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*This paper critically examines some of the ways in which conceptions of interculturalism are being positively contrasted with multiculturalism, especially as political ideas. It argues that while some advocates of a political interculturalism wish to emphasise its positive qualities in terms of encouraging communication, recognising dynamic identities, promoting unity and critiquing illiberal cultural practices, each of these qualities too are important (on occasion foundational) features of multiculturalism. The paper begins with a broad introduction before exploring the provenance of multiculturalism as an intellectual tradition, with a view to assessing the extent to which its origins continue to shape its contemporary public 'identity'. We adopt this line of enquiry to identify the extent to which some of the criticism of multiculturalism is rooted in an objection to earlier formulations that displayed precisely those elements deemed unsatisfactory when compared with interculturalism. Following this discussion, the paper moves on to four specific areas of comparison between multiculturalism and interculturalism. It concludes that until interculturalism as a political discourse is able to offer a distinct perspective, one that can speak to a variety of concerns emanating from complex identities and matters of equality and diversity in a more persuasive manner than at present, interculturalism cannot, intellectually at least, eclipse multiculturalism, and so should be considered as complementary to multiculturalism.*

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It has been said that the first decade of the twenty-first century will be remembered for a series of historical episodes, including international military conflicts and global

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financial crises; for technological innovations in mass communication, information collection, storage and surveillance; alongside an increased recognition of climate change and an associated environmental awareness (Serwer 2009). Whether or not future generations will come to share this assessment, and while initially much less dramatic, the last 10 years has also witnessed seemingly rapid and perhaps significant developments in the ways plural societies organise living with 'difference'.

For example, it has been argued that during the last decade there has been an observable 'retreat' in north-western Europe from relatively modest – compared with those of Federal Canada – approaches of multicultural citizenship across a variety of citizenship regimes (Brubaker 2001, Joppke 2004, McGhee 2008). Yet this 'retreat' has already been shown to be a complicated and mixed affair (Jacobs and Rea 2007, Meer and Modood 2009a). With much greater certainty one could state that the appeal of multiculturalism as a public policy has suffered considerable political damage, such that the argument that multiculturalism is a valuable means of "remaking of public identities in order to achieve an equality of citizenship that is neither merely individualistic nor premised on assimilation" (Modood 2005: 5), is not being embraced as broadly as it once might have been.

The reasons for this are various, but include how for some multiculturalism has facilitated social fragmentation and entrenched social divisions (Malik 2007, Policy Exchange 2007); for others it has distracted attention away from socio-economic disparities (Barry 2001, Hansen 2006); or encouraged a moral hesitancy amongst 'native' populations (Prins and Salisbury 2008, Caldwell 2009). Some even blame it for international terrorism (Gove 2006, Phillips 2006). While these political positions are the instigators of anxieties over multiculturalism, other beneficiaries have included a number of competing political orientations concerned with promoting unity, variously conceived, alongside or in a greater degree to recognising diversity (Modood and Meer 2011). Some observe this focus in the discovery or rediscovery of national identity (Orgad 2009); others point to its evidence in notions of civicness (Mouritsen 2008), or in a resurgent liberalism that allegedly proves, in the final analysis, to be 'neutral' (Joppke 2008). To this we could also add social or community cohesion (Dobbernack 2010).

Such issues have been discussed at length in a variety of contributions, including in those of the present authors, yet one further 'competitor' term has been explored far less despite both its frequent invocation in public discourse and that it appears to retain something of what multiculturalism is concerned with. This is the concept of 'interculturalism' and the related idea of 'intercultural dialogue' (Kohls and Knight, 1994, Belhachimi 1997, Milton 1998, Gundara 2000, Gundara and Jacobs 2000, Kymlicka 2003, Powell and Sze 2004, Gagnon and Iacovino 2007, Emerson, 2011). For example, the concept of interculturalism is now frequently found in places as diverse as German and Greek education programmes (Luctenberg 2003, Gropos and Tryandifillidou 2011); Belgian commissions on cultural diversity (see below); and Russian teaching on world cultures (Froumin 2003). A prominent symbolic example could be how 2008 was designated as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

(EYID), with the European Commission's stated objective being to encourage "all those living in Europe to explore the benefits of our rich cultural heritage and opportunities to learn from different cultural traditions".[1]

It is worth stepping back from these fine sentiments, however, to consider what distinguishes these efforts from other established approaches concerned with recognising cultural diversity. Is it merely the case, as Lentin (2005: 394) has suggested, that interculturalism is an 'updated version' of multiculturalism? If so, what is being 'updated'? If not, in what ways – if at all – is interculturalism different, substantively or otherwise, from multiculturalism? With a specific focus on the political, in this paper we tentatively sketch out and critically evaluate four ways in which conceptions of interculturalism are being positively contrasted with multi-culturalism (while these four positive evaluations of interculturalism overlap we also consider them to be sufficiently distinct to be discussed separately). These are, first, as something greater than coexistence, in that interculturalism is allegedly more geared toward interaction and dialogue than multiculturalism. Second, that interculturalism is conceived as something less 'groupist' or more yielding of synthesis than multiculturalism. Third, that interculturalism is something more committed to a stronger sense of the whole, in terms of such things as societal cohesion and national citizenship. Finally, that where multiculturalism may be illiberal and relativistic, interculturalism is more likely to lead to criticism of illiberal cultural practices (as part of the process of intercultural dialogue).

It is important to register at the outset that we are here concerned with what we understand as 'political interculturalism', by which we mean the ways in which interculturalism is appropriated in the critique of multiculturalism (Booth 2003, Sze and Powell 2004, Wood *et al.* 2006), in a manner that is not necessarily endorsed by wider advocates of interculturalism (in a situation not too dissimilar to how Western feminism (Moller Okin 1997) may be appropriated in the critique of non-Western cultures (see, for example, Malik 2007, Phillips 2007)). Moreover, the purpose of this article is not to offer a comprehensive account of the topic, but to provide an entry point in developing a discussion, especially in relation to multiculturalism and interculturalism as frameworks for political relations in contexts of cultural diversity. To do this satisfactorily we need first to elaborate something of our understanding of the intellectual character of multiculturalism, and it is to this that we now turn.

## Liberalism and Multiculturalism

To some commentators the staple issues that multiculturalism seeks to address, such as the rights of ethnic and national minorities, group representation and perhaps even the political claims-making of 'new' social movements, are in fact "familiar

long-standing problems of political theory and practice" (Kelly 2002: 1). Indeed, some hold this view to the point of frustration:

> If we take a very broad definition of multiculturalism so that it simply corresponds to the demand that cultural diversity be accommodated, there is no necessary conflict between it and liberalism. [...] But most multiculturalists boast that they are innovators in political philosophy by virtue of having shown that liberalism cannot adequately satisfy the requirements of equal treatment and justice under conditions of cultural diversity. (Barry 2002: 205)

The first part of Barry's statement is perhaps more conciliatory than might be anticipated from an author admired for his argumentative robustness and theoretical hostility toward multiculturalism; while the second part poses more of an empirical question. Beginning with the first part, Barry's view is by no means rejected by those engaged in the 'multicultural turn'. Modood (2007a: 8), for instance, locates the genesis of multiculturalism within a "matrix of principles that are central to contemporary liberal democracies", in a manner that establishes multiculturalism as "the child of liberal egalitarianism, but like any child, it is not simply a faithful reproduction of its parents". Another way of putting this is to state that as a concept, multiculturalism is a partial outgrowth of liberalism in that it establishes

> a third generation norm of legitimacy, namely respect for reasonable cultural diversity, which needs to be considered on a par with the [first and second generation] norms of freedom and equality, and so to modify policies of 'free and equal treatment' accordingly. (Tully 2002: 102)

Our interest is with the political implication of this 'third-generation norm of legitimacy' for a concept of citizenship, which includes the recognition that social life consists of individuals and groups, and that both need to be provided for in the formal and informal distribution of powers; not just in law, but in representation in the offices of the state, public committees, consultative exercises and access to public fora. This means that while individuals have rights, mediating institutions such as trade unions, churches, neighbourhoods, immigrant associations and so on may also be encouraged to be active public players and fora for political discussion (and may even have a formal representative or administrative role to play in the state). One implication of this recognition means the re-forming of national identity and citizenship, and offering an emotional identity with the whole to counterbalance the emotional loyalties to ethnic and religious communities (Modood 2007a).

Picking up the second part of Barry's statement, to what extent then do we have an established 'canon' of multiculturalism as an intellectual tradition – one that persuasively distinguishes it from varieties of liberalism? It is certainly the case that theoretically there are three established policy-related strands of multiculturalism. One derives from radical social theory, especially uses of Derrida, and finds ideological expression in critiques of Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism and the wars over 'the canon' in the US universities in the 1980s. Another focuses on popular

culture, everyday cultural interaction and the resulting hybridity and mixedness (Gilroy 2004), though the policy implications of such 'multiculture' are not usually operative at the national level (Meer and Modood 2009a). It is the third strand, however, which is the focus of our interest, and which grows out of policy developments, with Canada supplying one of the maturest examples, and, pioneered by Will Kymlicka, is best expressed in engagements with liberal political theory.

