A Multicultural Nationalism?

TARIQ MODOOD

Today’s “new nationalism” marks merely the latest iteration of yesterday’s old nationalism.¹ I refer here to the majoritarian nationalism that seems to be the rising or dominant politics in many parts of the world today—Russia, China, India, the United States, many Muslim-majority countries, and central and eastern Europe. Yet, what is genuinely new is the identity-based nationalism of the center-left—sometimes called “liberal nationalism” or “progressive patriotism”—that is appearing in Anglophone countries. In a recent study covering Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, India, South Africa, and Peru, Raymond Taras expresses the novelty of his empirical findings as a move toward “nationhood.” He sees this as “enlarging the nation so that it consists of different integrated ethnic parts” and describes it as “a characteristically British way of viewing a political society.”² I present here a view that falls into this category, which I shall call “multicultural nationalism.”³ I argue that multiculturalism is a mode of integration that does not just emphasize the centrality of minority group identities, but rather proves incomplete without the re-making of national identity so that all citizens have a sense of belonging. In this respect, multiculturalist approaches to national belonging have some relation to liberal nationalism and majoritarian interculturalism, making not only individual rights but, also minority accommodation a feature of acceptable nationalism. Unlike cosmopolitanism, multiculturalist approaches are nationally-focused and not against immigration controls (subject to certain conditions).

For these reasons, multicultural nationalism unites the concerns of some of those currently sympathetic to majoritarian nationalism and those who are

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¹ Tariq Modood is Professor of Sociology, Politics, and Public Policy and the founding director of the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship at the University of Bristol. He was awarded a MBE for services to social sciences and ethnic relations in 2001, made a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in 2004, and elected a fellow of the British Academy in 2017. His latest book is Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism (2019).

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pro-diversity and minority accommodation in the way that liberal nationalism (with its emphasis on individualism and majoritarianism) or cosmopolitanism (with its disavowal of national belonging and championing of open borders) does not. Multicultural nationalism, therefore, offers a feasible alternative political idea to monocultural nationalism.

**Modes of Integration**

Multiculturalism is the idea that equality in the context of “difference” cannot be achieved by individual rights or equality as sameness, but has to be extended to include the positive inclusion of marginalized groups marked by race and their own sense of ethnocultural identities. The latter is reinforced by exclusion but may also indicate a form of belonging to many individuals. Multiculturalism thereby grows from an initial commitment to racial equality into a perspective that allows minorities to publicly oppose negative images of themselves in favor of positive self definitions and institutional accommodations.

If we unpack the idea of integration, we can appreciate that multiculturalism is a mode of integration. The need for integration arises when an established society is faced with some people who are perceived and treated unfavorably by standard members of that society (and typically the former also perceive of themselves as different, though not necessarily in a negative way). This may relate to various areas of society and policy, such as employment, education, and housing.

However, integration also has a subjective and symbolic dimension, which has a more general or macro character—how a minority is perceived by the rest of the country and how members of a minority perceive their relationship to society as a whole. Partial integration, even when achieved in a number of spheres, is not full integration without some degree of subjective identification with the society or country as a whole—what the Commission on Multi Ethnic Britain called “a sense of belonging”—and with the acceptance by the majority that you are a full member of society with the right to feel that you belong. Hence, a commission on these topics in Quebec has rightly said that “the symbolic framework of integration (identity, religion, perception of the Other, collective memory, and so on) is no less important than its functional or material framework.” This is particularly true because the current sense of crisis about multiculturalism and integration is operating at this macro symbolic level. This is evident when one considers how few policies exist in relation to integration, or how small the funds involved are compared to the importance of these issues.
In thinking about a general ethos or policy orientation at a national level, it is therefore crucial to engage at this macro-symbolic level.

