

WORKING PAPERS

Is Multicultural Nationalism Possible? If it is, what benefits follow?

Tariq Modood

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Abstract

I offer a conception of nationalism and of multiculturalism that I suggest renders their compatibility theoretically unproblematic and politically desirable; indeed, it may even be the case that multiculturalism presupposes such a nationalism. Confining itself to post-immigration ethnocultural formations and hybrid identities (and leaving aside all territorially based minorities), a very broad conception of the national, and based on an understanding of equal citizenship, it is a view allied to liberal nationalism. It works with the internal dynamics of contemporary liberal/social democratic countries without, however, privileging liberalism. The theoretical benefits are that one can begin without having to have a liberal theory and is able to critically evaluate liberalism from a multiculturalist point of view, and vice versa (though not done in this paper). Politically, multicultural nationalism can be adapted to work with a wide range of centre-left and centre-right views; above all, it allows one to be sensitive to minority identity vulnerabilities and majority identity anxieties within an integrated framework.

Table of Contents

Abstracti
Acknowledgement..... 1
The National..... 2
Liberal Nationalism and Multicultural Nationalism: some comparisons and contrasts..... 4
Conclusion 8
References..... 9

Acknowledgement

This paper was presented to the CERC-University of Bristol workshop, 'Is Multiculturalism Compatible with Multiculturalism' on 26 May 2022: https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/cerc-migration/news-events/events/2022/may/CERCWorkshop_Multiculturalism_nationalism_program.pdf

I am grateful for the stimulus from and collaboration with Geoffrey Brahm Levey, Varun Uberoi, and Clayton Chin over a number of years in helping me think through the topics of this paper, both in areas of agreement and disagreement.

The National

For some people, there is a fundamental clash between multiculturalism and nationalism. This is the standard view on the Right: so much of today's right-wing populist nationalism, both in the West and beyond it, as in India, is strongly anti-diversity and is often characterised as a backlash to multiculturalism, minority activism, and anti-racism – or even simply to the presence of ethnic, religious and racialised minorities, especially if their numbers are growing or perceived to be growing. The 'fundamental clash' view, however, is standard on the Left too. Many cosmopolitans and those who seek to expand the scope of human rights, especially in relation to questions of the regulation of borders, mobilities, and the treatment of non-citizens by a state, see any appeal to patriotism, national identity, national interest, or national pride as implicit or explicit hostility to ethnic minorities within one's borders. This extends well beyond the academic literature and is found in, for example, tensions within the British Labour Party between those who think it is essential to affirm the patriotism of their Party (such as the present leader, Keir Starmer) and those, including many supporters of the former leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who think such affirmations are whitewashing Britain's dark past and present.

Yet for those who are at all familiar with the Anglophone political theory of multiculturalism of the last few decades, the 'fundamental clash between multiculturalism and nationalism' thesis seems fantastic. The leading liberal theorist of multiculturalism, Will Kymlicka, exudes a Canadian identification and his classic book, *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), can be read as an earnest essay in liberal nationalism. Charles Taylor may aver from a certain kind of liberalism, but his work in this area is about "reconciling the two solitudes" through a commitment to the nationhood of Quebecers and the nationhood of Canadians (1993). Across the Atlantic, Bhikhu Parekh and I have been concerned to think about and see in practice a multiculturalism with British characteristics (Parek, 2006 [2000]; Modood, 2013 [2007]). Across further oceans, Geoffrey Brahm Levey's conceptualisation of Australian political multiculturalism emphasises and embraces its national character (2008). The point I am making exists not just in the pages of some books. Countries that have most prominently debated and implemented policies of multiculturalism – such as India, Canada, USA, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand – have done so not just within a national frame or to heal divisions but explicitly as nation-building, nation-preserving, or national renewal projects. National unity in diversity seems to be the watchword.

Multiculturalism, then, is here understood as being contained within a national consciousness and framework while simultaneously and essentially rethinking and remaking that consciousness and framework.

