

Who Doesn't Feel British? Divisions over Muslims

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ABSTRACT

Politicians increasingly promote Britishness. We thus ask who do they think has difficulty feeling British and why do they think this? Scholars have not yet tried to address these questions and in this article we attempt to do so. Using interviews with former home secretaries, junior ministers and their shadow cabinet counterparts, we examine whether leading politicians think that Muslims have difficulty feeling British. We show that senior members of the main political parties are not only internally divided on this issue, but that a cross-party divide exists and that many of the members of these divisions are unaware of the relevant sociological data.

NATIONHOOD is not a new feature of debates about Britain's cultural diversity.² The 1948 Nationality Act gave Commonwealth immigrants the ability to enter and reside in the UK and historical research suggests that it was introduced, in part, to preserve the imperial dimension of what it meant to be British.³ Two decades later, Enoch Powell wanted to end Commonwealth migration partly to ensure that Britain remained a white nation.⁴ Indeed, as being British was equated with Empire and being white, many on the left opposed its significance and the idea of 'political blackness' emerged somewhat in opposition to it.⁵ Initially, steeped in the anti-imperialist and anti-racism movements of Britain's Afro-Caribbean community, 'political blackness' became an identity that it was hoped Britain's cultural minorities might unite behind. However, amidst criticism that this identity excluded British Asians and suggested the superiority of being black over other minority identities, it faded from public debate.⁶ More amenable approaches to Britishness emerged among Britain's cultural minorities and this can be seen in the Commission for Multi-Ethnic Britain's report.⁷ While criticised by the media for being anti-British and suggesting that 'British' was a racist term,⁸ the Report actually suggested that there was a need to reconceptualise what it means to be British, so as to reflect Britain's culturally diverse nature.⁹ The Commission was not alone as, for different reasons, others were suggesting a need to reconceptualise Britishness. Hence in 1995 Tony Blair described Britain as a 'young

country'¹⁰ and in 1997 Mark Leonard advocated a need to 'rebrand Britain'.¹¹

Devolution forced many others to contemplate how Britain and what it meant to be British had changed, and it was in this context that politicians began to explicitly promote Britishness. Hence, at a seminar on the subject, Gordon Brown claimed, 'A strong sense of being British helps to unite and unify us; it builds stronger social cohesion among communities. We know that other countries have a strong sense of national purpose, even a sense of their own destiny. And so should we'.¹² Likewise in a speech about multiculturalism, the Shadow Justice Secretary Dominic Grieve discussed 'how we can instill a common sense of identity...'.¹³

Such politicians assume that some, possibly many, have difficulty feeling British, but who do *they* think these people are? This differs from asking who actually has this difficulty as this can be examined through popular surveys.¹⁴ The latter do not tell us who is thought to have this difficulty *by leading politicians* whose claims on this issue are also somewhat inconsistent with what the survey data shows.¹⁵ Equally, understanding who leading politicians think have this difficulty is different to understanding which groups are portrayed as such in public and media discourse.¹⁶ The latter provides valuable insight into who commentators and scholars think have this problem. When politicians contribute to these debates, we catch glimpses of their thoughts on the subject also. But often these are only glimpses that never articulate, as far as we know, a clear sense of who the government or their official opposition think has difficulty feeling British, yet understanding this issue is important.

After all, politicians seem keen to promote Britishness using the state. Hence the government has introduced citizenship ceremonies that are supposed to 'reflect our national character'.¹⁷ The English national curriculum has been altered, so that 'understanding core British values' is 'at the heart of Citizenship teaching'.¹⁸ In a recent document, the government stated that a 'clearer definition of citizenship would give people a better sense of their British identity...'.¹⁹ and they are now offering a clearer definition through their proposed Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.²⁰ Even theorists who disagree with one another claim that such activity by politicians who control the state can help to form and shape a national identity, and historians have shown that this was true in Britain.²¹ Indeed, as the Conservatives endorse a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities²² while advocating a new history syllabus as part of what they call the 'British Agenda and Identity',²³ they differ little to the government.²⁴ As such activity can help to shape a national identity, it matters. Thus so does developing a deeper understanding of it and if politicians are promoting Britishness, this deeper understanding entails asking who they think has difficulty feeling British.

But the literature on Britishness ignores this question. Hence some scholars focus on the history of the British national identity.²⁵ Others focus on its future in relation to devolution and identity politics.²⁶ Some write about its moral and instrumental value while others focus on how Britishness should change.²⁷ Some examine the salience of the British national identity in relation to the English, Scots and Welsh ones while others examine whether the British national identity is civic or ethnic in nature.²⁸ Some allude to increasing discussions about British values,²⁹ others identify similar trends in other countries³⁰ and some advise against listing these values.³¹ But the question of whether there is a group, or numerous groups in Britain, which members of the government and their official opposition think have difficulty feeling British is seldom asked and this is what we will examine in this article.

