

# **The Multiculturalism Backlash**

European discourses, policies and practices

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## 2 The rise and fall of multiculturalism?

### New debates on inclusion and accommodation in diverse societies<sup>1</sup>

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Ideas about the legal and political accommodation of ethnic diversity have been in a state of flux for the past 40 years around the world. A familiar way of describing these changes is in terms of the “rise and fall of multiculturalism.” Indeed, this has become a kind of “master narrative,” widely invoked by scholars, journalists, and policy-makers alike to explain the evolution of contemporary debates about diversity. Although people disagree about what comes “after multiculturalism,” there is a surprising consensus that we are indeed in a “post-multicultural” era.

My goal in this chapter will be to explore and critique this master narrative, and to suggest an alternative framework for thinking about the choices we face. In order to make progress, I will suggest, we need to dig below the surface of the master narrative. Both the rise and fall of multiculturalism have been very uneven processes, depending on the nature of the issue and the country involved, and we need to understand these variations if we are to identify a more sustainable model for accommodating diversity.

In its simplest form, the master narrative goes like this:<sup>2</sup>

- From the 1970s to mid-1990s there was a clear trend across the Western democracies towards the increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multiculturalism policies and minority rights. These policies were endorsed both at the domestic level in various states and by international organizations, and involved a rejection of earlier ideas of unitary and homogenous nationhood.
- Since the mid-1990s, however, we have seen a backlash and retreat from multiculturalism, and a re-assertion of ideas of nation-building, common values and identity, and unitary citizenship—even a “return of assimilation.”
- This retreat is partly driven by fears amongst the majority group that the accommodation of diversity has “gone too far” and is threatening their way of life. This fear often expresses itself in the rise of nativist and populist right-wing political movements, such as the Danish People’s Party, defending old ideas of “Denmark for the Danish.”
- But the retreat also reflects a belief amongst the centre-left that multiculturalism has failed to help the intended beneficiaries—namely,

minorities themselves—because it has failed to address the underlying sources of their social, economic, and political exclusion, and may indeed have unintentionally contributed to their social isolation. As a result, even the centre-left political movements that had initially championed multiculturalism, such as the social democratic parties in Europe, have backed away from it, and shifted to a discourse that emphasizes ideas of “integration,” “social cohesion,” “common values,” and “shared citizenship.”<sup>3</sup>

- The social-democratic discourse of national integration differs from the radical right discourse in emphasizing the need to develop a more inclusive national identity, and to fight racism and discrimination, but nonetheless distances itself from the rhetoric and policies of multiculturalism. The term “post-multiculturalism” has often been invoked to signal this new approach, which seeks to overcome the perceived limits of a naïve or misguided multiculturalism while avoiding the oppressive reassertion of homogenizing nationalist ideologies.<sup>4</sup>

This, in brief, is the master narrative of the “rise and fall of multiculturalism.” It helpfully captures important features of our current debates. Yet in some respects it is misleading, and may obscure the real challenges and opportunities we face.

In the rest of this chapter, I will argue that the master narrative (a) mischaracterizes the nature of the experiments in multiculturalism that have been undertaken over the past 40 years, (b) exaggerates the extent to which they have been abandoned, and (c) misidentifies the genuine difficulties and limitations they have encountered.

### **What is multiculturalism?**

In much of the post-multiculturalism literature, multiculturalism is characterized as a feel-good celebration of ethnocultural diversity, encouraging citizens to acknowledge and embrace the panoply of customs, traditions, music, and cuisine that exist in a multi-ethnic society. Alibhai-Brown calls this the “3S” model of multiculturalism in Britain—saris, samosas, and steel drums (Alibhai-Brown 2000). Multiculturalism takes these familiar cultural markers of ethnic groups—clothing, cuisine, and music—and treats them as authentic cultural practices to be preserved by their members, and safely consumed as cultural spectacles by others. So they are taught in multicultural school curricula, performed in multicultural festivals, displayed in multicultural media and museums, and so on.

In my view, as I will explain below, this is a caricature of multiculturalism. But it is an influential caricature, and as such has been the focus of many critiques. To list the most obvious criticisms:

- It entirely ignores issues of economic and political inequality. Even if all Britons come to enjoy Jamaican steel drum music or Indian samosas, this by itself would do nothing to address the real problems facing Caribbean

and south Asian communities in Britain—problems of unemployment, poor educational outcomes, residential segregation, poor English language skills, and political marginalization. These economic and political issues cannot be solved simply by celebrating cultural difference.