One important point of nomenclature. It is common in English to be able to discuss a phenomenon or a category, including its advocacy, without implying that it exists as a systematic body of ideas or a political position, what is sometimes called an ideology. One can believe that all individuals have certain rights without necessarily being committed to the political ideology of the individual, individualism. Similarly, one might favour some state ownership of economic enterprises without being an out and out socialist. Or one might favour some separation of religion and state without espousing a secularist worldview. Again, we have all heard women and men say, 'I believe in the equality of men and women, but I am not a feminist'. The point I am getting at is that while in some contexts we might want to distinguish between the *national* and *nationalism*, between, say national identification and a monistic ideology that subsumes all politics to the promotion of the interests of a particular nation-state, I shall not be observing that distinction here. When I talk about 'multicultural nationalism' it is interchangeable with, say, 'multiculturalising the national'. Thus, for example, to talk about remaking a national identity so that it is inclusive of marginalised and racialised minorities is a form of political nationalism. There are certainly contexts in which I might say, 'I believe in the national, but I am not a nationalist', but my discussion of multicultural nationalism is not one of them.

I then answer the question of this workshop, 'Is Multiculturalism Compatible with Nationalism?' with a yes. I want to argue, however, that there are at least two different multiculturalism-nationalism compatible positions and that the two that I discuss, namely, liberal nationalism and what I will call multicultural nationalism, are allied but different.

Let me begin by offering a definition of how I am using 'nationalism'. My two-step definition has a minimal or threshold aspect and points to how the minimal moves towards a comprehensive 'ism':

- i) Minimal: a societal perspective or a politics that gives normative significance to the national
- ii) And connects it to other things that have normative or other significance; the more things, the more nationalist (maximal).

It follows that nationalism is varied, and to accept one kind is not to necessarily accept another. Indeed, there are likely to be very few people who will accept all possible forms of nationalism as different forms of nationalism – especially exclusivist versus inclusivist forms – are inconsistent with each other. I know that some argue that Othering/exclusion is involved in all kinds of nationalism and so this cannot be the basis for distinguishing between the different forms (Valluvan, 2019), but I hope to show this is not the case.¹ While it is evident that some, perhaps many, kinds of nationalism are exclusionary of some citizens or prospective citizens, this feature is not part of the core definition and does not capture the normative character of nationalism (Parekh, 1995).

Connecting the national to (i) the state, (ii) citizenship, and (iii) belonging, is not without controversy but will be intelligible ideas to most people. Each connexion is presupposed by multicultural recognition and inclusion, but I shall not attempt to defend those first three steps here. I shall simply assume that a normative case can be made for those connexions.

My first substantive point is that all states and citizenship, and the forms of membership and belonging that go with them, have some historical-cultural character that cannot be reduced to rights. Hence, a rights-based or constitutional or civic nationalism that is not also, to some extent, 'culturalist' is impossible. So, of any state, one can ask 'culturalist' questions; proposing or opposing 'culturalist' policies cannot be ruled out on the grounds that they are illegitimate or have nothing to do with the civic sphere.

Someone may say that they are not interested in the Germanic character of the German state, their normative commitment is only to its civic character. However, if that is the case, why should all fellow citizens accept its Germanic character? Why should some not seek to de-Germanise the German state? Suppose they wish the German state to stop using the German language as its primary form of communication. Well, it will need to use a language. Suppose they propose that the language should be Turkish. A fundamental transformation like that could not be done overnight, so they come up with, say, a 25-year plan to achieve this. What is the civic nationalist's response to this? They clearly cannot object to it on cultural grounds, because they are normatively indifferent to the cultural character of the polity. They aspire to the state being culturally neutral, to having no cultural character, but as we have noted, at least in relation to language, that is impossible. They can only mount practical objections, such as that too much expenditure or energy will be involved, which should be devoted to other political projects. So, it seems the civic nationalist, regardless of their stated normative commitments, is willing to accept the cultural status quo in quite a profound way. Such normative civicism, by making certain questions off-limits, seems to be a form of conservatism in relation to the national culture.