We will not, however, try to identify all those who leading politicians think have difficulty feeling British as there are many possibilities. Indeed for many in England, Scotland and Wales, their British identity is reducing in salience while their English, Scots and Welsh identities are increasing in salience and undoubtedly this informs the debate about Britishness.³² Our interests, however, are elsewhere as many have discussed how the loyalty of Muslims is questioned by the government.³³ Equally, government attempts to 'cohere the nation' are said to focus on Muslims³⁴ and an example of this is a policy of community cohesion which is said to be a 'site for exploring the repackaging and re-branding of the British people',³⁵ that many argue has 'come to focus upon the Muslim community'.³⁶ The existing literature suggests that Muslims in Britain *may* be a group that leading politicians think have difficulty feeling British, but this is an empirical claim that needs to be supported by empirical evidence. Indeed, many have shown how the media portray Muslims as having difficulty feeling British,³⁷ but it is unclear if leading politicians think this. If they do, then it is worth noting that since the late 1990s quantitative studies have suggested the reverse.³⁸ Indeed, Anthony Heath and Jane Roberts' analysis of the 2005 Home Office Citizenship Survey shows that 43% of Muslim respondents claim that they 'very strongly' belong to Britain and 42% claim that they belong to Britain 'fairly strongly'.³⁹ If government and official opposition politicians believe that Muslims in Britain have difficulty feeling British they do so despite sociological evidence which suggests otherwise, and in this article we will show that this, to some extent, occurs.

We proceed in four stages. First, we clarify what we mean by 'difficulty feeling British' as well as our methodological approach. Second, government and official opposition speeches and policy documents are used to examine the claims that are made by leading politicians about whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British so as to discern what their thoughts on this subject might be. Third, we use elite interviews with existing and former members of the government and their shadow

cabinet counterparts to explore the thoughts of leading politicians on this issue more deeply and in the final stage, we conclude.

Concepts and approach

Bhikhu Parekh's recent work helps to illuminate what is meant by a 'difficulty feeling British' because he suggests that when we talk about 'national identity' we often do so in an objective or a subjective sense.⁴⁰ Objectively, one might refer to the identity of a political community; the institutions, the history, the values and the people that make it this political community and not another one. Subjectively, a national identity can be one of many identities that a person has and exhibits when they say things like they are 'British', 'French' or 'German'. We are more interested in the subjective sense because in trying to understand if leading politicians think that Muslims have difficulty feeling British, we want to know if they think that Muslims have difficulty *subjectively* identifying themselves as such. Indeed, this might be something that many have difficulty with as a socialist may identify with the 'workers of the world', a cosmopolitan may identify with 'citizens of the world' and both may be unwilling to identify with any nation. Equally, some national identities are seen as an artificial imposition that should be accorded little worth and some Scottish and Welsh nationalists may see their British identities in this way.⁴¹ Many may have difficulty feeling British, but others can also perceive a difficulty when none exists. Hence many who came to Britain in the late 1940s and 1950s from the Caribbean saw Britain as the 'mother country' and felt British,⁴² yet some in government had difficulty seeing them in this way.⁴³ A subjective sense of national identity has then an inter-subjective element that is crucial for this article because we are examining whether *government and shadow cabinet politicians* think that Muslims have difficulty subjectively identifying themselves as British.

We do so by first examining government and shadow cabinet speeches and policy documents relating to Britishness. The former are speeches on devolution, community cohesion, immigration and other such subjects relating to Britishness that are delivered by members of the government or the shadow cabinet. The policy documents we refer to are published by the government or the Conservative Party and focus on similar issues. Any starting point for examining such speeches and policy documents would be somewhat arbitrary, but we began to do so from 2001 as in that year two issues seemed to converge on the loyalty of Muslims and whether they felt British. The first was September 11th. The second was a Report that recommended a debate on 'the common elements of nationhood' in response to riots in which young Muslims participated.⁴⁴ This recommendation seemed to suggest that Muslims had difficulty feeling British, and credence was lent to this interpretation when the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, said

that the Report faced ‘head on’ how ‘people in the Asian community help the second and third generation feel British...’.⁴⁵