- Even with respect to the (legitimate) goal of promoting greater understanding of cultural difference, the focus on celebrating discrete “authentic” cultural practices that are “unique” to each group is potentially dangerous and misleading. First, not all customs that may be traditionally practiced within a particular group are worthy of being celebrated, or even of being legally tolerated, such as forced marriage. To avoid this risk, there’s a tendency to choose safely inoffensive practices as the focus of multicultural celebrations—such as cuisine or music—practices that can be enjoyably consumed by members of the larger society. But this runs the opposite risk of the trivialization or Disneyfication of cultural difference (Bissoondath 1994), ignoring the real challenges that differences in cultural values and religious doctrine can raise.
- Second, the 3S model of multiculturalism can encourage a conception of groups as hermetically sealed and static, each reproducing its own distinct authentic practices. Multiculturalism may be intended to encourage people to share their distinctive customs, but the very assumption that each group has its own distinctive customs ignores processes of cultural adaption, mixing and *mélange*, and renders invisible emerging cultural commonalities, and thereby potentially reinforces perceptions of minorities as eternally “Other.”
- Third, this model can end up reinforcing power inequalities and cultural restrictions within minority groups. In deciding which traditions are “authentic,” and how to interpret and display them, the state generally consults the traditional elites within the group—typically older males—while ignoring the way these traditional practices (and traditional elites) are often challenged by internal reformers, who have different views about how, say, a “good Muslim” should act. It can therefore imprison people in “cultural scripts” that they are not allowed to question or dispute.

According to post-multiculturalists, it is the gradual recognition of these flaws that explains the retreat from multiculturalism, and the search for new post-multicultural models of citizenship that emphasize the priority of political participation and economic opportunities over the symbolic politics of cultural recognition, the priority of human rights and individual freedom over respect for cultural traditions, the priority of building inclusive common national identities over the recognition of ancestral cultural identities, and the priority of cultural change and cultural mixing over the reification of static cultural differences.

If indeed multiculturalism was fundamentally about celebrating cultural difference in the form of discrete folk-practices, then the post-multiculturalist critique would certainly be justified. In my view, however, this is a caricature

of the reality of multiculturalism as it has developed over the past 40 years in the Western democracies, and a distraction from the real issues that we need to face.

I cannot rehearse the full history of multiculturalism here, but I think it is important to situate it in its historical context. In one sense, “multiculturalism” is as old as humanity—different cultures have always found ways of co-existing, and respect for diversity was a familiar feature of many historic empires, such as the Ottoman Empire. But the sort of multiculturalism that is said to have had a “rise and fall” is a much more specific historic phenomenon, emerging first in the Western democracies in the late 1960s. This timing is important, for it helps us situate multiculturalism in relation to larger social transformations of the post-war era.

More specifically, multiculturalism can be seen as part of a larger “human rights revolution” in relation to ethnic and racial diversity. Prior to World War II, ethnocultural and religious diversity in the West was characterized by a range of illiberal and undemocratic relations—including relations of conqueror and conquered; colonizer and colonized; master and slave; settler and indigenous; racialized and unmarked; normalized and deviant; orthodox and heretic; civilized and primitive; ally and enemy. These relationships of hierarchy were justified by racialist ideologies that explicitly propounded the superiority of some peoples and cultures, and their right to rule over others. These ideologies were widely accepted throughout the Western world, and underpinned both domestic laws (e.g., racially-biased immigration and citizenship policies) and foreign policies (e.g., in relation to overseas colonies).

After World War II, however, the world recoiled against Hitler’s fanatical and murderous use of such ideologies, and the UN decisively repudiated them in favor of a new ideology of the equality of races and peoples. And this new assumption of human equality has generated a series of political movements designed to contest the lingering presence or enduring effects of older hierarchies. We can distinguish three “waves” of such movements: (a) the struggle for decolonization, concentrated in the period 1947 to 1965; (b) the struggle against racial segregation and discrimination, initiated and exemplified by the African-American civil rights movement from 1955 to 1965; and (c) the struggle for multiculturalism and minority rights, which has emerged from the late 1960s.

Each of these movements draws upon the human rights revolution, and its foundational ideology of the equality of races and peoples, to challenge the legacies of earlier ethnic and racial hierarchies. Indeed, the human rights revolution plays a double role here: not just as the inspiration for struggle, but also as a constraint on the permissible goals and means of that struggle. Insofar as historically excluded or stigmatized groups struggle against earlier hierarchies in the name of equality, they too have to renounce their own traditions of exclusion or oppression in the treatment of, say, women, gays, people of mixed race, religious dissenters, and so on. The framework of human rights, and of liberal-democratic constitutionalism more generally,

provides the overarching framework within which these struggles are debated and addressed.

Each of these movements, therefore, can be seen as contributing to a process of democratic "citizenization"—that is, turning the earlier catalogue of hierarchical relations into relationships of liberal-democratic citizenship, both in terms of the vertical relationship between the members of minorities and the state, and the horizontal relationships amongst the members of different groups. In the past, it was often assumed that the only way to engage in this process of citizenization was to impose a single undifferentiated model of citizenship on all individuals. But the ideas and policies of multiculturalism that emerged from the 1960s start from the assumption that this complex history inevitably and appropriately generates group-differentiated ethnopolitical claims. The key to citizenization is not to suppress these differential claims, but to filter and frame them through the language of human rights, civil liberties and democratic accountability. And this is what multiculturalist movements have aimed to do.