¹ It is true though that '[i]t is only when you meet someone of a different culture from yourself that you begin to realize what your own beliefs really are' (Orwell, 1962, p. 145). More generally, it could be said that identities are relational or dialogical. Yet one must beware of essentialising the idea that a group's identity lies in what differentiates it from (key) others. An essentialising logic that I think is a main feature – albeit not in relation to social groups, but epistemological categories – of Oakeshott (1933).

Moving beyond that neutralism or anti-cultural nationalism means a politics in which it is legitimate to argue for and against aspects of the public culture and the national history, how it is interpreted, how it is mythologised, its exclusionary and inclusionary effects, whether the country should be officially monolingual or bilingual, and so on. So, we are now in a space in which multiculturalism and mono-cultural nationalism operate. It is a space in which liberal neutralism and cosmopolitanism have no traction. It is the terrain on which liberal nationalism and multicultural nationalism are to be found.

Going back to the German-Turkish example (or, equally, the making of German as the national language of Turkey), for liberal nationalism (hereafter LN) and multicultural nationalism (hereafter MN), it is about *identity*. Of course, the same practical questions arise, but for LN and MN, the question is: which language(s) best express or are consonant with the national identity of Germany today, in terms of achievement and aspiration, and can be democratically sustained? While for liberal individualism, constitutional patriotism, and cosmopolitanism there are no normative questions of identity in relation to minorities, integration, or inclusion; and for civic nationalism, identity is restricted to politics or citizenship, understood as distinct from national culture, for LN and MN identities and citizenship are part of a larger framework. Integration has a number of components based on opportunities to participate, which are context-specific (employment, housing, etc.) and need to be secured by law and policy initiatives. It also has an inter-subjective and symbolic dimension, which has some context-specific features, but also 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 (Modood, 2010). Even if members of ethnic minorities are fully integrated in terms of legal rights, access to employment, or education, that does not mean they have achieved full social integration. This also requires 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' (CMEB, 2000) – and acceptance from the majority population that the minority persons are full members of society and have the right to feel that they belong. These identifications and exclusions are imaginative, as well as having to do with norms, principles, rules, and values, and are part of a general understanding that we as members of society have about what our society is and what it is to be a member. While it is not easy for members to state and be subject to continuous questioning and interpretation, contestation, and creative representation, it informs popular understanding and 'high' culture as well as political ideas. As the Quebec Consultative Commission put it, "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" (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; see also Bouchard, 2011). This is particularly relevant because the sense of 'crisis' about multiculturalism and integration operates at this general and societal level. This is evident when one considers how few the policies directed at integration are or how small the funds involved are compared to the headline importance that the issues regularly achieve. What distinguishes LN and MN from other 'isms' mentioned above is that they think this macro-symbolic level is relevant to questions of inclusion and citizenship, to equality and 'difference' (Levey, 2013). They can, however, exhibit different understandings of the national, of multiculturalism, and of the relationship between the two – between LN and MN – but also within them. Some of these – but not at all in a comprehensive way – I explore below.

Liberal Nationalism and Multicultural Nationalism: Some Comparisons and contrasts

David Miller is one of the leading liberal nationalists, one that some authors understand to be relatively unaccommodating of minorities; primarily because he utilises, it is claimed, a public-private distinction. It is said that like any other liberal, he wants to keep matters such as 'faith, ritual, and worship' beyond the reach of political intervention and in the private sphere (Gustavson,

2019, p. 703) .Yet in his principal statement on LN, Miller explicitly says, “So we cannot sidestep the problems of cultural pluralism by supposing that we can legitimately require all identities other than national ones to be ‘privatized’” (1995, p. 123). It is true that he worries that certain kinds of recognition (he calls it ‘radical multiculturalism’ and instances Young [1992]) reifies group identities, putting groups into separate hermetic boxes and thus undermining the sense of national cohesion necessary to sustain a national identity (Miller, 1995, p. 133-138). Yet, Miller also believes “existing national identities must be stripped of elements that are repugnant to the self-understanding of one or more component groups” (1995, p. 142), though he does also require dialogically that minorities shed elements of their values that are at odds with the principles of national identity. Miller supports the idea that state schooling in Britain should be multifaith, and while he appreciates that countries like the USA and France might do things differently, he does not think that religious education, including pluralistic religious education, is intrinsically private or something outside the national public culture, but rather an important feature in Britain in making the national identity inclusive, one of the goals of LN (p.144).²