Not all such speeches and policy documents contain claims about whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British and elsewhere we show why many seemingly relevant ones barely mention this group.⁴⁶ Equally, our examination of these policy documents and speeches is *not* an attempt to quantify the frequency of certain types of claims or to try to explain why politicians are making them. Hence we neither count the number of times certain claims appear nor do we adequately contextualise and discuss where, when and to whom they were made. Instead we are interested in whether leading politicians *think* that Muslims have difficulty feeling British; hence, we focus on the claims that they make on this issue because they indicate what their thoughts on the matter *might* be. But these indicators are not perfect as politicians may make such claims to win support among voters, to show that they are ‘in tune’ with public debate, or simply because they think they are following the ‘party-line’. Their claims then *may* not reflect what they really think on this issue; hence, we use them merely to show what leading politicians are willing to say about Muslims feeling British and thus what they *might* think about this subject. We then verify these thoughts and illuminate some of the reasoning behind them using data from semi-structured interviews with some of these politicians and their parliamentary colleagues with similar ministerial and shadow cabinet responsibilities. Of course, there was no means of ensuring that the politicians we interviewed were not lying to us (or themselves), but our interviews did provide an opportunity to explore the thoughts of leading politicians more deeply than we otherwise could and what follows is what we found.

Speeches and policy documents

Looking first at the government speeches and policy documents, when he was Home Secretary, David Blunkett gave a lecture in which he claimed that ‘there will always be those... encouraging their followers to define their faith and their identity in terms of their opposition to outsiders rather than in positive terms... It is a worrying trend that young second generation British Muslims are more likely than their parents to feel they have to *choose* between feeling part of the UK and feeling part of their faith...’.⁴⁷ Blunkett thus suggests that a growing number of young Muslims feel that they have to choose between feeling Muslim and feeling British and he offers different reasons for this in the lecture including that some extremists may be encouraging it. Similar claims were made by Ruth Kelly and Liam Byrne when the former was the Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities and the latter was the Minister of State for Immigration.⁴⁸ Not part of the government, but an advisor to it, the Chairman of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Trevor

Phillips, assumes that young Muslim men have difficulty feeling British when he says that they should be told 'again and again and again' that they are British.⁴⁹

Some in government thus suggest that young Muslims are a group who could have difficulty feeling British, but consider what Jack Straw said as a Leader of the House of Commons and when talking about extremism:

Democracy is incompatible with any single, all consuming, identity. This, as we know, is a particular problem for certain minority fringe Muslim groups . . . Such groups also often argue that Muslims cannot be Muslims and British at the same time. *These people represent an extremely small fraction of the Muslim community, but they have shown an ability to amplify their significance to a degree far in excess of what is warranted by their numbers.*⁵⁰

In the next sentence, Straw says that Muslims could do more to distance themselves from extremists and he has also recently discouraged Muslim women who want to wear the niqab from doing so.⁵¹ But on the issue of whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British, Straw is not suggesting that young Muslims have any difficulty. Instead he argues that few Muslims do so and fears to the contrary result from a small number of extremists who have exaggerated their significance. In a document that Fiona Mactaggart published when she had ministerial responsibility for community cohesion, something similar is said. While stating that other identities are not incompatible with Britishness, she suggests that Muslims are one of many groups who use their faith as a significant way of identifying themselves.⁵² Elsewhere she goes further saying that 'British Muslims have consistently shown how it is possible to be British, Muslim and proud'.⁵³

Obviously the statements above are not inconsistent because if *most* Muslims feel British and Muslim, then *some* young Muslims can find this difficult. However, these statements are very different in nature as Straw and Mactaggart seem like they are trying to allay a fear that, as said earlier, is frequently articulated in the media: that Muslims in Britain have difficulty feeling British, while Blunkett and others suggest that they share this fear where some young Muslims are concerned. Indeed, both types of suggestions feature in an often-quoted speech by Tony Blair. Echoing Straw and Mactaggart, he claims 'Most Muslims are proud to be British and Muslim. . .'.⁵⁴ However, he also implicitly suggests that some Muslims have difficulty feeling British when he defines the latter in terms of values,⁵⁵ and does the same with integration.⁵⁶ As Britishness and integration are defined in the same way, any suggestion that a group is un-integrated is also a suggestion that there is some difficulty with their Britishness and some Muslims are portrayed as un-integrated. Hence Blair refers to extremist 'Muslims who shun integration' and three of his six 'measures that underscore' integration focus to differing extents on Muslims.⁵⁷ Blair's definitions

mean that if some Muslims are un-integrated, they have difficulty sharing the values that define the British people and thus that they have difficulty feeling British. His speech thus chimes with the divergent claims of Blunkett and Straw alike.

