

A Slip of the Tongue



Rupa

Huq, MP

by Theodore Dalrymple

A member of the British parliament called Rupa Huq was once a university teacher of sociology and criminology, and may therefore be assumed to have, *ex officio*, a firm grasp of unreality. Such a grasp is no handicap, of course, to a political career, indeed of late seems almost to be a precondition of one, to judge by the performance of many of our leaders. But some things are unforgivable, and Huq has just committed the unforgivable.

[Speaking at a joint meeting](#) of two pressure groups called British Future and the Black Equity Organisation, Huq said of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#), that he was only “superficially a black man,” and that if you heard him speak on the radio, you would not have guessed that he was black.

Now, much can be said about Kwarteng (who is of Ghanaian descent), for example that in no time flat he has caused considerable financial chaos despite—or perhaps because of—his doctorate in economic history. After all, it takes a very long education not to be able to see that to increase borrowing in times of rising interest rates might not be a terribly good idea.

But what Huq's comments suggested was that he wasn't really a black man because (a) he is highly educated and (b) he does not speak as many denizens of a black ghetto speak. She was but a short step away from saying that the superficiality of his blackness was proved by his non-use of dope or crack, and his lack of a criminal record. If he had been deeply rather than only superficially black, he would have been out mugging old ladies. You can't really get more racist than this.

Huq elaborated on her comments and referred to the fact that recent Conservative governments have had incomparably more ethnic-minority ministers than any other governments in history (and to their great credit none of them has ever used his or her membership of an ethnic minority to claim victimhood status or demand special privileges). She said—and I quote verbatim:

“Superficially they've had [the Conservatives] four brown Chancellors and that. But when you have a little brown guy who, and also the leadership contest [in which the majority of the contenders were of ethnic minorities] I think by that that I'd say alludes to that other when there was, say, Suella Braverman [who is of Goan and Kenyan Indian descent], Kemi Badenoch [who is of Nigerian descent], all these people in it.”

What is appalling about the above is not only the odious sentiment that I think that Huq is trying to express, namely that no person of minority descent can be a political or

cultural conservative and must, on pain of being considered an Uncle Tom, have the views approved of by Huq, but the manner of its expression. She was, as I have mentioned, a university teacher. If this is how a university teacher expresses herself, what standards can university students be expected, or required, to reach?

Having realized that she had made a potentially career-destroying mistake, [Huq said](#) that she had spoken in haste and used clumsy language “which in no way reflects my views.” No one, surely, would believe this; it’s much more likely that she had inadvertently let slip her true feelings. If her mind were an institution, it would be called (with more justification than usual) institutionally racist.

She later said, “On being challenged [at the meeting], I sought to expand on a poor choice of words, which I retract. I fell entirely short of my convictions on this occasion, therefore I will be seeking out and completing anti-racist-bias training.”

There is a contradiction here, is there not? If her words were simply ill-chosen, in effect a mere slip of the tongue, what need would she have had of any such training? On this hypothesis, her words did not represent or express her thoughts. If, on the other hand (and as seems more likely), what she said revealed her deepest-seated thoughts and feelings, then a little Maoist-style re-education, à la Robin DiAngelo, would hardly make any difference. Our innermost feelings are not like scratch-cards, which can be removed with a slight scrape or a session of bogus confession.

It isn’t wrong to have innermost feelings—they are unavoidable for beings such as humans—and it’s likewise inevitable that some of them will be discreditable. Which of us does not have feelings that he would rather that he did not have? I can hardly walk down the street without having them, so appalling do many of my fellow citizens appear to me.

However, we are all endowed with consciousness that allows us, and I would say requires us, to modify our actual conduct towards others. Whatever Huq's innermost feelings about Kwarteng, and indeed about blacks in general, she had a duty not to express herself in the way in which she did express herself. It was her behavior, not her innermost thoughts or feelings, that is to be reprehended.

A long time ago, Queen Elizabeth I said, or is alleged to have said, "I desire not to make windows into men's souls," a very wise saying whether or not she actually said it. This is not to claim Elizabeth I (if she said it) as a great heroine of liberty: She was no such thing. But (again if she said it), she was declaring herself to be anti-totalitarian. If it were conformity that she desired, it was only of the outward kind, not a conformity of soul. And no society, after all, can exist that doesn't demand a considerable degree of such outward conformity—though the precise degree is a matter of endless dispute.

Now, however, we are plagued by what Stalin, referring to writers, called "engineers of souls" such as DiAngelo: those who will not leave us alone until all our thoughts and feelings are "correct" according to their own conceptions of what is right and proper, thus assuring themselves of a job forever, since our thoughts and feelings are never correct. They underestimate or even deny the possibility of self-control, which is the deepest enemy of the would-be purifiers of our souls.

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