The precise character of the resulting multicultural reforms varies from group to group, as befits the distinctive history that each has experienced. They all start from the anti-discrimination principle that underpinned the second wave, but go beyond it to challenge other forms of exclusion or stigmatization. In most Western countries, explicit state-sponsored discrimination against ethnic, racial or religious minorities had largely ceased by the 1960s and 1970s, under the influence of the second wave of human rights struggles. Yet evidence of ethnic and racial hierarchies remained, and continues to be clearly visible in many societies, whether measured in terms of economic inequalities, political under-representation, social stigmatization or cultural invisibility. Various forms of multiculturalism have been developed to help overcome these lingering inequalities.

We can broadly distinguish three patterns of multiculturalism that have emerged in the Western democracies. First, we see new forms of empowerment of indigenous peoples, such as the Maori in New Zealand; Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Australia; Native Americans; Sami in Scandinavia, or Inuit of Greenland. These new models of multicultural citizenship for indigenous peoples often include some combination of the following nine policies:<sup>5</sup>

- 1 recognition of land rights/title
- 2 recognition of self-government rights
- 3 upholding historic treaties and/or signing new treaties
- 4 recognition of cultural rights language; hunting/fishing, sacred sites
- 5 recognition of customary law
- 6 guarantees of representation/consultation in the central government
- 7 constitutional or legislative affirmation of the distinct status of indigenous peoples
- 8 support/ratification for international instruments on indigenous rights
- 9 affirmative action.

Second, we see new forms of autonomy and power-sharing for substate national groups, such as the Basques and Catalans in Spain, Flemish and Walloons in Belgium, Scots and Welsh in Britain, Quebecois in Canada, Germans in South Tyrol, Swedish in Finland, and so on. These new forms of multicultural citizenship for national minorities typically include some combination of the following six elements:

- 1 federal or quasi-federal territorial autonomy
- 2 official language status, either in the region or nationally
- 3 guarantees of representation in the central government or on Constitutional Courts
- 4 public funding of minority language universities/schools/media
- 5 constitutional or parliamentary affirmation of "multinationalism"
- 6 according international personality e.g., allowing the substate region to sit on international bodies, or sign treaties, or have their own Olympic team.

And, finally, we see new forms of multicultural citizenship for immigrant groups, which may include a combination of the following eight policies:

- 1 constitutional, legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism, at the central and/or regional and municipal levels
- 2 the adoption of multiculturalism in school curriculum
- 3 the inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in the mandate of public media or media licensing
- 4 exemptions from dress-codes, Sunday-closing legislation etc. either by statute or by court cases
- 5 allowing dual citizenship
- 6 the funding of ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities
- 7 the funding of bilingual education or mother-tongue instruction
- 8 affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups.

While there are important differences between these three modes of multiculturalism, each of them has been defended as a means to overcome the legacies of earlier hierarchies, and to help build fairer and more inclusive democratic societies.

In my view, therefore, multiculturalism is first and foremost about developing new models of democratic citizenship, grounded in human rights ideals, to replace earlier uncivil and undemocratic relations of hierarchy and exclusion. Needless to say, this account of multiculturalism-as-citizenization differs dramatically from the "3S" account of multiculturalism as the celebration of static cultural differences. Whereas the 3S account says that multiculturalism is about displaying and consuming differences in cuisine, clothing and music, to the neglect of issues of political and economic inequality, the citizenization account says that multiculturalism is precisely about constructing new civic

and political relations to overcome the deeply-entrenched inequalities that have persisted after the abolition of formal discrimination.

It is obviously important to determine which of these accounts provides a more accurate description of the Western experience with multiculturalism. Before we can decide whether to celebrate or lament the fall of multiculturalism, or to replace it with post-multiculturalism, we need first to make sure we know what multiculturalism has in fact been. I have elsewhere tried to give a fuller defense of my account (Kymlicka 2007: chaps. 3–5), so let me here just note three ways in which the 3S account is misleading.

First, the claim that multiculturalism is solely or primarily about symbolic cultural politics depends on a complete misreading of the actual policies. If we look at the three lists of policies above, it is immediately apparent that they combine economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. Take the case of land claims for indigenous peoples. While regaining control of their traditional territories certainly has cultural and religious significance for many indigenous peoples, it also has profound economic and political significance. Land is the material basis for both economic opportunities and political self-government. Or consider language rights for national minorities. According official language status to a minority's language is partly valued as a form of symbolic "recognition" of a historically-stigmatized language. But it is also a form of economic and political empowerment: the more a minority's language is used in public institutions, the more its speakers have access to employment opportunities and decision-making procedures. Indeed, the political and economic dimensions of the multiculturalist struggles of indigenous peoples and national minorities are obvious: they are precisely about restructuring state institutions, including redistributing political control over important public and natural resources.