Miller is a prominent LN, but other LNs differ from him in important ways. Kymlicka (1995) is a significant LN text and is more interested in national minorities or Indigenous people rather than post-immigration ethnoracial and ethnoreligious formations, which is reflected in the shape of its theory. I have already said that my interest is confined to the post-immigration groups. The point I am making now is that it’s not simply that all LNs do not share the same view of what nations their theory is referring to; I am drawing out the implication that not all LNs or all multiculturalists mean the same thing by nation, national identity, and nationality. The object of Miller’s theory is a country like Britain, which is my own interest. On the other hand, Kymlicka’s foundational work is built around historic, territorial minorities such as Indigenous peoples and the Quebecois in Canada, whom he regards as nations or societal cultures, not just constituents of an urban *mélange* and an interactive diversity. He thinks of Canada as a multi-national federated state and, therefore, possibly not a nation. I, with Miller, think Britain, no less than Scotland, is a nation, meaning that the term ‘national’ applies to each of them and they fall within the normative concept of the national as I am using it (with whatever qualifications that may be necessary). Specifically, my interest here is in independent countries such as Canada and Britain; and if Scotland and Quebec were independent countries, similar issues of integration would apply.³

While Miller (1995) can be said to be a cautious multiculturalist or have a cautious take on multiculturalism, this is not typical of LN. Kymlicka leads with multiculturalism, though, as I have explained, their multiculturalism is primarily about national minorities, and so he is focused on a different problematic for Miller and me. I will use Kymlicka’s LN multiculturalism as a point of contrast to MN. Kymlicka (1995) philosophically begins with individuals, not countries, but recognises that individuals need ‘societal cultures’ as ‘contexts of choice’; some societal cultures dominate existing states, so territorial groups should be able to have their own territory in which their culture also enjoys some kind of privileged status in order to be the individuals necessary for their individuality, freedom, and authentic growth. It is fair compensation for territorially and culturally distinct minorities or ‘nations’ in states dominated by a cultural majority to have a significant degree of self-government and group representation. This is a solution that is not

² For a more general distinction about whether the public-private distinction is a good basis for distinguishing LN from other nationalisms, see Daniel (2022).

³ On whether Britain is a nation or just a polity, or relatedly what does British national identity consist of, Varun Uberoi (2018) points out that Britain’s leading political theorist of multiculturalism, Bhikhu Parekh, has taken different views at different times. However, Uberoi believes that the view that is most justifiable and most consistent with Parekh’s thought as a whole is that England is a nation and Britain is a polity, not a nation (2018). While Parekh and Uberoi are MNs, here they may be close to the LN, Kymlicka (1995). I squarely identify as a MN but on this point am in agreement with the LN, Miller (1995)

feasible for post-immigration ethnic minorities, nor would it be just for them to demand it as they, their parents, or grandparents willingly left countries where they had their own societal culture, to join a country like Canada with different societal cultures. Justice warrants that they should be allowed to maintain some distinctive cultural practices, which may indeed require some recognition and accommodation from the state, but their individual growth and freedom principally require that they be fully and equally integrated into the dominant majority/state culture (Kymlicka, 1995). In this integration, it is difficult to see that philosophical individualism is doing much work. Kymlicka's politics are more accommodating of minorities than Miller's, but the difference seems to be that Kymlicka takes it for granted that the state-level national identity, Canadian-ness, will maintain itself, while Miller gives some thought to how a national identity is to be sustained and the legitimacy of state action to achieve that. Kymlicka is not indifferent to there being such a state-level identity. But for him, the multiculturalist project of inclusion can become a central part of that identity. I share this multicultural nationalism – an appropriate term of description for Kymlicka – but I do not see how it is derived from the philosophy of individuals and their need for societal cultures.