Let us consider two variations of multiculturalism that offer alternative interpretations of the role of majority culture in national citizenship. The first position is liberal nationalism, which argues that the existing national identity of a liberal democratic country cannot be reduced to political institutions and a public sphere, or what is sometimes referred to as a civic national identity, but rather requires a cultural component consisting of language, history, ways of thinking, and ways of living. In practice, these cultural dimensions cannot be detached from a sense of peoplehood and are essential to the solidarity that underpins a liberal democratic national identity, including common welfare, willingness to pay taxes to help one’s fellow citizens, common public services, and other aspects of social justice. It follows that this foundational or national culture is also necessary for multiculturalism. Thus, multiculturalism must not loosen these bonds of belonging and mutual identification to the extent that appeals to national identity are not strong enough to call for individuals to be concerned with the good of the whole.

The second variation of multiculturalism is Quebecer interculturalism, which distinguishes itself from Canadian multiculturalism by alleging that the latter believes that all cultures are equal, and none is more Canadian than another in the eyes of the state. In contrast, Quebecer interculturalism commits to the preservation of its foundational Francophone culture. Consequently, all cultures are not equal; one is the ground upon which all others must stand.

One common feature between these two positions, and multiculturalism more generally, is that each assumes that the liberal state is not culturally neutral—all states in the European Union, for example, support a certain language(s); a religious calendar in respect of national holidays, the teaching of religion(s) in schools, and/or the funding of faith schools; certain arts, sports, and leisure activities; and so on. Saying that the liberal state is not neutral means that the majority culture already has a degree of recognition. Multiculturalism is a matter of extending this valued recognition to minorities. Multiculturalism puts a special value on identity and is thereby consistent with the idea that liberal democratic states may promote a national culture (within liberal limits and respecting other group identities); this would benefit the society or polity as a whole. Appeals to majority cultural heritage cannot be described as illegitimate per se. The multiculturalist point is that the predominance that the cultural majority enjoys in shaping the national culture, symbols, and institutions should not be exercised in a non-minority-accommodating way.
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The liberal nationalist goal is legitimate, but it should be recognized that its constraints are not just limited to traditional liberal freedoms of the individual. The latter may be enough to ensure non-discrimination and non-coercive assimilation, but multiculturalism goes further to emphasize respect for post-immigration ethno-racial, ethno-cultural, and ethno-religious group identities. Although this respect is a constraint on the kind of national cultural identity that may be pursued, it is more positively an opportunity to create a national identity that includes group identities in the reformed national identity, critically reforming, but not displacing, the narrative of the majority. Minorities may wish to contest dominant narratives that exclude them or fail to respect them and their contributions, but they do not compete with the majority in a zero-sum game. The process should be seen as a form of egalitarian “levelling up,” not a form of dispossession. More positively, going beyond liberal nationalism toward what we might call “multicultural nationalism,” the accommodation of minorities should not be seen as a drag on national identity, but as a positive resource; minorities do not dilute the national culture but vivify and enrich it. While liberal nationalism is often offered to facilitate the solidarity that enables social democratic redistribution of resources, the distinctive goal of multicultural nationalism is to allow people to hold, adapt, hyphenate, fuse, and create identities important to them as national co-citizens and members of socio-cultural, ethno-racial, and ethno-religious groups. In some ways, this brings multiculturalism closer to Quebecer interculturalism. Yet, the crucial distinction remains that while multicultural nationalism recognizes the legitimacy of majority culture, it denies the majority the right to refuse the accommodation of minorities simply because that accommodation runs counter to majority culture. For example, the majority in Quebec decided in the last few decades that Catholicism would no longer be a feature of Quebecer public space. This does not justify, however, the demand that Muslims, Sikhs, and Jews abide by dress codes in public life and public employment, making their own religious identity invisible. The majority and the minorities should stand in a dialogical relationship—in a two-way or multi-way adaptation—in which both the majority and the minorities may seek to have aspects of their core (albeit evolving) cultural identities preserved; neither has a
unilateral right to impose this exclusively upon the other in such a way that the other identity is not allowed to coexist. This is the ideal of “a multiculturally constituted common culture.”