The view that multiculturalism is about the apolitical celebration of ethnic folk-customs, therefore, only has any plausibility in relation to immigrant groups. And indeed representations of cuisine, dress and music are often the most visible manifestations of "multiculturalism" in the schools and media. It is not surprising, therefore, that when post-multiculturalists discuss multiculturalism, they almost invariably ignore the issue of indigenous peoples and national minorities, and focus only on the case of immigrant groups, where the 3S account has more initial plausibility.

But even in this context, if we look back at the list of eight multiculturalism policies adopted in relation to immigrant groups, we will quickly see that they too involve a complex mixture of economic, political, and cultural elements. While immigrants are (rightly) concerned to contest the historic stigmatization of their cultures, immigrant multiculturalism also includes policies that are centrally concerned with access to political power and to economic opportunities—for example, policies of affirmative action, mechanisms of political consultation, funding for ethnic self-organization, or facilitated access to citizenship.

All three familiar patterns of multiculturalism, therefore—for indigenous peoples, national minorities, and immigrant groups—combine cultural



recognition, economic redistribution, and political participation. In this respect, the post-multiculturalist critique of multiculturalism as ignoring economic and political inequality is simply off the mark.

Second, the post-multiculturalists' claim that multiculturalism ignores the importance of universal human rights is equally misplaced. On the contrary, as we've seen, multiculturalism is itself a human rights-based movement, inspired and constrained by principles of universal human rights and liberal-democratic constitutionalism. Its goal is to challenge the sorts of traditional ethnic and racial hierarchies that have been discredited by the post-war human rights revolution. Understood in this way, multiculturalism-as-citizenization offers no support for protecting or accommodating the sorts of illiberal cultural practices within minority groups that have also been discredited by this human rights revolution. The same human rights-based reasons we have for endorsing multiculturalism-as-citizenization are equally reasons for rejecting cultural practices that violate human rights. And indeed, this is what we see throughout the Western democracies. Wherever multiculturalism has been adopted, it has been tied conceptually and institutionally to larger human rights norms, and has been subject to the overarching principles of the liberal-democratic constitutional order. No Western democracy has exempted immigrant groups from constitutional norms of human rights in order to maintain practices of, say, forced marriage, criminalization of apostasy, or cliterodectomy. Here again, the post-multiculturalist claim that human rights should take precedence over the recognition of cultural traditions simply reasserts what has been integral to the theory and practice of multiculturalism.

And this in turn points out the flaws in the post-multiculturalists' claim that multiculturalism ignores or denies the reality of cultural change. On the contrary, multiculturalism-as-citizenization is a deeply (and intentionally) transformative project, both for minorities and majorities. It demands both dominant and historically subordinated groups to engage in new practices, to enter new relationships, and to embrace new concepts and discourses, all of which profoundly transform people's identities and practices.

This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the historically-dominant majority nation in each country, which is required to renounce fantasies of racial superiority, to relinquish claims to exclusive ownership of the state, and to abandon attempts to fashion public institutions solely in its own national (typically white/Christian) image. In fact, much of multiculturalism's "long march through the institutions" consists precisely in identifying and attacking those deeply rooted traditions, customs, and symbols that have historically excluded or stigmatized minorities. Much has been written about the transformations in majority identities and practices this has required, and the backlash it can create.

But multiculturalism is equally transformative of the identities and practices of minority groups. Many of these groups have their own histories of ethnic and racial prejudice, of anti-Semitism, of caste and gender exclusion,

of religious triumphalism, and of political authoritarianism, all of which are delegitimized by the norms of liberal-democratic multiculturalism and minority rights. Moreover, even where the traditional practices of a minority group are free of illiberal or undemocratic elements, they may involve a level of cultural closure that becomes unattractive and unsustainable under multiculturalism. These practices may have initially emerged as a response to earlier experiences of discrimination, stigmatization, or exclusion at the hands of the majority, and may lose their attractiveness as that motivating experience fades in people's memories. For example, some minority groups have developed distinctive norms of self-help, endogamy, and internal conflict resolution because they have been excluded from or discriminated within the institutions of the larger society. Those norms may lose their rationale as ethnic and racial hierarchies break down, and as group members feel more comfortable interacting with members of other groups and participating in state institutions. Far from guaranteeing the protection of the traditional ways of life of either the majority or minorities, multiculturalism poses multiple challenges to them. Here again, the post-multiculturalists' claim about recognizing the necessity of cultural change simply reasserts a long-standing part of the multicultural agenda.

In short, I believe that the post-multiculturalist critique is largely off-target, primarily because it misidentifies the nature and goals of the multiculturalism policies and programs that have emerged over the past 40 years during the "rise" of multiculturalism.

### **The retreat from multiculturalism?**

But this then raises a puzzle. If post-multiculturalist claims about the flaws of multiculturalism are largely misguided, then what explains the fall of multiculturalism? If, as I claim, multiculturalism is inspired by human rights norms, and seeks to deepen relations of democratic citizenship, why has there been such a retreat from it?