The relationship to liberalism of this third strand of multiculturalism is a pertinent issue because it compels us to explore something of the provenance of multiculturalism as an intellectual tradition, with a view to assessing the extent to which its origins continue to shape its contemporary public 'identity'. We might reasonably ask this to identify the extent to which some of the criticism of multiculturalism is rooted in an objection to earlier formulations that displayed precisely those elements deemed unsatisfactory when compared with interculturalism, for example, that multiculturalism is more likely to be essentialist, illiberal, less agency-oriented and less concerned with unity.

Before proceeding with this line of inquiry, it seems only reasonable to offer the intellectual health warning that multiculturalism as a concept is – like very many others – 'polysemic', such that multiculturalist authors cannot be held entirely responsible for the variety of ways in which the term is interpreted. This is something noted by Bhabha (1998: 31) who points to the tendency for multiculturalism to be appropriated as a 'portmanteau term', one that encapsulates a variety of sometimes contested meanings (see, for example, Meer and Modood 2009a). In this respect, the *idea* of multiculturalism might be said to have a 'chameleonic' quality that facilitates its simultaneous adoption and rejection in the critique or defence of a position (Smith 2010).

One illustration of this is the manner in which multiculturalism is simultaneously used as a label to describe the fact of pluralism or diversity in any given society, *and* a moral stance that cultural diversity is a desirable feature of a given society (as well as the different types of ways in which the state could recognise and support it). Moreover, in both theoretical and policy discourses, multiculturalism means different things in different places. In North America, for example, multiculturalism encompasses discrete groups with territorial claims, such as the Native Peoples and the Québécois, even though these groups want to be treated as 'nations' within a multinational state, rather than merely as ethnocultural groups in a mononational state (Kymlicka 1995). Indeed, in Europe, while groups with such claims, like the Catalans and the Scots, are thought of as nations, multiculturalism has a more limited meaning, referring to a post-immigration urban mélange and the politics it gives rise to. One outcome is that while in North America language-based ethnicity is seen as the major political challenge, in Western Europe the conjunction of the terms 'immigration' and 'culture' now nearly always invokes the large newly settled Muslim populations. Sometimes, usually in America, political terms such as multiculturalism and 'rainbow coalition' are meant to include all groups marked by 'difference' and historic exclusion such as women and sexual minorities (Young 1990).

Some have turned to this variety in meaning and usage of the term as an explanation of the allegedly "widely divergent assessments of the short history and potential future of multiculturalism" (Kivisto and Faist 2007: 35), and it is to these different meanings and the contexts that generated them to which we now turn.

## Forging Multicultural Citizenship

The term 'multiculturalism' emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in countries like Canada and Australia, and to a lesser extent in Britain and the USA (where it was initially limited to the field of education). As we have already noted, in the case of Canada the focus was from the start on constitutional and land issues, in a way that informed definitions of nationhood and related to unresolved legal questions concerning the entitlements and status of indigenous peoples, not to mention the further issue of the rise of a nationalist and secessionist movement in French-speaking Quebec.

At the outset in both Canada and Australia, multiculturalism was often presented as an application of 'liberal values' in that multiculturalism in these countries extended individual freedoms and substantiated the promise of equal citizenship. As evidence of this position, Kymlicka (2005a) points to the then Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau's 1971 speech on the implementation of a bilingual framework (a precursor to the later Multicultural Act). In this, Trudeau promised that "a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework is basically the conscious support of individual freedom of choice. We are free to be ourselves" (Trudeau 1971: 8546, in Kymlicka 2005a). In Kymlicka's reading (2005a: 2), this statement reflected the natural outgrowth of the liberalisation of Canadian social legislation in the period between the Bill of Rights (1960) and Charter of Rights (1982), because "the fundamental impulses behind the policy were the liberal values of individual freedom and equal citizenship on a non-discriminatory basis".

While similar observations might be made in relation to Australia, they could only be so in so far as it reflected "essentially a liberal ideology which operates within liberal institutions with the universal approval of liberal attitudes" (Jupp 1996: 40, in Kymlicka 2005a). This is because in contrast with Canada, Australian multiculturalist policy developed more as a means to better integrate new immigrants, by easing the expectations of rapid assimilation.[2] Initially, as Levey (2008) elaborates, the policy did not include Indigenous Australians until the end of the 1970s with the Galbally Report (1978), which spoke of multiculturalism being a policy for 'all Australians' *including* Indigenous Australians.[3]

This kind of multiculturalism nevertheless simultaneously encompassed the recognition of discrete groups with territorial claims, such as the Native Peoples and the Quebeckers, even though these groups wanted to be treated as 'nations' within a multinational state, rather than as minority groups in a mononational state. In reconciling these political claims to a political theory of liberalism, Kymlicka's own intellectual work is reflective of how an early theorisation of liberal multiculturalism was developing (1995). This is because Kymlicka proposed group differentiated rights

for three types of minorities comprising indigenous peoples, 'sub-state' national minorities and immigrant groups. The general principles common to each of these different types of minorities, he argued, included, first, that the state must be seen as belonging equally to all citizens. Second, individuals should be able to access state institutions, and act as full and equal citizens in political life, without having to hide or deny their cultural identity. Third, the state should acknowledge the 'historic injustice' done to minority (non-dominant) groups. He interpreted these principles to mean that national and indigenous minorities were entitled to territorial autonomy and separate political representation, while migration-based groups, who were assumed to have no relationship to the country prior to migration, were entitled only to 'polyethnic rights', namely, full civic integration that respected their cultural identities.

Outside of Canada, in the USA, UK and later the Netherlands, respectively, Kymlicka's distinction between national minority rights and polyethnic rights was not easily transposed. On the one hand, multiculturalism in these contexts mostly comprised of 'polyethnicity': the policy focus was more likely to be concerned with schooling the children of Asian/black/Hispanic post-/neo-colonial immigrants, and multiculturalism in these instances meant the extension of the school, both in terms of curriculum and as an institution, to include features such as 'mother-tongue' teaching, non-Christian religions and holidays, *halal* food, Asian dress and so on. On the other hand, the citizenship regimes in European countries included historical relationships with former colonial subjects that were distinct from the citizenship regimes of settler nations. For example, the 1948 British Nationality Act granted freedom of movement to all formerly or presently dependent, and now Commonwealth, territories (irrespective of whether their passports were issued by independent or colonial states) by creating the status of 'Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies' (CUKC). Until they acquired one or other of the national citizenships in these post-colonial countries, these formerly British subjects continued to retain their British status. Thus, post-colonial migrants to Britain were clearly not historic minorities, but nor were they without historic claims upon Britain and so constituted a category that did not fit Kymlicka's categories of multicultural citizens.

Nevertheless, the term 'multiculturalism' in Europe came to mean, and now means throughout the English-speaking world and beyond, the political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race, ethnicity or religion, and, additionally but more controversially, by reference to other group-defining characteristics such as nationality and aboriginality. The latter is more controversial not only because it extends the range of the groups that have to be accommodated, but also because the larger political claims made by such groups, who resist having these claims reduced to those of immigrants. Hence, despite Kymlicka's attempt to conceptualise multiculturalism-as-multinationalism, the dominant meaning of multiculturalism in politics relates to the claims of post-immigration groups.

This provenance of multiculturalism has bequeathed to its contemporary instantiations the importance of reconciling ideas of multiculturalism to ideas of citizenship, within a reciprocal balance of rights and responsibilities, assumptions of virtue and conceptions of membership or civic status (Meer 2010). While there is agreement that the membership conferred by citizenship should entail equal opportunity, dignity and confidence, different views remain about the proper ways, in culturally diverse societies, to confer this civic status. Those engaged in the 'multicultural turn' still maintain that conceptions of citizenship can frequently ignore the sensibilities of minorities marked by social, cultural and political differences (May *et al.* 2004).

Hence, the *political* multiculturalism of Modood, for example, insists that "when new groups enter a society, there has to be some education and refinement of...sensitivities in the light of changing circumstances and the specific vulnerabilities of new entrants" (2006: 61). As such, a widely accepted *contemporary* thrust of what multiculturalism denotes includes a critique of "the myth of homogeneous and monocultural nation-states" (Castles 2000: 5), and an advocacy of the right of minority "cultural maintenance and community formation, linking these to social equality and protection from discrimination" (5).

## Beyond Multicultural Coexistence, towards Intercultural Dialogue and Communication

Outside of Canada and North America more broadly, the idea of interculturalism has hitherto more commonly featured in Dutch (de Witt 2010) and German (Miera 2011) accounts of integration, as well as in Spanish and Greek discussion of migrant diversity in the arena of education (Gundara 2000). Until relatively recently it has been less present in British discourses because concepts of race relations, anti-racism, race equality and multiculturalism have been more prominent (Gundara and Jacobs 2000). While its current advocates conceive it as something societal and therefore of much broader appeal than in a specific commercial usage found in some American formulations (in terms of facilitating 'communication' across transnational business and commerce) (Carig 1994, Bennett 1998), what its present formulation perhaps retains from such incarnations is an emphasis upon communication. Indeed, according to Wood *et al.* (2006: 9) 'communication' is the defining characteristic, and the central means through which "an intercultural approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds". The question is to what extent this can be claimed as either a unique or distinguishing quality of interculturalism when dialogue and reciprocity too are foundational to most, if not all, accounts of multiculturalism. To put it another way, what makes communication unique for interculturalism in a manner that diverges from multiculturalism? According to some advocates, a difference is perceptible in

the social or convivial 'openness' in which communication is facilitated. As Wood *et al.* (2006: 7) maintain:

> Multiculturalism has been founded on the belief in tolerance between cultures but it is not always the case that multicultural places are open places. Interculturalism on the other hand requires openness as a prerequisite and, while openness in itself is not the guarantee of interculturalism, it provides the setting for interculturalism to develop.