At a conference in November 2021 in Paris, held to mark the 25th anniversary of Kymlicka's 1995 publication, albeit delayed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kymlicka gave a more heightened attention to national identity (here meaning what Miller and I mean by national identity rather than on national minorities). He argued that national states have a tendency, unless actively challenged, to create an exclusionary peoplehood, a 'we' based on the cultural majority. Two things were needed to remedy this. First, minorities should be provided with a protective shield of compensatory rights in the way elaborated in Kymlicka (1995). However, it had become a growing conviction of his that this was not enough. Drawing on survey data created with colleagues, he suggested that even when members of minority groups, especially post-immigration minorities, had full equal rights and were perceived as law-abiding, hard-working contributors to the economy and society, and actively recruited by employers, they may still not be fully accepted and thought of as part of the national 'we'. They may be thought to not fully be committed to, say, Canada and its national culture, or willing to make sacrifices for the well-being of the country, and, worse still, to be thought of as disloyal (Banting et al., 2020; Harrell et al., 2020). Under such circumstances, full equal citizenship or membership was not possible without a rethinking or remaking of national membership and the national identity. Kymlicka insisted, however, that this was a secondary task and that compensatory rights were fundamental. This is what I challenge.

I fully share the (secondary) argument about intellectually and politically rethinking national identity and membership. But I do not see how it is derived from Kymlicka (1995); i.e., from what we might call the political theory of liberal multiculturalism. Stronger still, I think that what Kymlicka thinks of as secondary is actually fundamental. Because it is possible to derive from the idea of a national 'we' that certain groups who are part of the 'we' have special needs – these can be welfare and economic needs but also can be, say, cultural or religious needs – that require to be accommodated. Compensatory rights may be regarded as a means of delivering recognition in certain circumstances. It is because dual recognition of a group as a group and as part of the 'we' is fundamental that we can have a political project of identifying and challenging misrecognition and working for the transformation of negative identities into positive identities without any special theory of individualism. In short, while there is no logic that gets us from special rights to national, multicultural inclusivity, once we have an idea of a multicultural national inclusivity, that our co-citizens stand in need of recognition, and that their identities should be respected and seen as part of our national, multi-faceted, plural 'we', we can argue for appropriate forms of accommodation – 'rights', if you will. While my concern is with the distinctive needs of post-migration groups, I think the same argument may have some purchase in relation to national minorities too.

Or, to put it another way, I find myself very much in political agreement with Kymlicka (1995) that minorities will never be fully accepted by majorities until both can play some part together in

reimagining a shared national identity. But it is precisely because of agreement on that point that it suggests that Kymlicka's theory is not necessary in order to establish what he wants to say about ethnic minorities, as I can reach the same conclusions without the theory. As Geoff Levey (2019) has said of an approach such as mine (grouped together with colleagues into a 'Bristol school of multiculturalism' or 'BSM') and that "argues for a more open, less liberal-centric or constrained dialogue between cultural minorities and the dominant majority"..."[i]t focuses on remaking the national narrative through inclusive public rhetoric, symbolic recognition, and institutional accommodation that is grounded in national inclusion itself rather than in notions of individual autonomy and an expanded set of rights. The logic, as I read it, is that by broadening the national story, residual areas of institutional and social marginalisation will lose their sanction, and so, reform" (Levey, 2019a, 1001; 1005).⁴

Besides the relationship to liberal principles and to the national, let me also mention two other differences between Kymlicka's LN and my MN. While in his recent work, Kymlicka (2022) has started emphasising transforming the national culture by including something of the minorities in it, in his earlier work he took the view that multicultural citizenship was best served by ensuring the absence of a thick public culture:

"...liberal states exhibit a much thinner conception of national identity. In order to make it possible for people from different ethnocultural 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" (2002, p. 55-56).

In my view, whilst thinning may indeed be what is sometimes necessary or part of what is necessary (cf., Miller's 'existing national identities must be stripped of elements that are repugnant to the self-understanding of one or more component groups', quoted above), this is to turn a means to an end into a principle. As we have already seen, sometimes to achieve maximum inclusion, one will want to add to the national culture, not subtract. Let me sharpen the difference by contrasting the way Kymlicka holds religion at arm's length and does not consider how it can play an egalitarian and inclusive role. Let me illustrate these two points together with two examples I have used before (Modood, 2019).

