



Theodore Dalrymple

## David Cameron's Muslim Muddle

*The British prime minister didn't go far enough—though he went further than most politicians.*

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Listening to and [reading](#) Prime Minister David Cameron's [recent speech](#) about Islamic extremism in Britain, I realized why I could never be a practicing politician. Its mixture of good sense, half-truths, evasions, political correctness, and electioneering was anathema to me. It was the stock-in-trade of a man obliged by his position to balance a hundred considerations at once, an obligation that precludes intellectual honesty, even if the latter is desired.

In some ways, Cameron's speech was welcome. He (or his speechwriter) has been "converted" from his previous view that Islamic terrorism has *nothing* to do with Islam, and now admits that such a view violates common sense, which was obvious all along. He also suggested that Internet providers and universities should be less complaisant toward Islamic extremists, and that the conspiracy theories the Islamists peddle should be vigorously countered and mocked. He also was right to say that Islamic terrorism is not caused by poverty or any other reason for complaint that supposedly justifies it.

On the other hand, he evaded some difficult though obvious questions. Extolling his own country, he said, "It is here in Britain where in one or two generations people can come with nothing and rise as high as their talent allows," which is certainly true: but this correct assertion has a troubling corollary. For if, in aggregate, certain groups do *not* rise, this reflects more on their group characteristics than upon the host country. For example, the Sikhs, who came to Britain from the Punjab with nothing, are now the second-wealthiest group by household, as classified by religious affiliation; notwithstanding individual successes, Muslims who came from the Punjab at the same time remain relatively poor. The explanation for this difference may not be religious, but it's an important question that no politician such as Cameron would dare to ask, let alone try to answer.

Similarly, the prime minister, who championed such "basic" values as democracy, freedom, sexual equality, and non-discrimination, did not pause to consider whether these were compatible with Islam. Certainly, they do not appear at first sight to be so, though no doubt some Muslim reformists would like to make them so; and Bangladesh, from which a large group of immigrants to Britain have come, is one of the few countries to have witnessed an explicitly *anti*-democratic mass demonstration. In most Muslim countries, it remains dangerous to be explicitly atheist. Criticism of Muhammad, even if reasoned and scholarly, would be even more dangerous.

When Cameron said that he wanted to build a more cohesive society, he didn't pause to consider whether cohesiveness can be built, as if societies were made of Lego. When he said that many immigrants to Britain didn't *feel* British, he deliberately missed the point that it's not how immigrants *feel* that matters, but how they *behave*. No one has any idea how British the Polish, Brazilian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other immigrants (of whom there are hundreds of thousands, if not millions in total) feel, but nobody cares, because none of them is intent upon the destruction of British institutions. This is not true of some unknown and probably unknowable—but possibly not negligible—proportion of Muslims, no matter which part of the Islamic world they come from.

Every politician, it seems, must tread on the eggshells of political correctness. Cameron felt constrained to say, “It is here in Britain where success is achieved not in spite of diversity but because of diversity . . . . Every one of the communities that has come to call our country home has made Britain a better place.” *Suggestio falsi* and *suppressio veri* can hardly go further. Success in Britain isn’t caused by diversity, but becomes possible for diverse people because of the rule of law—British law, not sharia, Jewish, canon, or any other law. And I doubt that the general population feels that the Kosovars, say, or the Romanian gypsies have, as a group (irrespective of any individuals among them), made Britain a better place. If asked for specific ways in which they have made Britain better, Cameron would no doubt answer, in best politico-sophistical fashion, that the problem is that, though resident, they do not call Britain home, and that they therefore need to be made to *feel* British by the building of a more cohesive society.

The price of power, it seems, is being obliged to say what you know not to be true and not to say what you know to be true. Such is the lesson of Cameron’s speech, by no means the worst of its genre.

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