The 'openness' or 'closedness' that the authors have in mind is not an ethical or moral but a sociological concern related to – if not derived from – a spatial sense of community and settlement as discussed further below. However, it is also an openness of another kind that is not more than a few steps away from what Smith (2004) characterises as models of inter-religious dialogue. These models come from the North American context, including the 'Dialogue as Information Sharing' and 'Dialogue to Come Closer Model', which encourage religious groups to focus on commonalities, in a way that seeks to eschew differences in order to elevate mutuality and sharing. What is striking, however, is the extent to which Wood *et al.*'s characterisation ignores how central the notions of dialogue and communication are to multiculturalism (2006). This might easily be illustrated with reference to some canonical contributions that have provided a great deal of intellectual impetus to the advocacy of multiculturalism as a political or public policy movement.

Our first example could be Charles Taylor's essay from 1992, widely considered to be a founding statement of multiculturalism in political theory, and in which he characterises the emergence of a modern politics of identity premised upon an idea of 'recognition'. The notion of recognition, and its relationship to multiculturalism, can be abstract but is located for Taylor as something that has developed out of a move away from conceiving historically defined or inherited hierarchies as the sole provenance of social status (in the French sense of *préférence*), toward a notion of dignity more congruent with the ideals of a democratic society or polity, one that is more likely to confer political equality and a full or unimpaired civic status upon all its citizens.[4]

Drawing upon his previous, densely catalogued account of the emergence of the modern self (Taylor 1989), Taylor mapped the political implications of this move onto two cases of Equality. The first is the most familiar and is characterised as a rights-based politics of universalism, which offers the prospect of affording equal dignity to all citizens in a polity. The second denotes a politics of difference where the uniqueness of context, history and identity are salient and potentially ascendant. For Taylor, this coupling crystallises the way in which the idea of recognition has given rise to a search for 'authenticity'. This is characterised as a move away from the prescriptive universalisms that have historically underwritten ideas of the Just or the Right, in favour of the fulfilment and realisation of one's true self, originality or worth. According to Taylor, therefore, people can no longer be recognised on the basis of identities determined from their positions in social hierarchies alone but

rather, through taking account of the real manner in which people form their identities. That is to say that Taylor emphasises the importance of 'dialogical' relationships to argue that it is a mistake to suggest that people form their identities 'monologically' or without an intrinsic dependence upon dialogue with others (see Meer 2010: 31–56). As such he maintains that we are "always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us" (Taylor 1992: 33).

In this formulation, Taylor openly draws upon both Hegel and Mead, each of whom maintained that our idea of ourselves, what we claim to be and what we really think we are, is dependent upon how others come to view us to the extent that our sense of *self* is developed in a continuing dialogue. Self-consciousness exists only by being acknowledged or recognised, and the related implication for Taylor is that a sense of socio-cultural self-esteem emerges not only from personal identity, but also in relation to the group in which this identity is developed. This is expressed in Taylor's account as follows (1992: 25–26):

> [O]ur identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning some in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

This is therefore one illustration of how central a concern with dialogue and communication is to multiculturalism too.

Let us consider another landmark text on this topic: Bhikhu Parekh's *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000). The central argument here is that cultural diversity and social pluralism are of intrinsic value *precisely because* they challenge people to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own cultures and ways of life. Parekh explicitly distinguishes his multiculturalism from various liberal and communitarian positions. Some of the latter recognise that cultures can play an important role in making choices meaningful for their members (Kymlicka 1995), or play host to the development of the *self* for the members of that culture (Sandel 1982). Their argument that culture is important for individual group members is well taken but they are less successful in explaining why cultural diversity is necessarily valuable in itself. To this Parekh (2000: 167) offers the following explanation:

> Since human capacities and values conflict, every culture realizes a limited range of them and neglects, marginalizes and suppresses others. However rich it may be, no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of human possibilities. Different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each other's horizon of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfilment. The value of other cultures is independent of whether or not they are options for us . . . inassimilable otherness challenges us intellectually and

morally, stretches our imagination, and compels us to recognize the limits of our categories of thought.

His argument that cultures other than one's own have something to teach us, and that members of minority cultures should therefore be encouraged to cultivate their moral and aesthetic insights for humanity as a whole, is largely built upon an assumption of intercultural dialogue. Indeed, for both Taylor and Parekh, communication and dialogue are in different ways integral features to their intellectual and political advocacy of multiculturalism, and by implication must necessarily be considered so by those drawing upon their work unless a different reading is offered. The point is that to consider multiculturalists who draw upon these and similar formulations as being unconcerned with matters of dialogue and communication is to profoundly misread and mischaracterise their positions.

Moreover, even amongst those theorists who do not elaborate a philosophical concept of dialogical multiculturalism, dialogue is important at a political level. Whatever their varying views about the importance of say entrenched rights, democratic majoritarianism, special forms of representation and so on, they all see multiculturalism as the giving of 'voice' in the public square to marginalised groups (Young 1990, Kymlicka 1995, Tully 1995, Modood 2007a). Specifically, these authors also argue that dialogue is the way to handle difficult cases of cultural practices such as clitoridectomy, hate speech, religious dress, gender relations and so on (see also Eisenberg 2009 on public assessment of identity claims). Therefore, whether it is at a philosophical or a political level, the leading theorists of multiculturalism give dialogue a centrality missing in liberal nationalist or human rights or class-based approaches – and missed by interculturalist critics of multiculturalism. The multiculturalists assume, however, that there is a sense in which the participants to a dialogue are 'groups' or 'cultures' and this leads us to a second point of alleged contrast with interculturalists.

## Less Groupist and Culture-Bound: More Synthesised and Interactive

A related means through which the concern with 'closed' communities or groupings that advocates of interculturalism conceive multiculturalism as giving rise to, takes us to our next characterisation of interculturalism contra multiculturalism. This is found in the assertion that "one of the implications of an intercultural framework, as opposed to a multicultural one . . . is that culture is acting in a multi-directional manner" (Hammer 2004:1). This depiction of interculturalism as facilitating an interactive and dynamic cultural 'exchange' informs a consistent line of distinction, as the following two portrayals make clear:

> Multiculturalism tends to *preserve* a cultural heritage, while interculturalism acknowledges and enables cultures to have currency, to be exchanged, to circulate, to be modified and evolve. (Sze and Powell 2004)

> [Interculturalism] is concerned with the task of developing cohesive civil societies by turning notions of singular identities into those of multiple ones, and by developing a shared and common value system and public culture. In building from a deep sharing of differences of culture and experience it encourages the formation of interdependencies which structure personal identities that go beyond nations or simplified ethnicities. (Booth 2003: 432)

This emphasis is warranted for advocates of interculturalism who maintain that the diversity of the locations from where migrants and ethnic minorities herald, gives rise not to a creation of communities or groups but to a churning mass of languages, ethnicities and religions all cutting across each other and creating a 'superdiversity' (Vertovec 2007). An intercultural perspective is better served to facilitate management of these sociological realities, it is argued, in a way that can be positively contrasted against a multiculturalism that emphasises strong ethnic or cultural identities at the expense of wider cultural exchanges.

Notwithstanding this problematic description of how groups feature in multiculturalism, which is challenged in other readings (see, for example, Modood 2007a and Meer, 2010), what such characterisations of interculturalism ignore are the alternative ways in which political interculturalism is itself conceptualised. As stated at the outset, by political interculturalism we refer to ways in which interculturalism is appropriated in the critique of multiculturalism (Booth 2003, Sze and Powell 2004, Wood *et al.* 2006), in a way that may not necessarily be endorsed by interculturalism's advocates.

Writing from the Quebec context, Gagnon and Iacovino (2007) are one example of authors who contrast interculturalism positively with multiculturalism. The interesting aspect for our discussion is that they do so in a way that relies upon a formulation of groups, and by arguing that Quebec has developed a distinctive intercultural political approach to diversity that is explicitly in opposition to Federal Canadian multiculturalism. Their starting point is that two broad considerations are accepted by a variety of political positions, including liberal nationalists, republicans and multiculturalists; indeed, by most positions except liberal individualism, which they critique and leave to one side. These two considerations are that, first, "full citizenship status requires that all cultural identities be allowed to participate in democratic life equally, without the necessity of reducing conceptions of identity to the level of the individual" (Gagnon and Iacovino 2007: 96). Second, with respect to unity: "the key element is a sense of common purpose in public matters", "a *centre* which also serves as a marker of identity in the larger society and denotes in itself a pole of allegiance for all citizens" (96).

For Gagnon and Iacovino, however, Canadian multiculturalism has two fatal flaws, which means that it is de facto liberal individualist in practice if not in theory. First, it privileges an individualist approach to culture: as individuals or their choices change, the collective culture must change; in contrast, Quebec's policy states clearly the need to recognise the French language as a collective good requiring protection and encouragement (Rocher *et al.* in Gagnon and Iacovino

2007: 99). Second, Canadian multiculturalism locates itself not in democratic public culture but rather "[p]ublic space is based on individual participation via a bill of rights" (110–111); judges and individual choices, not citizens debating and negotiating with each other become the locus of cultural interaction and public multiculturalism.