**British National Identity**

“Rethinking the national story” is the most important yet most misunderstood message in the report of the Commission on Multi-Ethnic Britain. It argued that the post-immigration challenge was not simply eliminating racial discrimination or alleviating racial disadvantage, as important as these were as an equality strategy. Rather, the deeper challenge was finding inspiring visions of the United Kingdom, which showed its citizens where they were coming from and where they were going, how history had brought them together, and what they could make of their shared future. The Commission did not want to paint the past or the present in rosy colors. It recognized conflict and contestation of narratives as ever-present, but nevertheless insisted that, through dialogue and egalitarian commitment, a vibrant, new sense of the United Kingdom was possible. The British had to rethink what it meant to be British and remake their sense of country so that it was inclusive of all fellow-citizens. No one should be rejected as a cultural alien and as not sufficiently British because of his or her ethnicity or religion. All had to reimagine the United Kingdom together so that, for example, Muslims could see that Islam was part of the United Kingdom and, equally importantly, so that non-Muslims—especially secularists and Christians—could see Muslims as part of the new, evolving United Kingdom.

Hence, the idea that an emphasis on citizenship or Britishness was a substitute for multiculturalism is quite misleading. Indeed, in public discourse it is often overlooked that the theorists of multiculturalism have regarded citizenship as a foundational concept and explicitly developed multiculturalism as a mode of integration, albeit a non-assimilationist integration that respects group difference. Moreover, they have tended to emphasize not just minority identities, but also the inclusion of minority groups in the national identity. This is also how various Canadian and Australian governments have understood multiculturalism and continue to do so when center-left parties are in power. If we look at what multiculturalists have argued (as opposed to the caricatures presented by their critics), this has been the dominant interpretation in the United Kingdom too.

Two examples—both of which have to do with the place of religion in British national identity—may help to illustrate what this kind of multiculturalism means in practice. Some find the idea of including religion in national identity
controversial. I do not take the view that this question rests on a principle that national identity must embrace a country’s religious identities, nor the alternate principle that it must not. The question is contingent on the nature of different countries and their understandings of their own national identities and the unities that need to be forged or which are at risk of coming apart. If certain identities are important for certain minorities, then the majority should allow them a place in the national identity, and vice versa. Nor is it a matter of giving religious identities some absolute priority; just as there are some for whom their racial, ethnic, regional, and so on identities are important, there are also those for whom their religious identities are important. I am arguing for the inclusion of the latter on the same basis, not a prioritization.18 I take this view to be an aspect of a multiculturalism, which is based on the idea of group identity. This identity has to be shared because it is part of a group heritage or membership, and people want to pass it on to the next generation to see it survive and flourish in the future.

The first example relates to the Church of England, an institutionalized feature of England’s and the United Kingdom’s historical identities, as reflected in symbolic and substantive aspects of the constitution. For example, 26 Anglican bishops, by virtue of their status, sit in the upper house of the U.K. legislature: the House of Lords. The Archbishop of Canterbury presides over the installation of a new head of state, specifically the coronation of the monarch. Given the rapid changes affecting British national identity, and the way in which religion, sometimes divisively, is making a political reappearance, it would be wise not to discard this historic aspect of British identity lightly. It continues to be important to many, even when few attend Church of England services, and when that Church may perhaps have been overtaken by Catholicism as the largest organized religion in the country.19

Yet, in my advocacy for a multiculturalized United Kingdom, I would like to see the Church of England share some of these constitutional privileges with other faiths. However, multiculturalism here does not mean rigid parity. My expectation is that even in the context of an explicit institutionalization of religious plurality and equality—what one might call “multifaithism”—the Church of England would enjoy a rightful precedence in the religious representation in

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the House of Lords and in the coronation of the monarch. This would stem not from a crude majoritarianism, but from the Church’s historical contribution and its potential to play a leading role in the evolution of a multiculturalist national identity, state, and society. Indeed, over the last few decades, the Church of England has played a significant role in speaking up for religious minorities and having their needs accommodated by British institutions. Both the historical and multiculturalist contributions to national identity have a presumptive quality and, usually, they qualify each other. But, where they are complementary, the case for “establishment” is enhanced. In short, the Anglican establishment can be supported by multiculturalists when it is a facilitator of the public inclusion of non-Anglican faith communities and humanists.