We find something very similar among leading Conservatives; some of whom suggest that British and Muslim identities can conflict. Hence when he was his party's Housing spokesman, Michael Gove claimed, 'A rising generation has been encouraged by those Muslims most prominent in public life to put their Islamic identity ahead of their citizenship'.⁵⁸ If prominent Muslims are trying to make people's Islamic identities more significant than their British citizenship, then a conflict is portrayed between being a Muslim and being British. But other Conservatives like the Shadow Justice Secretary, Dominic Grieve⁵⁹ and the Shadow Security Minister Pauline Neville Jones seem to go further. Indeed, at the launch of her committee's report, *An Unquiet World*, Neville Jones stated that the challenge 'is not how you try to indigenise Islam... which is important, but how you give British Muslims in this country the feeling that actually they are Brits, like any other British'.⁶⁰

Leading Conservatives thus suggest that British and Muslim identities can conflict while others suggest that Muslims have difficulty feeling British. But there are also leading Conservatives who suggest that no such conflict exists, at least at the level of the 'shared values' that Conservatives (along with some members of the government) describe as the basis of Britishness.⁶¹ Hence when he was the leader of the Conservative Party and in the week following one of the riots referred to earlier, just before the 2001 General Election, William Hague spoke of 'the way in which Muslim values are being built into the edifice that is modern Britain'.⁶² In another speech, he talked about the Muslim community demonstrating that while it 'has its own traditions of which it is rightly proud, a number of Muslim values are common to us all'.⁶³ Unlike Gove, Hague suggests no conflict between British and Muslim identities, at least at the level of values and shadow community cohesion spokeswoman, Sayeeda Warsi, goes further. When describing a cross-party trip to Sudan to try to release an incarcerated British primary school teacher, she not only stated that she was 'proud that Britain and Islam each accommodate the other',⁶⁴ but also said, 'I hope our mission to Sudan *demonstrated to people in Britain, and in other Western countries, that you can be Muslim and hold firm to your country's values and interests...*'.⁶⁵ Warsi thus rejects the notion that British and Muslim identities can conflict, and like Straw and Mactaggart, seemed keen to demonstrate the reverse.

In a similar manner to Blair, Cameron articulates these divergent suggestions in a speech that he gave at Cambridge University and does so in the following statement, 'the vast majority of families of recent immigrant origin do feel a strong sense of citizenship and what it is to

be British. Indeed, my time in Birmingham... showed that if we want to remind ourselves of British values... there are plenty of British Muslims ready to show us what those things really mean. *The problem is some do not*.⁶⁶ The latter accords with what we have seen: leading government and shadow cabinet politicians are making claims that point in different directions. Indeed, two discursive registers thus emerge whereby there are two groups of discourse on whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British. In the first register, we can place Blunkett, Gove and Neville-Jones' claims as, to differing extents, they suggest that some Muslims have difficulty feeling British. In the second register, we can place Straw, Mactaggart, Hague and Warsi's claims which, to differing extents, suggest the opposite and Blair and Cameron's claims fall into both registers. Of course, these claims may just be different messages that politicians hope will appeal to different audiences. Hence in the next section we consider what our elite interview data tells us about whether leading politicians really do think that Muslims have difficulty feeling British.

But before we do, note that in relation to the claims in the first register, we have already referred to Heath and Roberts' data which suggest that Muslims have little difficulty feeling British. However, as members of the government refer specifically to *young Muslims*, this data is again instructive. Using the Home Office's 2005 Citizenship Survey, it shows that 38% of Muslim respondents aged 16–24 say that they belong to Britain 'very strongly' and 45% in the same age group say that they belong to Britain 'fairly strongly'. The last figure is higher for Muslim respondents in this age group than it is for Christian respondents and those categorised as being of 'no religion'.⁶⁷ Indeed, when 'management by numbers' is a prevailing 'mood' in government and such figures stem from the government's own data sets (it is the *Home Office* Citizenship Survey), it is difficult to understand why these claims about young Muslims are made.⁶⁸ Yet some in government, and of course the shadow cabinet, claim to differing extents that Muslims have difficulty feeling British. They thus also appear to think this, and in the next section we will consider whether this is the case, but before we do, note something else.

The claims in both of our discursive registers come from leading members of *both* political parties which seems strange. Of course, many have written about how the Labour Party has re-orientated itself to become electable,⁶⁹ and the popular press suggests that Cameron's Conservative Party is doing the same. But regardless of such re-orientations, Jack Straw instituted the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, passed the Race Relations Amendment Act and he is not usually equated with anti-immigration and euro-sceptic rhetoric. Yet this is precisely what William Hague is equated with since his infamous 'foreign land' speech⁷⁰ and it thus seems strange to see Straw and Hague making similar claims over whether Muslims have difficulty

feeling British. Equally, Blunkett seems to be making similar claims to Gove who is a former head of the Conservative leaning think tank, Policy Exchange, which according to the Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, is cultivating a ‘renaissance of the centre-right’.⁷¹ Rivals then—like Blair and Cameron—are making similar claims about whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British, which suggests that they may also have similar thoughts on this issue and in the next section we consider whether this is true using our elite interview data.