The Church of England has a uniquely privileged status as a religious organisation in Britain, is part of the country's historic identity, and is acknowledged as such by most people in Britain, regardless of their religion, if any. At the same time, Britain is clearly a multi-faith country, a dimension of its public life that is growing and is so far institutionalised to a small, albeit growing, degree. It is understandable that in this situation, a multiculturalist might move towards disestablishing the Church of England. But what if it was found that the minority faiths were not in favour of disestablishment, seeing in that not a new recognition of minority faiths but less recognition of religion in general (Modood, 1997; Modood & Thompson, 2021). At the same time, the Church was gradually seeing its national role as, among other things, the promotion of multi-faith and multicultural inclusion. Would those not be reasons to consider thickening the religious identity dimension in Britain's institutionalised image of itself rather than a thinning? My other example is the broadening of the religious curriculum and the provision of religious instruction and worship in schools if and when requested by minority communities. This kind of pluralistic religious thickening is not favoured by Kymlicka. When Levey (2019b) pointed out this contrast in the treatment of religious groups between Kymlicka's and the Bristol School approach, Kymlicka's reply was that this was not a difference in kind but simply that the BSM had to deal with religion and secularism because such debates became prominent much earlier in Britain than in Canada (2019, p. 973). Levey did not accept this reply and was right to not do so. Kymlicka did consider the place of religious diversity in relation to his conception of multiculturalism, and his earlier view

⁴ The key figures identified by Levey as members of the Bristol school of multiculturalism are Bhikhu Parekh, Varun Uberoi, Nasar Meer and me (Levey 2019b).

was that multicultural recognition should not be extended to organised religion because religion and ethnicity were different in kind (2001). There is nothing in his theory to explain why they are different in kind, but he held the view that the integration of religious migrants such as Muslims has been best achieved in the United States, where no religion enjoys state support, but all denominations are allowed to flourish in equality with the rest (Kymlicka, 2009, p. 548). More recently, Kymlicka has come to the view that “all of the arguments for adopting multiculturalism as a way of tackling the legacies of ethnic and racial hierarchies apply to religion as well” (2015, p. 28). Indeed, he says this issue is “perhaps the key question for multiculturalism in Canada at the start of the 21st century” (p. 27). That may be the case, but he has not yet attempted to show how religion fits into his theory. If one comes to multiculturalism without having to think ‘what is the liberal position on this’, one will be much more open to both the needs of minorities and the character of the relevant public culture and will look for within it resources – such as the Church of England and the significance that religion has for certain minorities – that can be adapted to serve multiculturalist goals. I do not take the view that this question rests on the principle that national identity must embrace a country’s religious identities, nor on 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.

Conclusion

By way of concluding this discussion, let me emphasise what LN and MN have in common, even though they can have contrary takes on it. It is the idea that minorities that suffer forms of misrecognition and non-recognition – discrimination, exclusion, ‘othering’ and oppression, and so on – need recognition. This need is central to a multiculturalist understanding of equality but consists not just of an understanding of the minority as a discrete group but of a politics of inclusion into the collective ‘we’ from which they have been absent, excluded, or included in a marginal way, which denies them equal citizenship. This politics of inclusion involves re-making the ‘we’ in a way that is not just about rights, laws, or policies. Yet, as the ground of equality is a shared national citizenship, inclusion simultaneously is an appeal to that citizenship as well as a critical act of reformation and repair based on an aspiration that all citizens should not just have the same effective rights, *de jure* and *de facto*, but they can all have a sense of belonging to that country. This is not merely a sentimental belonging or merely imagined but involves dialogue and contestation about what it means to belong and the terms of membership. Recognition here means empowering minorities so that they can participate in this dialogue and, through participation, empower themselves further by collectively reimagining the country they belong to and which it wants them to belong to.⁵

⁵ For an excellent recent discussion on this, see Clayton (2021). For varying and opposed views on the relationship between multiculturalism and nationalism, see Koopmans & Orgad (forthcoming, 2022).

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