That is the multiculturalist way forward rather than a pretense of state neutrality. The principle can be expressed as one of positive inclusion, not of colorblind or faith-blind formal equality. A second illustration concerns religious instruction (not merely religious education) and worship in the common school. We should not, for example, ask schools to cease Christian instruction or worship or to stop celebrating Christmas because of the presence of Muslims or Hindus; rather, we should extend the celebrations to include, for example, Eid and Diwali. Such separate classes and faith-specific worship need to be balanced with an approach that brings all the children together and into dialogue in common classes studying religion together (i.e., religious education). Without this inclusiveness, separate religious classes would potentially divide the school and society. But where common religious education classes are in place, voluntary pursuit of one’s own faith or philosophical tradition fulfills the multiculturalist approach to the place of religion in such schools. If the majority comes to the view that it no longer has a religion or does not want its religion(s) taught in common schools, fair enough. But that does not give the majority the right to veto the religious inclusion of minority faiths at school if any minority wants their faith included. Simply because Christians do not have any dietary requirements at school does not give them the right to prevent the provision of kosher, halal, or vegetarian options for other pupils.20

The general liberal and civic nationalist approach is to say that diversity requires a thinning of the national culture, so that minorities may feel included and do not feel that a thick majoritarian culture is imposed on them. This is also the approach of liberal multicultural nationalists like Will Kymlicka, who argues that:

...liberal states exhibit a much thinner conception of national identity.
In order to make it possible for people from different ethnocultural
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backgrounds to become full and equal members of the nation... In so far as liberal nation-building involves diffusing a common national culture throughout the territory of the state, it is a very thin form of culture.²¹

Yet, the two examples above do not represent a thinning of the presence of religion in the constitution, in state ceremonies, or in state schools; they entail a pluralistic thickening. The multiculturalism in these examples adds to the national culture not by disestablishing the national church but by incorporating other faiths and building relationships between them. Not taking religion out of schools ensures that commonality and diversity are both accommodated. In general, a multicultural society requires more state action not just to respect diversity, but also to bring it together in a common sense of national belonging. In many instances, that means adding a sense of national culture, not hollowing it out. Bringing minority faith communities into aspects of the national or public culture alongside Christians and humanists requires us to think differently about the country. It may require an appropriate public narrative about the kind of country we are now, as well as the state promotion of what Indian scholars call a composite national culture.²² My approach thus makes explicit that a national identity or a national public culture has a plural or composite character without connecting that to a presumption of national thinness.²³ The splendid London 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony—which emphasized historic continuity and cultural richness in a multicultural nation, not a post-national cultural hollowing out—provides a symbolic and highly dramatic representation of a national history and a multicultural nationalism.²⁴

**Cosmopolitanism and Immigration**

I have contrasted multicultural nationalism with liberal nationalism and Quebecker interculturalism. I would now like to contrast it with another version of multiculturalism: cosmopolitanism. In part, cosmopolitanism rests on a rejection of the reality of groups, seeing them all as “socially constructed” and usually with the intent to dominate subordinates of one’s own group, another group, or both. Instead, cosmopolitanism focuses on the need to liberate individuals—in their varied, hybrid, and fluid identities—from these groups.²⁵ Cosmopolitanism denotes persons valuing their personal diversity, having multiple identities—like Londoner, young, and female, with parents who are Indian and Scottish—and mixing freely with others who are equally mixed and who together produce ever-changing further mixes. In this view of group identities, forcing a person to choose one identity over all others—by, for example, having to be a good...
Indian girl or to be Scottish but not British—can be stifling. This is said to be evident if we stop speaking at the level of national models and policies and instead study cities, localities, and everyday experiences to see how urban life manages well without normative theory. In everyday multiculturalism, people become indifferent to group identities and relate to each other through multiple social roles such as neighbors, colleagues, students of local schools, users of public services, and so on. Moreover, it is argued that immigrants, as well as later generations, may remain connected to their countries of origins or to certain diasporas and imagined transnational communities, such as a black Atlantic diaspora or the global Muslim community (ummah); these transnational networks, ways of living, and self-identities are more real than national identities, multiculturalist or otherwise. According to cosmopolitanism then, we should resist identities that demand a singular loyalty to the nation and should think of ourselves as citizens of multiple places, and more generally, of the world. We should be free to live, work, and travel to wherever we want to and so our policy goal should be to eliminate national borders. Though this is a form of multiculturalism, it is not the one I am advocating.