Interview data

While unable to secure interviews with all those discussed above, the former Home Secretary David Blunkett, former Minister for Community Cohesion, Fiona Mactaggart and former Minister for Race Equality and current Minister for the NHS Mike O’Brien all allude to the same government priority that Blunkett encapsulates by saying:

bear in mind that we are talking about post 11th September, so the unfortunate and regrettable read over between, sort of, the Taliban on the one hand and Bin Laden on the other in terms of their alleged adherence to Allah, actually then leads into the feeling, I think, that there was a real problem in trying to hook the Islamic community and do something about them feeling as if they were part of the country.⁷²

After September 11th, Britain’s ‘Islamic community’ was thought to feel that their loyalty was questioned and thus they also felt excluded from the country, so the government wanted to reassure them by saying publicly ‘You are part of us’.⁷³ Helping to explain the governmental claims in our second discursive register and discussed by other government interviewees, we do not doubt the existence of this priority, but it would be difficult to argue that the earlier quotes from Blunkett were designed to reassure Muslims in the way described. Indeed, while Blunkett did not focus exclusively on Muslims and thought that ‘you can be first generation Pakistani and British’,⁷⁴ when asked which immigrant groups might have difficulty feeling British he said, ‘I think there’s a lip service to Britishness and the issue is if we get under the surface, do people really mean it, do they feel it?’⁷⁵ He adds:

you see Pakistani covers a lot of different backgrounds, Pushtan and all the rest of it, and so it’s difficult and they don’t always agree with each other. So I always have to find out who the community leaders are (laughs) . . . I think they would, I think all those groups would pay a lip service to being British . . .⁷⁶

Unsure about how many Pakistanis pay lip service to Britishness, Blunkett states, ‘I don’t have any authentic statistics on it, I don’t have anything that is not just pure anecdote. . .’⁷⁷ Indeed, when so many, as we have seen, say that they belong to Britain either fairly strongly or

very strongly, the notion that some Muslims pay lip service to Britishness can, at best, only apply to a small percentage of them.

But Blunkett's reason for thinking that some Muslims can have difficulty feeling British is also interesting because he says, 'I just feel that the more economically successful people are, the more they actually coalesce and the more they feel they're committed to, this is just statistically the case'.⁷⁸ Here Blunkett is aware of statistical evidence and while we are unclear about what evidence he is referring to, his comments on the subject of integration provide some additional insight:

The Hindu community have managed not to be the focal point of bitterness and hatred... because there's a very much larger middle class, and wherever you have a larger middle class... then integration, social cohesion go hand in hand... And therefore the answer to your question is those areas of inward migration, where people have been struggling at the very bottom end of the economic ladder, that obviously means Bangladeshi and to some extent Pakistani communities, although that is changing...⁷⁹

Blunkett thus seems to think that some Muslims can have difficulty feeling British because some of those who are from Pakistan and Bangladesh are 'at the very bottom of the economic ladder' and he believes that there is a relationship between feeling British, integration and being economically successful. Indeed this perceived difficulty among some Muslims is thought to be problematic: 'Is it a problem? ... It's a problem... in the long term if people feel an affinity with and a commitment to somewhere else, and... pulls on their consciousness and their identity and identification, which is why... I'm not an expert on this, but... there is such a terrible internal trauma for young people'.⁸⁰

He also thinks that there are implications for society, hence he says:

your affinity and identification with the place you live and the country you're in, does make a difference to the way you see the world, and the way you see your own representative institutions and organs, and we're almost getting to the point in Britain where there's been so much opprobrium poured on everything that we've got as a... society... people don't have faith in institutions, and trust, and confidence in where they're at... that alienation is very dangerous.⁸¹

It is assumed then that if some Muslims have difficulty feeling British, this means an affinity 'for somewhere else' that disturbs individuals and contributes to a more general alienation from British institutions and society which is very dangerous.