Gagnon and Iacovino's positive argument for interculturalism can therefore be expressed in the following five stages. First, there should be a public space and identity that is not merely about individual constitutional or legal rights. Second, this public space is an important identity for those who share it and so qualifies and counterbalances other identities that citizens value. Third, this public space is created and shared through participation, interaction, debate and common endeavour. Fourth, this public space is not culture-less but nor is it merely the 'majority culture', all can participate in its synthesis and evolution and while it has an inescapable historical character, it is always being remade and ought to be remade to include new groups. Fifth and finally, Quebec, and not merely federal Canada, is such a public space and so an object to which immigrants need to have identification with and integrate into and should seek to maintain Quebec as a nation and not just a federal province (the same point may apply in other multinational states but there are different degrees and variations of 'multi-nationalism' cf Bouchard, 2011).

This characterisation then is very different to that proposed by Booth (2003), Hammer (2004) or Sze and Powell (2004) because it makes a moral and policy case for the recognition of relatively distinct sub-state nationalisms. As such it is less concerned with the diversity of the locations from where migrants and ethnic minorities herald or the superdiversity that this is alleged to cultivate therein. Its emphasis on multinationalism does distinguish it from post-immigration multi-culturalism (and post-immigration interculturalism) but not multiculturalism per se (see, for example, Kymlicka 1995). Alternative, less macro-level interculturalism that focuses on neighbourhoods, classroom pedagogy, the funding of the arts and so on, on the other hand, seems a-political. As such, they are not critiques of multiculturalism but a different exercise.

## Committed to a Stronger Sense of Whole; National Identity and Social Cohesion

A third related charge is that far from being a system that speaks to the whole of society, multiculturalism, unlike interculturalism, speaks only to and for the minorities within it and, therefore, also fails to appreciate the necessary wider framework for its success. As Goodhart (2004) has protested, multiculturalism is a-symmetrical in that it not only places too great an emphasis upon difference and diversity, upon what divides us more than what unites us, but also that it ignores the needs of majorities. It thus encourages resentment, fragmentation and disunity. This can be prevented or overcome, as Alev (2007) and other commentators put it, through invocations of interculturalism that promote community cohesion on a local

level, and more broadly through an interculturalism that encourages the subscription to national citizenship identities as forms of meta-membership:

> Interculturalism is a better term than multiculturalism. It emphasises interaction and participation of citizens in a common society, rather than cultural differences and different cultures existing next to each other without necessarily much contact or participative interaction. Interculturalism is therefore equivalent to mutual integration.

> While multiculturalism boils down to celebrating difference, interculturalism is about understanding each other's cultures, sharing them and finding common ground on which people can become more integrated. (NewStart Magazine 7 June 2006)

These common grounds embody a kind of commonality that members of society need to have and which is said to have been obscured by a focus on difference. It is argued that European societies and states have been too laissez-faire in promoting commonality and this must now be remedied (Joppke 2004), hence the introduction of measures such as swearing of oaths of allegiance at naturalisation ceremonies, language proficiency requirements for citizenship and citizenship education in schools, amongst other things. What such sentiment ignores is how all forms of prescribed unity, including civic unity, usually retain a majoritarian bias that places the burden of adaptation upon the minority, and so is inconsistent with interculturalism's alleged commitment to 'mutual integration' as put forward in Alev's account.

As Viet Bader (2005: 169) reminds us: "all civic and democratic cultures are inevitably embedded into specific ethno-national and religious histories". Were we to assess the normative premise of this view, however, we would inevitably encounter a dense literature elaborating the continuing disputes over the interactions between the civic, political and ethnic dimensions in the creation of nations, national identities and their relationship to each other and to non-rational 'intuitive' and 'emotional' pulls of ancestries and cultures and so forth. Chief amongst these is whether or not 'nations' are social and political formations developed in the proliferation of modern nation-states from the eighteenth century onwards, or whether they constitute social and political formations – or 'ethnies' – bearing an older pedigree that may be obscured by a modernist focus. What is most relevant to our discussion, however, is not the debate between different camps of 'modernist', 'ethno-symbolist' and 'primordialist' protagonists, among others, but rather the ways in which minorities' differences are conceived in contemporary form of meta-unity.[5]

It is perhaps telling, however, that much of the literature on national identity in particular has tended to be retrospective; to the extent that such contemporary concerns do not enjoy a widespread appeal in nationalism studies (while the opposite could be said to be true of the literature on citizenship). This tendency is not limited to academic arenas and one of the curiosities in popular articulations of national identity is the purchase that these accounts garner from a recourse to tradition,

history and the idea of a common past (Calhoun 1994). One implication is that national identities can frequently reflect desires to authenticate the past, "to select from all that has gone before that which is distinctive, 'truly ours', and thereby to mark out a unique, shared destiny" (Smith 1998: 43).

It was this very assessment that, at the turn of the millennium, informed the Commission on Multi-Ethnic Britain's characterisation of British national identity as potentially "based on generalisations [that] involve a selective and simplified account of a complex history" (CMEB 2000). Chaired by Bhikhu Parekh, it feared such an account would be one in which "[m]any complicated strands are reduced to a simple tale of essential and enduring national unity" (CMEB 2000: 2.9, 16). It was precisely this tendency that informed the CMEB's alarm at how invocations of national identity potentially force ethnic minorities into a predicament not of their making: one in which majorities are conflated with the nation and where national identity is promoted as a reflection of this state of affairs (because national identities are assumed to be cognates of monistic nations). For, in not easily fitting into a majoritarian account of national identity, or being either unable or unwilling to be reduced to, or assimilated into, a prescribed public culture, minority 'differences' may become variously negatively conceived.

These concerns have not been limited to the UK and may be observed in the Intercultural Dialog Commission (2005) set up by the federal government in Belgium to facilitate a transition at the federal level from an emphasis on integration to cultural diversity. This identified several historical tendencies, concerning (i) a political pluralism that facilitated working-class emancipation and wider political consultation; (ii) philosophical pluralism that incrementally led to the official recognition of various public religions (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic and Anglican) and non-religion; and (iii) community pluralism as stemming from Flemish and Walloon movements that created the current federal State of Belgium. Importantly, the Commissioners underscored a further form of pluralism as the next step: (iv) cultural pluralism. More precisely they insisted that integration issues should take into account relevant cultural dimensions and that it no longer makes sense to qualify the descendents of migrants as 'migrant' or 'allochtone' – used respectively in the Walloon and Flemish regions – instead, 'cultural minorities' would be a much more relevant definition. On the whole, the report focused its conclusions on the lack of cultural recognition in a manner that later invited the criticism that the Commission had been highly influenced by communitarian theories: of "trying to develop civic responsibility and common citizenship rather than thinking about an increasing space for cultural communities" (*La Libre* 6 June 2005).

One scholarly intervention in this vein can be found in Modood's restatement of multiculturalism as a civic idea that can be tied to an inclusive national identity (2007a); some of the responses this has elicited (see Modood 2007b) helps cast light upon this debate. This concern was present in his *Not Easy Being British: Colour, Culture and Citizenship* first published in 1992 where, not unusually among advocates of multiculturalism, Modood emphasised the role of citizenship in fostering

commonality across differences, before recasting part of this civic inclusion as proceeding through claims-making upon, and therefore reformulating, national identities. In his more contemporary formulation, he puts this thus:

> [I]t does not make sense to encourage strong multicultural or minority identities and weak common or national identities; strong multicultural identities are a good thing – they are not intrinsically divisive, reactionary or subversive – but they need the complement of a framework of vibrant, dynamic, national narratives and the ceremonies and rituals which give expression to a national identity. It is clear that minority identities are capable of exerting an emotional pull for the individuals for whom they are important. Multicultural citizenship, if it is to be equally attractive to the same individuals, requires a comparable counterbalancing emotional pull. (Modood 2007b)

This restatement contains at least two key points that are central to the preceding discussion. The first concerns an advocacy and continuity of earlier forms of multiculturalism that have sought to accommodate collective identities and incorporate differences into the mainstream. These differences are not only tolerated but respected, and include the turning of a 'negative' difference into a 'positive' difference in a way that is presented in the ethnic pride currents as elements of racial equality. The second is to place greater emphasis upon the unifying potential in an affirmation of a renegotiated and inclusive national identity therein. While the latter point is welcomed by some commentators who had previously formed part of the pluralistic left, the bringing of previously marginalised groups into the societal mainstream is, at best, greeted more ambivalently.

### Illiberalism and Culture

The fourth charge is that multiculturalism lends itself to illiberality and relativism, whereas interculturalism has the capacity to criticise and censure culture (as part of a process of intercultural dialogue), and so is more likely to emphasise the protection of individual rights.

In Europe this charge clearly assumes a role in the backlash against multiculturalism since, as Kymlicka (2005b: 83) describes, "it is very difficult to get support for multiculturalism policies if the groups that are the main beneficiaries of these policies are perceived as carriers of illiberal cultural practices that violate norms of human rights". This view is particularly evident in the debates concerning the accommodation of religious minorities, especially when the religion in question is perceived to take a conservative line on issues of gender equality, sexual orientation and progressive politics generally – something that has arguably led some commentators who may otherwise sympathise with religious minorities to argue that it is difficult to view them as victims when they may themselves be potential oppressors (see Meer and Modood 2009b).