Part of the answer is that reports of multiculturalism's death are very much exaggerated. Here again, we need to keep in mind the different forms that multiculturalism takes, only some of which have faced serious backlash. For example, there has been no retreat from the commitment to new models of multicultural citizenship for indigenous peoples. On the contrary, the trend towards enhanced land rights, self-government powers and customary law for indigenous peoples remains fully in place across the Western democracy, and has just been reaffirmed by the UN's General Assembly through the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. Similarly, there has been no retreat from the commitment to new models of multicultural citizenship for national minorities. On the contrary, the trend towards enhanced language rights and regional autonomy for substate national groups remains fully in place in the Western democracies.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, these two trends are increasingly firmly entrenched in law and public opinion, backed by

growing evidence that the adoption of multicultural reforms for indigenous peoples and national minorities has in fact contributed to building relations of democratic freedom and equality.<sup>7</sup> Few people today, for example, would deny that regional autonomy for Catalonia has contributed to the democratic consolidation of Spain, or that indigenous rights are helping to deepen democratic citizenship in Latin America.

So it is only with respect to immigrant groups that we see any serious retreat. Here, without question, there has been a backlash against multiculturalism policies relating to postwar migrants in several Western democracies. And there is also greater scholarly dispute about the impact of these policies. For example, while studies have shown that immigrant multiculturalism policies in Canada have had strongly beneficial effects in relation to citizenization (Bloemraad 2006), other studies suggest that immigrant multiculturalism in the Netherlands has had deleterious effects (Koopmans et al. 2005; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).<sup>8</sup>

It is an important question why immigrant multiculturalism in particular has been so controversial, and I will return to this below. But we can begin by dismissing one popular explanation. Various commentators have suggested that the retreat from immigrant multiculturalism reflects a return to the traditional liberal and republican belief that ethnicity belongs in the private sphere, and that citizenship should be unitary and undifferentiated. On this view, the retreat from immigrant multiculturalism reflects a rejection of the whole idea of multiculturalism-as-citizenization (e.g., Brubaker 2001; Joppke 2004).

But this cannot be the explanation. If Western democracies were rejecting the very idea of multicultural citizenship, they would have rejected the claims of substate national groups and indigenous peoples as well as immigrants. After all, the claims of national groups and indigenous peoples typically involve a much more dramatic insertion of ethnocultural diversity into the public sphere, and a more dramatic degree of differentiated citizenship, than is demanded by immigrant groups. Whereas immigrants typically seek modest variations or exemptions in the operation of mainstream institutions, historic national minorities and indigenous peoples typically seek a much wider level of recognition and accommodation, including such things as land claims, self-government powers, language rights, separate educational systems, and even separate legal systems. These claims involve a much more serious challenge to ideas of undifferentiated citizenship and the privatization of ethnicity than is involved in accommodating immigrant groups. Yet Western democracies have not retreated at all from their commitment to accommodating these historic minorities.

Western democracies are, in fact, increasingly comfortable with claims to differentiated citizenship and the public recognition of difference, when these claims are advanced by historic minorities. So it is not the very idea of multicultural citizenship per se that has come under attack.<sup>9</sup> The problem, rather, is specific to immigration. What we need to sort out, therefore, is why

multiculturalism has proven so much more controversial in relation to this particular form of ethnocultural diversity.

But even that way of phrasing the question is too general. The retreat from immigrant multiculturalism is not universal—it has affected some countries more than others. Public support for immigrant multiculturalism in Canada, for example, remains at an all-time high. And even in countries that are considered the paradigm cases of a retreat from immigrant multiculturalism, such as the Netherlands or Australia, the story is more complicated. The Dutch military, for example, which in the 1990s had resisted ideas of accommodating diversity, has recently embraced the idea of multiculturalism, even as other public institutions are now shying away from it. And in Australia, while the federal government has recently backed away from multiculturalism, the state governments have moved in to adopt their own new multiculturalism policies. What we see, in short, is a lot of uneven advances and retreats in relation to immigrant multiculturalism, both within and across countries.

So the post-multiculturalists' narrative of a "retreat" from multiculturalism is overstated, and misdiagnosed. Many new forms of multicultural citizenship have taken root, and not faced any significant backlash or retreat. This is true of the main reforms relating to both national minorities and indigenous peoples, backed by evidence of their beneficial effects. Even with respect to immigrant multiculturalism, claims of policy failure and retreat are overstated, obscuring a much more variable record in terms of policy outcomes and public support.

