. Clarity is thus needed about whether politicians intend to focus on both of them, their relationship, or only one of them, and if the latter, which is it and why is it the right one?

Equally, some might also question whether politicians are right to claim that Britishness is unclear and un-inclusive as they may be referring to Britain's identity, people's British identities, their relationship or both, and such empirical claims require evidence to be plausible. Likewise, the idea that nationhood helps citizens to feel as if they 'belong together' and are a 'community' is empirically uncontroversial (Anderson, 1983, pp. 6–7); but some question whether such a sense of 'belonging together' and community are necessary (Mason, 2010, p. 871). Further, while the civic realm can be shared regardless of ethnicity, some might object to politicians equating Britishness with it as we have noted how it usually uses and reflects the language, norms and sensibilities of only the cultural majority, thus reinforcing their dominance. Those who find the latter problematic may endorse equating Britishness with accommodating cultural diversity (Uberoi, 2007, p. 152), but Will Kymlicka also shows how cosmopolitanism and nationhood can be reconciled by observing how Canadians often believe that being 'a citizen of the world' is part of 'being Canadian' (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 358). If people's national identities can be equated with being a 'citizen of the world' and accommodating cultural diversity, these are *both* morally desirable traits that some may think Britishness could be equated with. Hence we might ask: which inclusive understanding of Britishness should be chosen and why? Should it be one where it is equated solely with accommodating cultural diversity, or with accommodating cultural diversity and Britain's political features, or with accommodating cultural diversity and being a citizen of the world? Unsure about what Britishness is or what it should be, it is thus unclear if there is a gap between the two that is desirable to fill, but even if we assume there is, *how* should such a gap be filled?

Should the approach be 'bottom up', 'top down' or a mixture of both, and if the latter, what should this mixture entail? We have *examined*, not *endorsed*, 'top-down' approaches, but it is still not clear whether leading politicians should simply lead a debate or go so far as to use the education system. Unclear why the latter is acceptable without a consensus emerging from the former, it is also unclear how such a consensus would be detected and what would happen if citizens were uninterested in the debate. However, as well as considering the powers Westminster politicians *should* have, we might want to consider the powers they *do* have as citizenship and history education were seen by them as ways to make Britishness more inclusive. But Westminster politicians do not control education policy in Scotland, Wales or, at the time of writing, in Northern Ireland where these types of education are also taught very differently (Andrews and Mycock, 2008; Phillips *et al.*, 1999). Post-devolution, other functions often used to shape people's national identities such as the state-funded arts are also devolved responsibilities, so influencing people's British identities *outside England* will require support from those governing Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But are the nationalist parties currently in government in Scotland and Northern Ireland likely to want to help make Britishness more inclusive, and are non-nationalist parties likely to want to do so either? When the political will to make Britishness more

inclusive is combined with governing politicians having some power to do so, difficult questions arise about how Britishness is understood by these politicians and how it should be, whether the sense of community it could foster is necessary, what its current nature is and should be, and what relationships politicians do and should have with it. Before this political will is exercised further, more research in these areas is needed.

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Notes

 1 Using Hobbesian, Rawlsian and Habermasian arguments some might question this need to feel part of a group, hence all such arguments are explicitly anticipated (Parekh, 2002, pp. 301–2). However, Mason recently challenges this point in a way not anticipated (Mason, 2010, p. 871).

 2 Some might say that Tony Blair described Britain as a 'young country again', but this is *not* a claim about making Britishness more inclusive and this is also not a reason why scholars say he devolved power to Scotland and Wales (McLean and McMillan, 2005).

 3 English *et al.*'s (2009) excellent recent piece focuses on Conservative thinkers not politicians and Englishness not Britishness. Aughey (2001) and Lynch (1999) offer excellent though older works on the subject.

 4 Clegg's 2011 speech said nothing specific about Britishness, but it endorsed the CMEB's idea of Britain as 'a community of communities' and a version of multiculturalism, though at the same time it endorsed Cameron's 'muscular liberalism' which Cameron framed as opposing multiculturalism (Cameron, 2011).

 5 These were: David Blunkett, interviewed 13 October 2007; Charles Clark, interviewed 11 December 2007; John Denham, interviewed 11 July 2007; Fiona Mactaggart, interviewed 5 October 2007; Mike O'Brien, interviewed 30 October 2007; Angela Eagle, interviewed 15 October 2007.

 6 These were: Damian Green, interviewed 18 April 2008; Dominic Grieve, interviewed 18 September 2007; Baroness Pauline Neville Jones, interviewed 17 October 2007; Paul Goodman, interviewed 4 March 2008. These interviews occurred before the 2010 general election, but remain relevant because, as we show, many of the measures relating to Britishness which these individuals discussed have now been introduced.

 7 We interviewed Nick Pearce on 31 October 2007; he was an adviser first to David Blunkett, then to Gordon Brown, both of whom spoke extensively about Britishness. We also interviewed Phillip Collins on 14 December 2007; he was Tony Blair's speech writer and adviser on this subject.

 8 Our civil servant interviewees asked to remain anonymous.

 9 If their English is below entry level 3, applicants for citizenship have to take an English and Citizenship course.

10 Dina Kiwan notes how Britain's diversity was equated with life in the UK in citizenship education for children but thinks this is different to 'abstract notions of Britishness' even though life in the UK would logically be a feature of Britain's identity (Kiwan, 2008. p. 64). Audrey Olser recognises how Britain's diversity is becoming integral to citizenship education for children, but says nothing about it actually being equated with Britishness (Olser, 2009).

11 We cannot find a reference to 'mongrel nation' in this poem but to 'a mongrel half breed race' (Defoe, 2006 [1703], p. 194).

12 See Brown (1997, p. 16; 2007, p. 2) for different forms of the same message.

13 The commonalities referred to in this speech are shared British achievements.

14 It may seem as if such measures make Britain and thus its identity more exclusive rather than inclusive. But the fact that it is harder to immigrate into Britain is not sufficient to show that Britain is becoming more exclusive as we need to know if such exclusion is just, what arguments determine this, whether factors making Britain more inclusive are nullifying those making it more exclusive, and so on.

15 This claim is made specifically with reference to schools cooperating but at the local level.

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