Kymlicka (2005b: 83) narrows this observation down further in his conclusion that "if we put Western democracies on a continuum in terms of the proportion of

immigrants who are Muslim, I think this would provide a good indicator of public opposition to multiculturalism". As Bhikhu Parekh (2006: 180–181) notes, this can be traced to a perception that Muslims are "collectivist, intolerant, authoritarian, illiberal and theocratic", and that they use their faith as "a self-conscious public statement, not quietly held personal faith but a matter of identity which they must jealously guard and loudly and repeatedly proclaim . . . not only to remind them of who they are but also to announce to others what they stand for". It is thus unsurprising to learn that some attitude surveys in Britain report that 77 per cent of people are convinced that "Islam has a lot of fanatical followers", 68 per cent consider it "to have more to do with the middle ages than the modern world" and 64 per cent believe that Islam "treats women badly" (Field 2007: 453).

For these reasons, Muslim claims-making has been characterised as exceptionally ambitious and difficult to accommodate (Joppke 2004, 2008, Moore 2004, 2006, Pew Research 2006, Policy Exchange 2007). This is particularly the case when Muslims are perceived to be – often uniquely – in contravention of liberal discourses of individual rights and secularism (Toynbee 2005, Hansen 2006, Hutton 2007) and is exemplified by the way in which visible Muslim practices such as veiling have in public discourses been reduced to and conflated with alleged Muslim practices such as forced marriages, female genital mutilation, a rejection of positive law in favour of criminal *sharia* law and so on (Meer, Dwyer and Modood, 2010). This suggests a radical 'otherness' about Muslims and an illiberality about multiculturalism, since the latter is alleged to license these practices.

One example can be found in Nick Pearce, director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and former Head of the Research and Policy Unit at 10 Downing Street under Prime Minister Brown. Pearce rejects the view that religious orientation is comparable to other forms of ethno-cultural belonging because this "may end up giving public recognition to groups which endorse fundamentally illiberal and even irrational goals" (2007). He therefore argues that one obstacle to an endorsement of multiculturalism is the public affirmation of religious identities, something Kymlicka (2007: 54) identifies as central to a 'liberal–illiberal' front in the new 'war' on immigrant multiculturalism.

It is difficult, however, not to view this as a knee-jerk reaction that condemns religious identities per se, rather than examines them on a case-by-case basis, while on the other hand assuming that ethnic identities are free of illiberalism. This is empirically problematic given that some of the contentious practices are not religious but cultural. Clitoridectomy, for example, is often cited as an illiberal practice in the discussions we are referring to. It is, however, a cultural practice among various ethnic groups, and yet has little support from any religion. Therefore, to favour ethnicity and problematise religion is a reflection of a secularist bias that has alienated many religionists, especially Muslims, from multiculturalism. It is much better to acknowledge that the 'multi' in multiculturalism will encompass different kinds of groups and does not itself privilege any one kind, but that 'recognition' should be

given to the identities that marginalised groups themselves value and find strength in, whether these be racial, religious or ethnic (Modood 2007b).

## Conclusions

This paper provides an entry point in developing a discussion on the relationship between interculturalism and multiculturalism. The question it raises is to what extent the present criteria proposed by advocates of interculturalism, in positively contrasting it with multiculturalism, are persuasive. In assessing this we maintain that whilst interculturalism and multiculturalism share much as approaches concerned with recognising cultural diversity, the answer to Lentin's question (2005: 394) – is interculturalism merely an 'updated version' of multiculturalism? – is in the main 'no'. That is to say that while advocates of interculturalism wish to emphasise its positive qualities in terms of encouraging communication, recognising dynamic identities, promoting unity and challenging illiberality, each of these qualities already feature (and are on occasion foundational) to multiculturalism too. Moreover, multiculturalism presently surpasses interculturalism as a political orientation that is able to recognise that social life consists of individuals and groups, and that both need to be provided for in the formal and informal distribution of powers, as well as reflected in an ethical conception of citizenship, and not just an instrumental one. As such we conclude that until interculturalism as a political discourse is able to offer an original perspective, one that can speak to a variety of concerns emanating from complex identities and matters of equality and diversity in a more persuasive manner than at present, it cannot, intellectually at least, eclipse multiculturalism.

## Acknowledgements

## Notes

[1]   See, for example: http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/406.0.html?&redirect_url = my-startpage-eyid.html
[2]   We are very grateful to Geoff Levey for alerting us to the nuances of the inception of Australian multiculturalism.
[3]   This inclusiveness was formalised in the first national multicultural policy, National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, under the Hawke Labor government in 1989. It has been retained in every subsequent version. While Indigenous Australians are formally included, the policy also states that their situation is distinct and requires its own special treatment and set of measures – consequently many Indigenous leaders themselves reject multiculturalism as being relevant to them and indeed as undercutting their special status as First Peoples (see Levey 2008).
[4]   Thus making equal recognition an essential part of democratic culture, a point not lost on Habermas (1994): 113) who argues that "a correctly understood theory of [citizenship]

rights requires a politics of recognition that protects the individual and the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed".

[5]     However, this concern relies perhaps on something from the cultural imaginary of the type of 'modernist' argument most associated with Anderson (1983). Moreover, for a study of how this is happening in non-political urban contexts, see Kyriakides *et al.* (2009).

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## Journal of Intercultural Studies

## Multiculturalism from Above and Below: Analysing a Political Discourse

Pnina Werbner

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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

# Multiculturalism from Above and Below: Analysing a Political Discourse[1]

## Pnina Werbner

Meer and Modood have written an admirably lucid exposition of the political–philosophical case in defence of multiculturalism. Their critical evaluation of interculturalism, a latecomer to the Anglo-American scholarly discourse on relations among cultures in modern states, is convincing: interculturalism is not really a political theory but refers to a mode of communication across ethnic or religious divisions. A further theory not mentioned by the authors, but also invoked as an alternative to the supposed multicultural tendency to essentialise or over-privilege cultural boundaries and cultural closure, is cosmopolitanism. Hollinger, for example, has argued that cosmopolitanism is neither universalist nor multiculturalist, but espouses a 'soft' multiculturalism that is responsive to diversity, particularity, history, the realities of power and the need for politically viable solidarities (2002: 228). Such situated or grounded cosmopolitanism nevertheless recognises, Hollinger argues, that cultures and groups change and evolve; they are not fixed and immutable forever (2002: 228).

My own critical evaluation of Meer and Modood's exposition starts from the theoretical position that multiculturalism must be grasped as a *discourse* in which scholars participate along with cultural actors, politicians and the media. Multiculturalism is, in other words, always positioned, invoked in defence of rights (cultural, human) or in defence of communal solidarity, including that of the nation-state. It is a discourse characterised by constant seepage across academia, the media, politicians and ethnic-cum-religious public actors on whether multiculturalism is 'good' or 'bad', whether it has created 'bridges' (more solidarity) or 'failed' (and is thus divisive). Multiculturalism is in this sense often a performative utterance, played out in front of an audience hostile to immigrants, Islam or the West, or alternatively, 'liberal' or 'cosmopolitan', enjoying and embracing diversity.

If we accept my argument that multiculturalism is a discourse as well as a political theory, we need to examine its affinities and differences from religious discourse.

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The debates on multiculturalism in Europe today, including the UK, often focus either explicitly or implicitly on Muslims and Islam, with Islam conceived of as a 'culture', leaving aside issues of religious tolerance and, indeed, inter-faith dialogue. But is this sleight of hand legitimate philosophically? Are the discourses of religious pluralism and multiculturalism identical? And if not, what distinguishes them? I start with a brief overview of my understanding of the multicultural debate.

Culture, Clifford Geertz proposed, is a "system of symbols and meanings", which he contrasted with norms, defined as oriented patterns for action (in Kuper 1999: 71). Against this American privileging of meaning, Durkheimian and Marxist anthropological traditions have tended to regard culture with suspicion (Kuper 1999: xiv), so that "British social anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard were dismissive of the notion of culture" (Kuper 1999: 58), conceiving anthropology more as a form of comparative sociology (Kuper 1999: 129). Multicultural citizenship has similarly had its sceptical critics and defenders. Much of the multicultural debate at the turn of the century has focused on the politics of multicultural citizenship in plural or immigrant societies, and concerns language or religious rights rather than 'culture' per se.

Critics of multiculturalism come from both the socialist Left and the liberal Centre and Right. They include postmodern anthropologists, feminists and human rights activists. They also, of course, include right-wing racists, traditionalists and nationalists.

Anthropological critiques of multiculturalism start from its presumed false theorisation of culture. Multiculturalism, anthropologists argue, reifies and essentialises cultures as rigid, homogeneous and unchanging wholes with fixed boundaries (Friedman 1997, Baumann 1999). It assumes a fixed connection between culture and territory (Caglar 1997). Its political correctness glosses over internal social problems within ethnic groups (Wikan 2002). Current theories in anthropology are based on the idea that cultures are creative and changing, internally contested and heterogeneous. People in one culture constantly borrow from others. Cultures are therefore inescapably hybrid and permeable. For this reason too, cultures do not have a single, unified leadership and any attempt by the state to impose one is false and oppressive. Critically also, diasporas have multiple and intersecting identities, including party political affiliations to the left and right (Werbner 2002).