I will discuss some possible explanations for the distinctive fate of immigrant multiculturalism below. But notice that we cannot start to identify these factors until we set aside the post-multiculturalists' assumption that what is being rejected is multiculturalism as such. What is happening here is not a general or principled rejection of the public recognition of ethnocultural diversity. On the contrary, many of the countries that are retreating from immigrant multiculturalism are actually strengthening the institutionalization of other ethnocultural differences. For example, while the Netherlands is retreating from immigrant multiculturalism, it is strengthening the rights of its historic Frisian minority; while France is retreating from immigrant multiculturalism, it is strengthening recognition of its historic minority languages; while Germany is retreating from immigrant multiculturalism, it is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the special status of its historic Danish minority; while Britain is retreating from immigrant multiculturalism, it has accorded new self-government powers to its historic nations in Scotland and Wales; and so on. None of this makes any sense if we explain the retreat from immigrant multiculturalism as somehow a return of orthodox liberal or republican ideas of undifferentiated citizenship and the privatization of ethnicity.

In short, contrary to the post-multiculturalists' narrative, the ideal of multiculturalism-as-citizenization is alive and well, and remains a salient option in the "tool-kit" of democracies, in part because we now have 40 years of experience to show that it can indeed contribute to citizenization. However,

particular uses of this approach, in relation to particular forms of diversity in particular countries, have run into serious obstacles. Not all attempts to adopt new models of multicultural citizenship have taken root, or succeeded in achieving their intended effects of promoting citizenization.

The crucial question, therefore, is why multicultural citizenship works in some times and places and not others. This is a crucial question not only for explaining the variable fate of multicultural citizenship in the West, but also for exploring its potential role as a model for thinking about diversity in post-colonial and post-communist societies. Unfortunately, the post-multiculturalist debate is largely unhelpful in answering this question. Since post-multiculturalists ignore the extent to which multiculturalism ever aspired to citizenization, and also over-generalize the retreat from multiculturalism, they do not shed light on the central question of why multicultural citizenization has flourished in some times and places, and failed elsewhere.

### **The preconditions of multicultural citizenship**

In my view, we do not yet have a systematic account of the preconditions for successful experiments in multicultural citizenship, and so a certain degree of caution is required when making judgments and recommendations in this area. However, if we explore the varying fate of multiculturalism across different types of groups and different countries, we can gain some preliminary indications about the preconditions for a sustainable model of democratic multiculturalism.

The theory and practice of multiculturalism suggests that multiculturalism can contribute to citizenization, but the historical record suggests that certain conditions must be in place for it to have its intended effects. Multicultural citizenship cannot be built (or imposed) out of thin air: certain sources and preconditions must be present. In a recent book (Kymlicka 2007, chap. 4), I discuss a number of these conditions, but let me focus here on two: the desecuritization of state-minority relations; and the existence of a human rights consensus.

*Desecuritization:* Where states feel insecure in geo-political terms, fearful of neighboring enemies, they are unlikely to treat fairly their own minorities. More specifically, states are unlikely to accord powers and resources to minorities that they view as potential collaborators with neighboring enemies.

In the past, this has been an issue in the West. For example, prior to World War II, Italy, Denmark, and Belgium feared that their German-speaking minorities were more loyal to Germany than to their own country, and would support attempts by Germany to invade and annex areas of ethnic German concentration. These countries worried that Germany might invade in the name of liberating their co-ethnic Germans, and that the German minority would collaborate with such an invasion.

Today, this is a non-issue throughout the established Western democracies with respect to historic national minorities and indigenous peoples, although

it remains an issue with respect to certain immigrant groups, particularly Arab/Muslim groups after 9/11. It is difficult to think of a single Western democracy where the state fears that a national minority would collaborate with a neighboring enemy and potential aggressor.<sup>10</sup> This is partly because Western states do not have neighboring enemies who might invade them. NATO has removed the possibility of one Western country invading its neighbors. As a result, the question of whether national minorities and indigenous peoples would be loyal in the event of invasion by a neighboring state is moot.

Of course, Western democracies do have long-distance potential enemies—such as Soviet Communism in the past, Islamic jihadism today, and perhaps China in some future scenario. But in relation to these long-distance threats, national minorities and indigenous peoples are on the same side as the state. If Quebec gains increased powers or even independence, no one in the rest of Canada worries that Quebec will start collaborating with Al Qaeda or China to overthrow the Canadian state. An autonomous or independent Quebec would be an ally of Canada, not an enemy.

In most parts of the world, however, minority groups are still seen as fifth columns collaborating with neighboring enemies. This is particularly true where the minority is related to a neighboring state by ethnicity or religion, or where a minority is found on both sides of an international border, so that the neighboring state claims the right to protect “its” minority. Consider the ethnic Serbs in Bosnia, or Kashmiris in India.

Under these conditions, ethnic relations become “securitized.” Relations between states and minorities are seen, not as a matter of normal democratic debate and negotiation, but as a matter of state security, in which the state has to limit the democratic process to protect itself. Under conditions of securitization, minority political mobilization may be banned, and even if minority demands can be voiced, they will be rejected by the larger society and the state. After all, how can groups that are disloyal have legitimate claims against the state? So the securitization of ethnic relations erodes both the democratic space to voice minority demands, and the likelihood that those demands will be accepted.