Cosmopolitanism could only replace multiculturalism proper if the problems that it addresses no longer needed to be addressed or could be addressed by cosmopolitanism. Yet, neither of these is true. The problems in question have to do with the stigmatization, exclusion, and domination of not just free-floating individuals, but of groups of citizens. The problems of anti-racism and ethno-religious group difference, assertion, and accommodation are ongoing. Despite the progress that has been made, they have become larger and more pressing, as collected together under the rubric of integration. It is difficult to see how cosmopolitanism could digest a multiculturalism based on concepts of national citizenship and group accommodation when its take on such concepts is intellectually and normatively negative. Yet, cosmopolitanism makes a contribution of its own, highlighting some recent trends related to mixed identities and diverse neighborhoods including immigrants of many different kinds and statuses who are not so interested in settling in one country. It seems, then, that we need both multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, and should advocate
both as complementary (contrary to some of the advocates of each, who see them in a competitive relation).

Yet, there are issues on which cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism diverge. Cosmopolitanism addresses the problem of the growing transnational character of life in developed countries, say due to the freedom of movement for citizens of member states within the EU. It also draws attention to the fact that people who wish to enter, temporarily or permanently, are large in number, and many are escaping conditions of war, persecution, economic underdevelopment, unemployment, and poverty. The cosmopolitan answer is that we should, therefore, have a much more open immigration policy, perhaps extending the freedom of movement pioneered by the EU to people coming from outside the EU as well. In this regard, it is difficult to see what cosmopolitanism-multiculturalism complementarity would look like, given that cosmopolitanism does not include the goal of self-determining national polities. While it is possible to have a multiculturalism that encompasses group accommodation and culturally-independent, mixed individuals, it is difficult to reconcile the view that a multicultural society requires control of immigration and the view that it requires freedom of movement across borders.

Multiculturalism, at least in countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, was developed in the context of immigration control and does not challenge the right of the state to control immigration. It insists that such control must not be exercised in ways that are discriminatory in relation to the composite and overlapping criteria of race, ethnicity, and religion at the heart of post-immigration multiculturalism. Canada is universally regarded as a pioneer of post-immigration multiculturalism, having advanced it the most and having suffered the least from a backlash that has affected all relevant countries in the last one or two decades. Moreover, multiculturalism has come to define its national identity. Therefore, despite Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s occasional use of the vocabulary of “post-national,” Canada in fact appears an impeccable example of multicultural nationalism. While Canada welcomes migrants and settlers from all over the world, and naturalized citizens strongly identify with the country—relative, say, to the United States—Canada is highly selective regarding immigration according to its national interest; both in terms of its economic needs and its desire to promote Canadian national identification amongst those selected for citizenship. Even if we think of multiculturalism based on historic communities rather than on immigration, say, as in India or Singapore, restrictive immigration policies are the norm. Recent perceptions by large portions of various publics across the world display a belief that the
pace and scale of immigration has been too high and too unregulated. These perceptions derive from a number of factors, including racism and xenophobia, which are damaging to multiculturalism and have to be challenged. However, a related factor is cultural identity questions that cannot be simply dismissed as majoritarian, let alone as majoritarian prejudice. Multiculturalism is a national identity re-making project, which may in some circumstances lead to legitimate concerns about the identity effects of immigration, including its effects on existing citizens and minority groups, and the possible consequences of large groups of migrants that are admitted on the understanding that they are not to be thought of as on a pathway to settlement and national citizenship. While a cosmopolitan version of multiculturalism is also present in countries like Canada and the United Kingdom and is largely compatible with a more political, communitarian multiculturalism, the two seem to have incompatible views on immigration control.