Indeed, the former Minister for Community Cohesion and the current Minister for Pensions, Angela Eagle agreed that economic deprivation as well as extremist activity might help to alienate many, including young Muslims. But crucially she noted that she was not saying that these groups would necessarily have difficulty feeling British.⁸² Eagle also accepted that the descendents of immigrants might have some difficulty integrating, but she later noted that 'what people

don't seem to understand about these post-modern times is actually that you have multiple identities and they actually do all fit. It's not either or. You don't have to choose...'⁸³ Naturally, she thus also thought that 'having a British identity isn't inconsistent with being a British Pakistani...'⁸⁴ Equally, Mike O'Brien, said, 'a lot of Muslims actually do' feel British and that they are unlikely to have a difficulty doing so because, 'a person can feel dual identity... you can be British and you can feel Pakistani... that's not a problem'.⁸⁵ Likewise Fiona Mactaggart suggests that some English people might have difficulty feeling British and even where she *may* have been referring to Muslims who do so as well, she thought that they were not really rejecting their British identities: 'it's like rebelling against the rules... If the rule-makers, if the British government has done something you think is wrong, like going to Iraq, then you can say, I'm no longer British, as it were, you know... That's a way of rejecting their values... But I'm not sure how profound it is, I think it's more a tactic...'.⁸⁶

There is also a perception that it is acceptable for some, or many, Muslims not to feel British. Hence O'Brien claims:

I would like people to feel British, but I don't need them to feel British. That's an individual choice and indeed part of the liberty the British people have is they can feel pretty much what they want. And they should be able to. And so it shouldn't be for me to tell them that they shouldn't be feeling this way.⁸⁷

Likewise, Eagle thinks clarifying what it means to be British is worthwhile, but does not think that anyone should be *expected* to feel British. She thus says 'I don't, I don't think that we should have these patterns—play these—have these expectations of patriotism...'.⁸⁸ These interviewees thus did not suggest that some Muslims pay lip service to Britishness; instead, they believe that most Muslims feel British and even if untrue, this remains acceptable.

Returning to our discursive registers, our data suggest that Blunkett's claims about young Muslims having difficulty feeling British do to some extent reflect his thoughts on the matter. He believes that some Muslims pay lip service to feeling British and this is thought to be something problematic that results from their lack of socio-economic success. Recall also those who claimed only a small number of Muslims have difficulty feeling British and seemed keen to allay fears to the contrary. Our data suggest that the government did indeed think it important to allay fears, not of society at large, but of Muslims who felt their loyalty questioned. Equally, our data shows that there are current and former government ministers who believe that most Muslims have little difficulty feeling British and even if this is untrue, it remains acceptable.

What about our Conservative interviewees? When Pauline Neville Jones was asked whether any particular 'types of people' might have difficulty feeling British, she answered, 'That's a very good question, and a kind of important question, actually. Umm, err, what I'm about

to say is not based on either work we've done or, or stuff I've read'.⁸⁹ Without referring to studies on the subject, she thought that there could be 'quite a lot of people who don't feel particularly British' and thus did not focus exclusively on Muslims.⁹⁰ However, when asked whether some Muslims might have difficulty feeling British, Neville-Jones answered, 'yep'.⁹¹ She was not alone, as Dominic Grieve seemed unaware of studies about whether any group might have difficulty feeling British and while thinking that non-Muslims might do so also, he said:

If looked at bluntly, I keep on meeting very pleasant people, not just Muslims, sometimes from other religious groups but I have to say principally Muslims, who seem to me to have views, and I have listened carefully to what they've got to say, which are certainly incompatible with development in our national and historical tradition.⁹²

Grieve and Neville Jones believe that some Muslims have difficulty feeling British and the former helps to explain why, when he states:

It is true there are only a tiny number of people who want to blow themselves up on the underground killing people for the sake of their view of what the world should be like. But equally it seems to me that whilst there are large numbers of Muslims living in Britain who have very little difficulty reconciling their religious views with the advantages of living in a pluralist democratic society, there are actually quite a large number of them who, whilst they might be quite grateful for the fact that they are living in a pluralist society rather than being persecuted somewhere else, *actually want to live in a society that is very different...*⁹³

Grieve is saying that while there are 'large numbers' of peaceful Muslims who are glad to live in Britain and benefit from doing so, they wish Britain to be a very different society. He thus suggests that aspects of what we described earlier as Britain's objective sense of national identity inhibit a subjective sense of national identity among some Muslims. Indeed, alluding to ways in which he thinks some Muslims wish Britain to be different and to the obstacle that this places on them feeling British, Grieve says, 'where the dictates of religion require that you should be trying to change the society to the image that you believe is fundamentally important for the salvation of humanity then you're going to find living in a pluralist democracy like the United Kingdom very difficult...'⁹⁴

Likewise, Neville Jones referred to 'aspects of modern western British secular society' that 'are particularly unattractive. The violence, the lawlessness, the drunkenness, the, um, the vulgarity', these are all things that no 'sane person would actually want to join'.⁹⁵ Again aspects of Britain's national identity in the objective sense are thought to inhibit a subjective sense of national identity.