Against critics of multiculturalism, Terence Turner (1993: 412) has argued that multiculturalism is a 'critical' rather than reifying discourse. The aporia that disadvantaged groups (women, ethnic minorities) face in the political arena relates to the definition of citizenship as the duty, *qua citizen*, to aim to transcend local concerns so that particularistic claims to compensate for historical under-privilege are often constructed as narrow, selfish and divisive. Hence, the challenge of the new multicultural politics is how to transcend such constructions, to eliminate current subordinations while stressing both universalism and difference (Modood and Werbner 1997, Werbner and Modood 1997). In Quebec's multicultural 'minority circuit', activists "show themselves capable of . . . adopting a generic minority rights

rhetoric as an occupational vernacular" (Amit-Talai 1996: 106), but in suppressing their particularistic cultural claims, they often fail to challenge the majority's hegemonic culture. Despite its morally grounded claims to separate cultural sovereignty, Quebec remains a deeply racist society (Knowles 1996). Multiculturalism, it is argued, thus co-opts leaders through minor investments. Feminists such as Okin (1999) argue that multiculturalism accords too much power to religious elders, usually men, to rule over women and their bodies, and to deny them their rights as equal citizens to choose how to dress, who to marry or divorce, if and when to have children, and so forth.

The argument in favour of multiculturalism put forward by liberal communitarians like Charles Taylor (1994) is that identities are deeply grounded emotionally in authentically specific cultures and moralities. To deny these is a form of offensive discrimination; second, that a pragmatic resolution of individual vs. collective rights is possible (Kymlicka 1995); third, that the public–private distinction is highly ambiguous (Parekh 1995, Modood 1997a); and fourth, that many forms of racism, such as anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, essentialise and biologise imputed cultural traits. Hence, the distinction between race and culture is untenable in reality (Modood 1997b). Indeed, multiculturalism without anti-racism does not make sense as a radical political programme. The need is to recognise that the two struggles are complementary rather than opposed (Blum 1994, Stolcke 1995). Racism denies universal human commonalities beyond culture, and thus presumes the licence to violate the symbolic and physical integrity of individuals and groups.

Tempelman (1999) distinguishes three forms of multiculturalism: 'primordial', associated with Taylor; 'civic', associated with Parekh; and 'universalist', with Kymlicka. While civic multiculturalism recognises that cultures are open, Tempelman claims, it fails to resolve cases in which dialogue fails and the state invokes its authority, as happened in the case of the *The Satanic Verses* affair in Britain or the scarf affair in France. Multicultural confrontations sometimes seem intractable and long term. The need is to distinguish therefore between multiculturalism-as-usual (ethnic restaurants, carnivals and special arrangements for school meals, burial, etc.) and what I have called 'multiculturalism-in-history' – unresolved conflicts that leave a bitter and often lasting legacy (Werbner 2005).

In current human rights discourse, the right of individuals and collectivities to foster, enhance and protect their culture and traditions is enshrined, but so too are freedom of speech and freedom from violence, which deny the absolute right of traditional practices, such as forced marriages or genital mutilation. Clearly, then, multiculturalism is fraught with potential contradictions if too rigidly defined. Anti-multiculturalist liberals argue that liberal democracy allows sufficient space for ethnic and religious expression in civil society and the private sphere. Universal individual rights to equality before the law are at risk if cultural rights are given precedence. There is nothing to prevent ethnic or religious groups, they say, from organising on a voluntary basis. However, as Talal Asad (1993), for example, has

argued, minorities need protection from offensive symbolic as well as civic or material exclusions and violations.

On the Left the argument is that the superficial celebration of multiculturalism – of exotic cuisines, popular music or colourful festivals and rituals – disguises ongoing economic and political inequalities. Rather than addressing these, the state funds multicultural festivals and turns its back on real problems of deprivation, prejudice and discrimination. Hence, multiculturalism and identity politics obscure the common oppression of the under-privileged within capitalist society and divide anti-racist movements (Sivanandan 1990). This debate, anti-racism vs. multiculturalism, shared oppression vs. culture, obscures, however, as Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) have pointed out, the divisive potential of equal opportunities policies.

## Multiculturalism from Below

Critics on both Right and Left tend to assume that multiculturalism is a conspiracy of top-down state engineering. Against that, my own argument has been that multiculturalism in Britain, as applied to immigrant minorities rather than territorial ones, is a politically and bureaucratically negotiated order, often at the local level, responsive to ethnic grassroots pressure, budgetary constraints and demands for redistributive justice. It is bottom-up rather than top-down; a politics of citizenship, like other group politics (Werbner 2005). There is thus no single 'just' blueprint for multiculturalism, even within a single country and certainly between countries (Samad 1997).

Beyond the struggles for local recognition, multiculturalism has today become a global movement against national assimilationist pressures (Nimni 2003). It refers to different struggles by minorities demanding autonomy, recognition and a share of state or local state budgets. The politics of multiculturalism in Botswana, for example, denies Tswana right to absolute hegemony in the public sphere in the name of nationalism (R. Werbner and Gaitskell 2002). Rather than thinking of multiculturalism, then, as a discourse that reifies culture, it needs to be thought of as a politics of equal and just citizenship that bases itself on the right to be 'different' within a democratic political community. The political is a critical dimension of the discourse of multiculturalism, both supporting and undermining it: the change in legislation in Botswana allowing community radio and indigenous or local language teaching in primary school has never been implemented. Without a struggle from below, it seems it never will be.

## The 'Failure-of-Multiculturalism' Discourse

In the face of alleged Muslim terror plots by young British, American or French-born Muslims, the Sisyphean task facing national Muslim organisational leaders, of counteracting the widespread public image of pervasive, hidden, Islamic terror, is huge. Instead of lobbying for and promoting Islamic interests, they find themselves

and their organisations condemned by politicians and the media alike for their radical roots and failure to promote diasporic Muslim integration and multiculturalism.

In this context, the 'failure-of-multiculturalism' discourse has taken root in Britain, promoted by politicians, the media and academics, and is a central aspect of the debate between Muslim leaders and British politicians. Bagguley and Hussain describe this as a "wholesale rejection of the discourse of multiculturalism" (2008: 159). Hence the political call was for 'community cohesion'. Multiculturalism-in-history was inaugurated by the Rushdie affair. Alleging blasphemy punishable by death, Muslims in Britain seemed deliberately to insist upon values alien to the majority population. They burnt books and demanded the death of an author. The 7 July 2005 London suicide bombings by young British Pakistanis were carried out in the name of Islam and as retribution for the sufferings of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East. Once again, this seemed to underline an unbridgeable chasm between European values of citizenship and the rule of law, and Muslims' vengeful transnational politics. The Danish cartoon affair was yet another manifestation of seemingly incommensurable values, this time in the field of art and representation.

Like Muslims, diasporic Hindus and Sikhs have each in turn also sparked apparently intractable multicultural conflicts in Britain. In the Sikh case, the conflict surrounded a play, *Behzti* (Dishonour), written by a young Sikh woman, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, which depicted the rape and murder of a young woman by a priest in the *Gurdwara* (Sikh temple). Produced by Birmingham Repertory, the play was cancelled after Sikhs responded with a massive show of public outrage and threatened violence (Asthana 2004: 13). In the case of Hindus, the clash of values arose in response to a solo exhibition by one of India's most celebrated contemporary artists, Maqbool Fida Husain, whose one-man retrospective in London included portrayals of the goddesses Durga and Draupadi in the "characteristic nude imagery associated with his work" (Khanna 2006: 2). Asia House Gallery withdrew the exhibition after highly vocal protests by Hindu Human Rights, the National Council of Hindu Temples and the Hindu Forum of Britain (Khanna 2006: 2).

The notion of multiculturalism-in-history is intended to separate day-to-day tolerance of cultural diversity and arguments over minor state funding allocations from exceptional cultural clashes that seem irresolvable. Historically, such confrontations are usually never resolved; they only 'go away', entering the collective sub-consciousness of a community as a bitter sediment. This was certainly true of the Rushdie affair. The 2007 award of a knighthood to Salman Rushdie, almost 20 years after the confrontation over *The Satanic Verses*, ignited once again the bitterness British Muslims felt over the affair, despite their muted public response.

## Religion vs. Culture

Debates on multiculturalism often lead to an intellectual cul-de-sac. Detractors typically argue that culture is not identical with community; it is not a bounded or

territorialised entity; it cannot be reified since it is constantly changing and hybridising, an 'open text'. While such deconstructive arguments are undeniable, they evade the question, first, of why certain issues evoke such passionate commitment and sharp disagreement, and, linked to that, is it accurate to speak of *culture*, when at issue are historical conflicts sparked by deeply felt *religious* feelings, in confrontation with liberal secularism or Western geopolitics? David Cameron, then leader of the opposition party in Britain, was able to say in the same breath, we will support the Notting Hill carnival (a cultural event), we reject multiculturalism as a failed policy. Carnival 'culture' is seemingly innocuous and non-polemical, neither race, ethnic chauvinism or religion; hence, an acceptable idiom in which to describe 'difference' in neutral terms. However, when talking about multiculturalism and its failures, more often than not the underlying attack turns out to be against diasporic Muslims' alleged self-segregation in social ghettoes or their 'extremist' defence of their religious commitments (there are countries, of course, in which language has the same effect). The fact that the underlying problematic of *religion* is not acknowledged publicly in Britain (as it might be in South Asia) so that 'culture' becomes a euphemism for religion or community entangles government ministers and opposition leaders alike in strange contradictions of which they seem entirely unaware.