Challenged to respond to the current nature and scale of migration, three multiculturalists of various stripes, with specific reference to Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, respectively, re-affirmed that multiculturalism is built on a concept of national citizenship. It thus assumes the right of states to control entry into their territories and denies any simple equality between citizens and temporary migrants. In my view, multiculturalism has to engage with migration at three levels. First, identifying and opposing negative, racist, or othering discourses, actions, and policies against migrants, no less than citizens (while recognizing that some citizenship-constituting rights and opportunities, such as residence or access to full welfare benefits, will not be available to migrants). Second, protecting and promoting the policies, forms of governance, and understandings that constitute the core of post-immigration multiculturalism, especially in relation to accommodation and civic recognition of ethnic minority citizens and accommodation of ethno-religious groups. Third, protecting and promoting the multicultural nation-building project. Cosmopolitanism is very strong on the first of these but ambivalent on the second and oppositional on the third. The incompatibility between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism in relation to migration is seriously problematic for progressive politics today but an issue for which I cannot see a solution.

CONCLUSION

The answer to the problem of monocultural, populist nationalism is not anti-nationalism or even liberal nationalism, but multicultural nationalism. It
Tariq Modood recognizes the importance of national identity to citizenship, and therefore to multicultural citizenship, without seeing the culture of the majority as necessarily a problem. Majoritarianism that seeks to privatize or individualize minority identities while demanding public assimilation is problematic, but this does not mean that multiculturalism cannot see the narratives of the historically evolved—and evolving—majority as central in the national identity. Similarly, the project to multiculturalize national identities can recognize the composite nature of majorities. Given that project’s sensitivity to the normative and political importance of identities and to the plural nature of identities, it is well-placed to appreciate why majorities can come to feel anxious about identity change and that this anxiety must be taken into account in working for inclusive national identities. Such multicultural nationalism unites the concerns of some of those currently sympathetic to majoritarian nationalism and those who are pro-diversity and minority accommodationist. Multicultural nationalism thus represents the political idea most likely to offer a feasible alternative rallying point to monocultural nationalism.

Notes


1. E.g., as in the ASEN Conference title noted above.
6. Commission on Multi-Ethnic Britain, The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (London: Profile Books, 2000). This was a report organized by the Runnymede Trust, comprising many leading racial egalitarians and academics, under the chairmanship of Lord Professor Bhikhu Parekh. Its brief was to review the position that the United Kingdom had reached in terms of ethnic equality and where more progress needed to be made; for a recent political theory discussion, see: Clayton Chin, “The concept of belonging: Critical, normative, and multicultural,” Ethnicities (2019), 1–25, online first, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1468796819827406.
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11. For a path-opening discussion and typology of the rights of majority cultures, see: Liav Orgad, The Cultural Defense of Nations: A Liberal Theory of Majority Rights (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Orgad, however, confines his normative discussion to uses of majority culture in relation to just two areas of policy, namely, immigration and naturalization. This is partly because his interest in “majority rights” is only in those that can be expressed in law. Multiculturalism is not only, or even primarily, focused on law (and Bouchard is not arguing for majority rights in law), and neither multiculturalism nor Quebec interculturalism is primarily interested in immigration and naturalisation but rather in state-citizen and citizen-to-citizen relations.
13. I leave aside the complication that sometimes-competing national identities are involved. This is most relevantly the case with multi-national states such as Belgium, the United Kingdom, or Canada, where state-level national identities may compete with sub-state national identities.
19. According to research based on self-reporting of membership, the number of members of the Anglican churches in the United Kingdom fell from 1.44 million in 2008 to 1.36 million in 2013; the number of members of the Roman Catholic churches fell from 1.61 million to 1.40 million: Peter Brierley, UK Church Statistics 2: 2010–2020 (Tonbridge: ADBC Publishers, 2014).
20. For an application of these arguments to the case of Flanders, Belgium, see: Tariq Modood “Mult-
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29. For a powerful statement that makes a claim like this at its boldest, see: Joseph Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).