But for Neville Jones, another issue is also salient. When asked if some Muslims can have difficulty feeling British because of their

socio-economic plight, religious reasons, perhaps something else, Jones said, 'I think it is a mistake to think that these things are purely associated with poverty',⁹⁶ it was more about:

whether you want to remain in the community, whether you want to get out of it, and how easy it is if you chance it, how easy it is to chance it into something else. And whether . . . your own . . . community accepts that. It's those things . . . which are . . . the issues that, urr, Muslims themselves need to confront . . . And where they're entitled to help from the rest of society, and so—and the rest of society should create a framework in which everybody wants to feel part.⁹⁷

Here Jones is suggesting that some Muslims are vulnerable to not feeling both British and rooted in the Muslim community. However, she is not advocating assimilation because she is suggesting that to encourage Muslims to become involved in the wider community, 'society should create a framework' which Muslims want to feel part of. Jones is thus suggesting that it is not only Muslims who need to change, British society must also.

Between them then, Grieve and Neville Jones seemingly think that some Muslims have difficulty feeling British because they wish Britain to be more Islamic and less vulgar and because they may have difficulty leaving their own communities and joining the mainstream. But now consider what our other Conservative interviewees said when asked whether some aspects of Britishness might be unattractive to Muslims. Unwilling to accept the notion that Muslims might have difficulty feeling British because they want Britain to become less vulgar, Paul Goodman, shadow spokesman on community cohesion claimed, 'I don't think that that is a picture, in my experience, that Muslims of, you know, Pakistani, Kashmiri origin have about the British or the English'.⁹⁸ He accepted that it was a view that many might hold about Western culture, but refused to take the next step of saying that this must also be a view that they share about Britain while also saying the following that relates to Britain becoming more Islamic, 'I have had some very mainstream people in my area say to me "oh no, we don't want, you know, the fully fledged Sharia State and we don't want Iran and we don't want Saudi Arabia . . . we don't want the Khalifah. . .".⁹⁹ Likewise, Damian Green, shadow immigration spokesman, thought that some of the more vulgar aspects of British life might also be unattractive to non-Muslims, and that 'If this were an undesirable place to live we wouldn't have upwards of half a million people every year coming to live here, which is what we have had for the past decade. So just looking at it factually, it is clear that this is a desirable country in which people want to live'.¹⁰⁰ Setting aside the accuracy of his figures, Green did not endorse the idea that certain unappealing aspects of British life were so prevalent as to inhibit some Muslims from feeling British.

Indeed, Goodman also seemed to differ on whether some Muslims had difficulty leaving their community and thus feeling British.

Drawing on his experiences with his constituents, approximately 9000 of whom are Muslim, Goodman accepted that 'the very oldest tranche of the people...I don't get the sense that when they arrived they wanted to engage with the mainstream culture'.¹⁰¹ But in successive generations, he says there are those 'who plunge themselves into the mainstream'.¹⁰² Before saying the latter, he alluded to how Western life was creating a strong sense 'of social breakdown...older men are worried about what's happening to their grandchildren'.¹⁰³ For Goodman then, it seems inaccurate to suggest that Muslims can find it difficult to leave their community because many of them join the mainstream to such an extent that this concerns their elders.

Goodman and Green thus had some difficulty with the rationale described by their colleagues for some Muslims having difficulty feeling British, but they also displayed different levels of difficulty with the idea itself. Green thought that Islamists reject western values as well as British behaviour and worried about the level of support they might enjoy. But the furthest he would go was to say 'I don't know whether they [Muslims] have difficulty feeling British, nobody's asked that question, I mean, and I'm literally just going on evidence', and later he also emphasised that Muslim and British identities were compatible.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Goodman did not know of any data on the subject and accepted that 'a certain type of English person'¹⁰⁵ might have difficulty feeling British as may 'radicals who identify with a particular extreme form of Islam'.¹⁰⁶ But with regard to more mainstream religious groups, he not only thought that 'there is a particular question about Islam...it's a question that might apply to other religions...'.¹⁰⁷ He also says, 'I don't think there's a particular problem about Britishness and Islam...'.¹⁰⁸

Returning again to our discursive registers, our data suggests that Neville Jones' earlier claims about some Muslims having difficulty feeling British reflect her thoughts on the matter and this is also true of Dominic Grieve. Collectively, they appear to think that as some Muslim wish Britain to be more Islamic, less vulgar and some of them also find it difficult to leave their own communities, this inhibits their ability to feel British. But our data also suggest that there are members of the shadow cabinet who have some difficulty with this reasoning and, to differing extents, the conclusion it leads to. There is then some coherence between the shadow cabinet claims that we discussed in the last section and the thoughts illuminated in this one.