Much of the discourse on multiculturalism assumes, unreflectively, that the cultures of minorities, defined in the broadest sense of the term to include religion, can be made to disappear by fiat if politicians and policymakers refuse to support them, either rhetorically, on official occasions, or with small dollops of cash. While defending multiculturalism, Meer and Modood implicitly make the same assumption. In reality, however, the very opposite has often been the case historically. The cultures of minorities are strengthened by the need to mobilise internally for the sake of culture or religion in the *absence* of public funding. Singling out Muslim religious associations for censure as British politicians have chosen to do arguably merely legitimises their representative status in the eyes of the public they serve.

As a minority, it makes sense for Pakistanis in Britain to highlight their religious identity in civil society and the public sphere: first, because as pious believers this is their most valued, high-cultural identity; but importantly also, there are in Britain laws that set out entitlements for religious groups. Among these are the right to found voluntary-aided state schools, supported by government funds; the right to worship, to build places of worship and so forth. Oddly enough, despite periodic invocations of the failure of multiculturalism, there are no *laws* in the UK that enshrine the cultures of immigrants, though limited legal rights to cultural, political and territorial autonomy have been granted to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.[2] In other words, multicultural citizenship in Britain, as elsewhere, recognises the rights of indigenous territorialised peoples and settled minorities, aboriginals, Native Americans and so forth, to a measure of self-rule, autonomy and formal representation in the public sphere. Only secondarily does multicultural citizenship

apply to immigrant minorities *not* settled territorially. The UK Race Relations Act protects ethnic and racial minorities – and this includes most Muslims. The recent law against incitement to religious hatred goes some way to protect Muslims against extreme religious offence or vilification. On purely pragmatic grounds, then, immigrants fighting to gain equal rights in the UK will choose to struggle in arenas where there already exist established rights, some of which are denied them. In such cases, there is no need to establish the ground rules and principles; merely to insist on their universal application.

Unlike hegemonic nationalism, multiculturalism's innovation as a philosophical movement is that it applies to all citizens, even the majority. However, in a further twist that highlights the ambiguity of the culture concept, young Muslims themselves are rejecting their parental culture and tradition, in a paradoxical move that seems to deny culture in the name of religion.

## Religious vs. Multicultural Discourses

Islamists in Britain and elsewhere deny the validity of local cultures (see Roy 2004). This raises an interesting question: can there be a religion that is not also cultural? Pakistanis reiterate that Islam is a whole, all-inclusive, way of life, and this indeed was the argument put forward by the Muslims of India in claiming a national homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. However, if Islam is a whole way of life, then surely it refers to the customs and traditions of particular localities? In a sense, both claims are equally dubious: religion is not the same as culture, at least not in the modern world, but nor is it entirely separable from it. Islamism may reject the Pakistani-style chiffon headscarf, but it substitutes for it another head covering that becomes over time a uniform, that is, a custom. This custom can, however, be shared by persons from different places and backgrounds.

Nevertheless, I believe that it makes sense to distinguish between culture and religion, in a way that an Islamist does. This is because, as discursive formations they are not the same, and particularly so in the case of the three monotheistic religions. In these, religious belief is about a relationship with a transcendent being that demands conviction and commitment, experienced in highly emotional ways. It may be, as Durkheim famously argued in the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, that God is merely the embodiment of community; and it is probably true that culture, in the sense of language, but also law, morality, food, music, art, architecture, spices and perfumes, clothing and so forth, also embodies a community – though not necessarily the same one. However, religion and culture are not the same for the simple reason that cultural practices are not hedged in a similar way with sacred taboos, dangerous no-go areas. Culture is not pitted against moral transgressions and ethical violations, although those who perform it badly can be laughed at for their gaucheness. Religion is threatened by believers' internal doubt, which may or may not be fuelled by externally inspired scepticism. Culture is threatened by the physical destruction of objects or buildings, by forgetfulness, and perhaps more than anything

in the modern world, by radical dislocations and changes in social organisation. A person may have multiple cultural competences, and switch between them situationally, or she may be a cultural hybrid, the product of even or uneven fusions of two or more cultural worlds. There have been periods in the history of religion when boundaries between, for example, Islam and Hinduism in South Asia, or Judaism and Christianity in the Near East, were blurred (for a discussion see Werbner 2009a). However, in the modern world it would seem odd to be a Muslim, a Jew and a Christian simultaneously, however syncretic one's faith.

The gap between culture and religion raises the question of what exactly is meant by multiculturalism in Britain? Whereas cultural 'traditions' may be open to negotiation in the diasporic context, religious customs anchored in Holy writ and said to originate in a transcendental covenant, may be conceived of by believers as non-negotiable. When encapsulated religious minorities negotiate a place in their new nation with the majority society, the more pious among them insist on the religious basis of customs (such as veiling) that in reality may have evolved historically. Culture for them assumes the aura of divine commandment, impervious to politicians' invocations of 'community cohesion'.

The problematic tendency to conflate religion and culture in debates on multiculturalism and identity politics in the UK includes academic defenders of multiculturalism as religion such as Modood (2005) or Parekh (2000) as well as their critics on the left (e.g. Yuval-Davis 1997). The "mystification of culture" as Bhatt (2006: 99) calls it, conflating religious pluralism with identity politics, imperceptively *merges two quite separate, historically constructed discourses* (Asad 2003). On the one hand, a discourse on religion that recognises that modern religions are institutionalised, bounded and textualised, even if subject to constant internal divisions and schismatic tendencies, more or less 'extreme', 'doctrinaire' or 'humanist-liberal'; 'pure' or 'syncretic', 'relaxed'; based on 'universalistic' or 'particularistic' interpretations; and, on the other hand, a discourse on 'culture' that recognises its fuzzy, historically changing, situational, hybridising and unreflective aspects. Arguably, issues usually regarded as a matter of multicultural policy, for example, the dispensation to wear exotic headdresses to school or work (turbans, veils, skullcaps) more rightly belong in the constitutional domain of religious pluralism. Cultural conventions on headdress, which do not carry that non-negotiable imperative quality, can be ignored.

Politicians would naturally like the Muslims of Britain to be contained within the envelope of the nation-state, to live scattered among the wider population and to be concerned mainly with religious education and pastoral care. They reject not only the extreme religiosity of many Muslims, including the second generation, but their enclaved living and diasporic commitments – not just to their country of origin but to Muslim communities elsewhere, especially Palestine, but also Iraq. *They demand a non-politicised religion, which they label 'culture'.* In addition, because Muslims in Britain are far more pious than most other British citizens and are equally emotional about their transnational loyalties, then it seems multiculturalism has not only failed

but supposedly foments hatred and division. Of course, at another level everyone – Muslims and non-Muslims alike – shares the knowledge that intractable international conflicts are impinging on the consciousness of young Muslims in Britain and encouraging a few of them towards – in their own eyes – heroic deeds of self-sacrifice, which to everyone else appear as unacceptable atrocities. How to reach these young people is a predicament shared by all British citizens, including Muslims. In a sense, too, it may well be that politicians feel on safer ground when they criticise religion, even if they label it 'culture'. They know from their own experience of European history that religion can be more or less extreme, more or less tolerant, more or less politicised, more or less individualised and private. Second, the term culture is also used to imply 'community': ethnic communities are expected by British politicians to exert moral control over their members. The failure of the Muslim community in Britain to control some of its youngsters is a failure of community and hence also of culture and multiculturalism.

Clearly, it is absurd to believe that the paltry sums of money given by the government to Muslim organisations whose members are, after all, tax payers, can shake the foundations of Muslim faith in Britain. Muslims raise vast sums of money in voluntary donations, running into millions of pounds each year, for charitable causes and communal projects like mosque building. For the latter, they also sometimes access overseas donations. No politician can determine the continued existence of Islam in Britain. The only use multicultural and multi-faith state or local-state funding can have is *positive*: to require that organisations service a wider range of ethnic minority users than their own internal fundraising would demand; to create alliances, to enter into dialogue with unlikely partners, to engage in joint efforts with other groups in order to provide help and services to the needy. Rather than fomenting hatred, state multiculturalism from above is designed to attenuate divisions between ethnic and religious groups and propel them into dialogue. *The aim of multiculturalism from above is thus greater interculturalism*! However, no amount of state funding can stop groups from asserting their diasporic loyalty and sense of co-responsibility vis-à-vis diasporas beyond the nation-state in which they have settled. World politics, not religion per se, are at the heart of the current multicultural debate.

In a sense, the failure-of-multiculturalism discourse is thus meant to remind minorities that there are no no-go areas within the diaspora that are closed to the press and media. Double talk – one message for them, one for us – is from now onwards unacceptable. The political thrust is towards an open, *transparent* multi-culturalism, legitimising press undercover reporting or engagement with spaces hidden from the public eye, and cultural-cum-religious intercultural debates with minorities on their own ground, sometimes on quite arcane issues, such as the writings of Mawdudi, on media websites or in the ethnic press (see Werbner 2009b). The question is whether this constant digging beneath the surface – the day-to-day media reporting on Muslim seditious plots and plotters, Muslim opinion polls that reveal out-of-line opinions and conspiracy theories, tirades by politicians against

so-called multiculturalism, or the invocations by politicians of the need to 'learn' to be good citizens – is in any way conducive towards a more positive integration of Muslims into British society? Such rhetorical attacks on a daily basis, many via the media, surely lead to a sense of siege and alienation among the vast majority of law-abiding Muslims, whatever their political sentiments.