In most Western countries, however, ethnic politics have been “desecuritized.” Ethnic politics is just that—normal, day-to-day politics. Relations between the state and minority groups have been taken out of the “security” box, and put in the “democratic politics” box. This is one essential precondition for multicultural citizenship to emerge and take root.

*Human rights protection:* A second precondition concerns the security, not of the state, but of individuals who would be subject to self-governing minority institutions. States are unlikely to accept minority self-government if they fear it will lead to islands of local tyranny within a broader democratic state.

This too has been a worry in the past in the West, where some long-standing minorities were seen as carriers of illiberal political cultures.

And this fear persists in relation to some recent immigrant groups. But at least in relation to national minorities, it is now widely assumed that there is a deep consensus across ethnic lines on basic values of liberal democracy and human rights. As a result, it is assumed that any self-government powers granted to national minorities will be exercised in accordance with shared standards of democracy and human rights. Everyone accepts that minority self-government will operate within the constraints of liberal-democratic constitutionalism, which firmly upholds individual rights. Where minorities have gained autonomy in the West, their self-governing institutions are subject to the same constitutional constraints as the central government, and so have no legal capacity to restrict individual freedoms in the name of cultural authenticity, religious orthodoxy or racial purity. Not only is it legally impossible for national minorities in the West to establish illiberal regimes, but they have no wish to do so. On the contrary, all of the evidence suggests that members of national minorities are at least as strongly committed to liberal-democratic values as members of dominant groups, if not more so.<sup>11</sup>

This removes one of the central fears that dominant groups have about minority autonomy. In many parts of the world, there is the fear that once national minorities or indigenous peoples acquire self-governing power, they will use it to persecute, dispossess, expel or kill anyone who does not belong to the minority group. In Western democracies, this is a non-issue. Where there is a strong consensus on liberal-democratic values, people feel confident that however issues of multiculturalism are settled, their own civil and political rights will be respected. No matter how the claims of ethnonational and indigenous groups are resolved—no matter what language rights, self-government rights, land rights, or multiculturalism policies are adopted—people can rest assured that they won't be stripped of their citizenship, fired from their jobs, subjected to ethnic cleansing, jailed without a fair trial, or denied their rights to free speech, association and worship. Put simply, the consensus on liberal-democratic values ensures that debates over accommodating diversity are not a matter of life and death. As a result, dominant groups will not fight to the death to resist minority claims. This, too, is a precondition for the successful adoption of multicultural citizenship.

There are other factors that underpin the rise of multiculturalism in the West, including demographic changes, but desecuritization and human rights are pivotal. Where these two conditions are absent, multiculturalism is unlikely to emerge, except perhaps as the outcome of violent struggle or external imposition. These two factors not only help explain the rise of multiculturalism, but also help explain the partial retreat from multiculturalism in some countries in relation to recent Muslim immigrants, who are often seen as both disloyal and illiberal. There are other factors at play as well in the backlash against immigrant multiculturalism, including concerns about illegal immigration, and about the economic burden of supporting unemployed immigrants, as well as old-fashioned racial prejudice.<sup>12</sup> For many people, the latter is the key factor. But of course prejudice is found in all

countries—indeed its existence is part of the justification for adopting multiculturalism—and so cannot explain the variation across countries (or over time) in support for multiculturalism. And if we try to understand why this latent prejudice and xenophobia sometimes coalesces into powerful political movements against multiculturalism, the answer I believe lies in perceptions of threats to geo-political security, human rights, and economic security. Where such perceptions are lacking, as they are in relation to most immigrant groups in North America, then support for multiculturalism can remain quite strong.

### **Conclusion: the future of multiculturalism in the West**

If this analysis is correct, it has important implications for the future of multiculturalism in the West. On the one hand, despite all the talk about the retreat from multiculturalism, it suggests that multiculturalism in general has a bright future. There are powerful forces at work in modern Western societies pushing in the direction of the public recognition and accommodation of ethnocultural diversity. Public values and constitutional norms of tolerance, equality, and individual freedom, underpinned by the human rights revolution, all push in the direction of multiculturalism, particularly when viewed against the backdrop of a history of ethnic and racial hierarchies. These factors explain the ongoing trend towards the recognition of the rights of sub-state national groups and indigenous peoples. Older ideas of undifferentiated citizenship and neutral public spheres have collapsed in the face of these trends, and no one today seriously proposes that these forms of minority rights and differentiated citizenship for historic minorities could be abandoned or reversed.<sup>13</sup> That minority rights, liberal democracy, and human rights can comfortably co-exist is now a fixed point in both domestic constitutions and international law. There is no credible alternative to multiculturalism in these contexts.