Indeed, certain similarities and differences in the thoughts of leading Labour and Conservative Party politicians are now apparent. Focusing first on the differences, Blunkett thinks that some Muslims pay lip service to Britishness and their alleged inability to feel British is due to their lack of socio-economic success. Grieve and Neville Jones, in comparison, collectively believe that some Muslims can have difficulty feeling British because they want Britain to be less vulgar, more Islamic and because they can find it difficult to leave their communities. Goodman and Green

have difficulty with this rationale and to differing extents, the conclusion it leads to. But collectively O'Brien, Eagle and Mactaggart believe that most Muslims feel British and even if this is not true, it remains acceptable. Within each political party, interviewees had different sets of rationales for believing or questioning whether some Muslims have difficulty feeling British.

But these differing sets of rationales produce similar results because they divide leading members of both political parties. Hence, Blunkett's views on whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British differ to those of O'Brien, Eagle and Mactaggart's; Neville Jones and Grieves' views on this issue differ to those of Goodman and Green. Indeed as these internal party divisions occur on the same issue, a cross-party divide becomes apparent. Hence on the specific issue of whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British, Blunkett's thoughts are more like Grieve and Neville-Jones' than O'Brien, Eagle and Mactaggart's. Equally, O'Brien, Eagle and Mactaggart's thoughts on the subject are more like Goodman and Greens' than Blunkett's. Our interview data thus not only helps to show what the thoughts are of leading politicians on whether Muslims have difficulty feeling British, it also illuminates both internal party divisions and a cross-party division on this issue.

Conclusion

In conclusion then as the government and the shadow cabinet promote Britishness, we have asked, who do they *think* has difficulty feeling British and the existing literature suggests that Muslims *may* be one such group. Using policy documents and speeches, we found that some leading members of the government and the shadow cabinet claim, to differing extents, that some Muslims have such a difficulty while other argue that few do so and seem keen to refute notions to the contrary. Indicative of either these politician's views or just differing messages that are designed to appeal to different audiences, we interviewed some of these politicians as well as their government and shadow cabinet colleagues to explore their thoughts on the matter. In doing so, we encountered the following points. Some Muslims were thought to pay lip service to Britishness and a lack of socio-economic success was said to inhibit their ability to feel British as does their alleged difficulty leaving their communities and their desire for Britain to become more Islamic and less vulgar.

Looking first at whether some Muslims pay lip service to Britishness and the question of whether, as Blunkett claimed, they really feel it, the existing survey data suggests that they do. After all, we have seen that contemporary studies measure the *strength* with which people say that they belong to Britain and the methodology of those who gathered the original survey data is also important. They ensured that respondents knew that by 'British', it was not 'legal status, passports or the right of residence' that was being discussed; it was 'identification with a country, with a place and its ways of living' which suggests that respondents were

clear that they were being asked whether or not they actually *identified* with being British.¹⁰⁹ Equally, considering whether low levels of socio-economic success can inhibit people from feeling British, we do not deny that it *may*. But scholars do discuss how a sense of nationhood can exist and generate a 'deep horizontal comradeship', despite socio-economic disadvantage,¹¹⁰ and the proposed relationship between socio-economic success and feeling British should also apply to poor whites. Yet while some may refer to the latter being *un-integrated*, we seldom observe members of the government or shadow cabinet making public statements about this group's ability to feel British. As to whether some Muslims have such a difficulty because they also have difficulty leaving their communities or because they want Britain to be more Islamic and less vulgar, we know of no studies supporting these ideas, but even if true, they can only apply to a small percentage of Muslims, given the high proportion who are comfortable with a British identity.

Indeed, when leading politicians who have, or have had, responsibilities for community cohesion, immigration, race equality and so on offer such reasons for believing that some Muslims have difficulty feeling British without referring to the relevant survey data, it is not only possible to conclude that they should know better. It is also possible to suggest that the process that we described at the beginning of this article whereby people from the Caribbean felt British, but were not recognised as such by politicians seems to be occurring with Muslims today. Indeed, these politicians may reflect a broader trend that Bhikhu Parekh states is common among 'influential circles' across Europe and 'cuts across the political and ideological divide . . . is shared, albeit in different degrees and for different reasons, by rightwing nationalists, conservatives, liberals and socialists'.¹¹¹ This trend is to conceive of Muslims as a problematic group and this article suggests that some leading politicians across the party political divide do so with regard to some of their abilities to feel British. However, we have also shown that a willingness to question this characterisation also cuts across party politics, hence so may the desire to combat the tendency that Parekh describes.

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