The situation with respect to immigrant groups is more complex. The same factors that push for multiculturalism in relation to historic minorities have also generated a willingness to contemplate multiculturalism for immigrant groups, and indeed such policies seem to have worked well under “low-risk” conditions. However, immigrant multiculturalism has run into difficulties where it is perceived as carrying particularly high risks. Where immigrants are seen as predominantly illegal, as potential carriers of illiberal practices or movements, and/or as net burdens on the welfare state, then multiculturalism poses perceived risks to both prudential self-interest and moral principles, and this perception can override the forces that support multiculturalism.

On the other hand, one could also argue that these very same factors also make the rejection of immigrant multiculturalism a high-risk move. It is precisely when immigrants are perceived as illegitimate, illiberal, and burdensome that multiculturalism may be most needed. Without some proactive policies to promote mutual understanding and respect, and to make



immigrants feel comfortable within mainstream institutions, these factors could quickly lead to a situation of a racialized underclass, standing in permanent opposition to the larger society. Indeed, I would argue that, in the long term, the only viable response to the presence of large numbers of immigrants is some form of liberal multiculturalism, regardless of how these immigrants arrived, or from where. But we need to accept that the path to immigrant multiculturalism in many countries will not be smooth or linear. Moreover, we need to focus more on how to manage the risks involved. In the past, defenders of immigrant multiculturalism have typically focused on the perceived benefits of cultural diversity and inter-cultural understanding, and on condemning racism and xenophobia. Those arguments are sound, I believe, but they need to be supplemented with a fuller acknowledgement of the prudential and moral risks involved, and with some account of how those risks will be managed.

If we still have only a sketchy understanding of the preconditions of multicultural citizenship in the West, this is even more true in relation to the post-communist or post-colonial world. The analysis above suggests that efforts to diffuse multicultural citizenship will be difficult, and perhaps even counter-productive, in parts of the world where regional security and human rights protections are absent. Where minorities are potential pawns in unstable regional geo-politics, and where human rights guarantees are weak, attempts to transplant Western models of multiculturalism may exacerbate pre-existing relations of enmity and exclusion, rather than contribute to citizenization. And yet here again there are often no feasible alternatives to multiculturalism. Attempts to replicate the nineteenth-century French model of assimilationist nation-building in twenty-first century post-communist or post-colonial states are almost certainly doomed to failure, not least because minorities today are more conscious of their rights, better organized, and more connected to international networks. The fact that there are grave obstacles to multiculturalism does not mean that there are viable alternatives to it.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter is an edited version of a Background Paper commissioned for the UNESCO World Report on Cultural Diversity, and will appear in a forthcoming special issue of the *International Social Science Journal*.
- 2 For influential academic statements of this "rise and fall" narrative, claiming that it applies across the Western democracies, see Brubaker 2001; Joppke 2004; cf. Baubock 2002. There are also, of course, many accounts of the "decline", "retreat," or "crisis" of multiculturalism in particular countries, such as the Netherlands (Entzinger 2003; Koopmans 2006; Prin and Slijper 2002), Britain (Hansen 2007; Back *et al.* 2002; Vertovec 2005); Australia (Ang and Stratton 2001), and Canada (Wong *et al.* 2005).
- 3 For an overview of the attitudes of European social democratic parties to these issues, see Cuperus *et al.* 2003.
- 4 For references to "post-multiculturalism" by progressive intellectuals and academics, who distinguish it from the radical right's "anti-multiculturalism", see

- Alibhai-Brown 2000, 2004 (re the UK); Jupp 2007 (re Australia); King 2004; Hollinger 2006 (re the US).
- 5 This and the following lists of multicultural policies are taken from the "Index of Multicultural Policies" developed in Banting and Kymlicka 2006.
  - 6 There has however been a retreat from attempts to formulate the rights of national minorities at the level of international law: see Kymlicka 2007: chap. 6.
  - 7 I survey the evidence in Kymlicka 2007: chapter 5.
  - 8 I discuss and criticize these Dutch studies in a review of the Sniderman/Hagendoorn book (Kymlicka 2008).
  - 9 Commentators who argue that Western democracies are rejecting multicultural citizenship per se typically simply ignore the obvious counter-examples of national minorities and indigenous peoples – see, e.g., Joppke 2004; Barry 2001.
  - 10 If we move outside Western Europe, Cyprus and Israel are consolidated democracies which still exhibit this dynamic of viewing their historic Turkish and Arab minorities as potential collaborators with external enemies, and not coincidentally have been unable to agree on minority autonomy.
  - 11 The situation with respect to some indigenous groups is more complicated, since they are sometimes perceived as falling outside the liberal-democratic consensus. But since indigenous self-government rarely involves the exercise of power over non-members, unlike the regional autonomy accorded to national minorities, there is less concern that indigenous self-government may harm the rights of non-members. Moreover, the evidence suggests that indigenous peoples are increasingly accepting of broader liberal-democratic principles (Schouls 2003).
  - 12 For a more detailed discussion of these factors, see Kymlicka 2004.
  - 13 Even a fierce critic of multiculturalism like Brian Barry (2001) makes no attempt to apply his ideas to the case of substate national groups and indigenous peoples.

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