The introduction of new discourses may disrupt "established assumptions structuring debates in the public sphere" (Asad 2003: 186). In this respect, the discursive attack on multiculturalism may be conceived of as a rejection by British politicians and the media of the invasion of religious discourses into the public sphere: faith and passion do not belong in a space of rational argumentation, economics and politics (Asad 2003: 187). The reasoned responses of Muslim leaders however, utilising the national platform of their own ethnic press, has carved out a space of intercultural civility in which they argue against allegations of extremism passionately and yet rationally (Werbner 2009b).

## A New Kind of Multiculturalism?

While much of the failure-of-multiculturalism discourse since 2000 has focused on the concern with the 'non-integration' of the Muslim minority, some features of the old state multicultural policy have always been unsatisfactory, especially the tendency to recruit representative delegates from each ethnic or religious group to sit on representative race and community relations councils. Against this, a 'new' public sector multiculturalism of consultation and participation has emerged in Britain, grounded in quite a different discourse. It makes no assumptions about the pre-existence of bounded communities. Instead, it creates vast lists of organisations that are invited in massive numbers to participate in public forums. In the case of London, for example, the organisations communicate through email with government agencies, the NHS, the Local Authority, the GLA and directly with each other. Their paid staff is multi-ethnic, as is the client population. While divisions tend to surface whenever 'representative' committees are set up across the whole black and ethnic minority population, cooperation and inclusive networks are likely to emerge and produce effective solidarity in narrower constituencies – and especially when it comes to the fair distribution of resources and jobs.

Our recent research on the black African diaspora in London disclosed the capacity of the African elite in civil society to create and sustain amicable inter-ethnic networks across the whole African diaspora, informed by a sense of justice, fairness and cooperation (see Werbner 2010). Elite Africans meet on many occasions – in public forums, workshops, parties, policy meetings, committees and advisory groups – some initiated by government, some by their national embassies or high commissions, and some by their own associations. Many have rubbed shoulders with the Great and the Good, including the leaders of their own countries. They are invited to receptions in Downing Street or the House of Commons, have advised ministers and the Mayor of London and sit on key Local Authority advisory groups.

This, despite the fact that in some cases their work is voluntary and unpaid. It is particularly the consultation and participation in forums that points to the emergence of a new kind of more inclusive multiculturalism in Britain, a feature of elite networking in a more open, participatory environment.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that multiculturalism is a political discourse that is always positioned. Augmenting Meer and Modood's consideration of the merits of multiculturalism vs. interculturalism, I highlight the central role that multiculturalism from above can play, at least in Britain, in facilitating, indeed requiring, intercultural or inter-faith openness and dialogue. It is thus extremely counter-productive, I argue, that politicians tend to use multiculturalism as a euphemism for immigration or extremism. All they achieve by the failure-of-multiculturalism discourse is a growing sense of alienation among religious and ethnic minorities who in any case rely on autonomous internal resources to perpetuate their culture and religion and create 'community'.

## Notes

[1]   This paper draws upon Werbner (2009b, 2010, 2011).
[2]   The amended British Nationality Act, 2005 requiring persons seeking naturalisation to have a minimal knowledge of English may be classed as a 'multicultural' law perhaps.

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# Comment on Meer and Modood

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# Comment on Meer and Modood

## Will Kymlicka

Academic and public debates go through cycles, and one of the current fashions is to defend a (new, innovative, realistic) 'interculturalism' against a (tired, discredited, naive) 'multiculturalism'. As Meer and Modood show, there is very little intellectual substance underlying this fad. It is not based on a careful conceptual analysis of the principles or presuppositions of the two approaches, but rather rests on a crude misrepresentation, even caricature, of multiculturalist theories and approaches. Nor is it based on a systematic empirical comparison of the actual policy outcomes associated with the two approaches, since defenders of interculturalism rarely make clear how their policy recommendations would differ from those defended by multiculturalists. As a result, the 'good interculturalism vs. bad multiculturalism' literature is essentially rhetorical rather than analytical, and we do not have a clear basis for judging how interculturalism differs from multiculturalism, if at all.

As a long-time defender of multiculturalism, I am not exactly a disinterested observer of this debate, and so unsurprisingly, I share Meer and Modood's frustration with this new fad and agree with their analysis of its limitations. Indeed, I am tempted to buttress their argument by providing further examples of the intellectual weakness of recent claims regarding the superiority of interculturalism over multiculturalism. Consider, for example, the influential 2008 "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. It argues that interculturalism should be the preferred model for Europe because multiculturalism has failed:

> In what became the western part of a divided post-war Europe, the experience of immigration was associated with a new concept of social order known as multiculturalism. This advocated political recognition of what was perceived as the distinct ethos of minority communities on a par with the 'host' majority. While this was ostensibly a radical departure from assimilationism, in fact multiculturalism frequently shared the same, schematic conception of society set in opposition of majority and minority, differing only in endorsing separation of the minority from

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the majority rather than assimilation to it . . . Whilst driven by benign intentions, multiculturalism is now seen by many as having fostered communal segregation and mutual incomprehension, as well as having contributed to the undermining of the rights of individuals – and, in particular, women – within minority communities, perceived as if these were single collective actors. The cultural diversity of contemporary societies has to be acknowledged as an empirical fact. However, a recurrent theme of the consultation was that multiculturalism was a policy with which respondents no longer felt at ease. (Council of Europe 2008: 18)

The intercultural approach, it argues, avoids these failed extremes of assimilation and multiculturalism, by both acknowledging diversity while insisting on universal values:

Unlike assimilation, [the intercultural approach] recognises that public authorities must be impartial, rather than accepting a majority ethos only, if communalist tensions are to be avoided. Unlike multiculturalism, however, it vindicates a common core which leaves no room for moral relativism. (Council of Europe 2008: 20)

All of this repeats the tropes that Meer and Modood identify in the literature. And as they would predict, it does so without a shred of evidence. The White Paper gives no examples of multiculturalist policies in post-war Europe that were premised on moral relativism, and it does not cite any evidence that the problems of social segregation or gender inequality are worse in European countries that embraced multiculturalism than in those countries that rejected multiculturalism. This is not surprising since, as I have argued elsewhere, there is no evidence for this claim.[1] And as Meer and Modood would predict, its defence of interculturalism stays at such a level of generality that it is impossible to tell which real-world multiculturalist policies it would reject.

In all of these respects, the White Paper nicely illustrates the Meer and Modood analysis, as yet one more example of the intellectual feebleness of the literature.[2] However, I mention the White Paper not to support their analysis, but rather to suggest its limits, and perhaps even its futility. In light of the White Paper, and related documents, we need to step back and ask deeper questions about the political context within which these debates take place, and about how progressive intellectuals can constructively intervene in them. The sort of analysis provided by Meer and Modood is intellectually sound, but I fear it is politically inert.

To understand the problem, it's worth pausing to consider how remarkable the 2008 White Paper is. The White Paper was approved by the Council of Ministers representing all the member states of the Council of Europe, and the Paper itself is derived from consultations with policymakers in the member states. Therefore, we have here an official statement by a pan-European organisation stating that it is the consensus of member states that multiculturalism has failed. In addition, note that this was in 2008. When Cameron, Merkel or Sarkozy made such claims in early 2011, this was considered newsworthy, although critics suggested there were clear partisan

political agendas underlying these claims by right-wing politicians. However, the claim that multiculturalism has failed had already been endorsed in 2008 by all member states, whether governed by left-wing or right-wing parties, whether traditionally pro-multicultural (like Britain or the Netherlands) or anti-multicultural (like France or Greece). There was a clear political consensus that we need a post-multicultural alternative, to be called 'interculturalism'.

Moreover, this is not just a European phenomenon. When UNESCO prepared its 2008 "World Report on Cultural Diversity", it too started from the premise that there was a consensus on the need for a post-multiculturalist alternative at the global level, which it too framed in the language of interculturalism (UNESCO 2008). Both the Council of Europe and UNESCO have historically been seen as standard-bearers for multiculturalism, yet as of 2008 both had declared the need to shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism.

How should we respond to such documents? One response, consistent with the Meer and Modood analysis, is to ask whether the White Paper or the World Report provides any good arguments or evidence for the claim that interculturalism is superior to multiculturalism. For example, when the White Paper claims that post-war Western Europe embraced relativist and segregationist multiculturalism, we certainly want to know if that is a fair characterisation or not. And here I agree with Meer and Modood that it is not a fair or accurate characterisation: indeed, it utterly strains all credibility (for my own critique of these mischaracterisations, see Kymlicka 2007: chaps. 2–4).

However, this just pushes the puzzle back a level: why would policymakers from across Europe endorse this caricature? One possibility is that this is a sincere error, due perhaps to misinformation or inadequate research, and that if we bring this error to light, the member states of the Council of Europe and UNESCO might reconsider their recommendation to shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism.

It's not clear if Meer and Modood believe something like this is possible, but in my view, it is implausible. I suspect that the authors of the White Paper and UNESCO World Report – along with the policymakers they consulted – are already aware that they are presenting a caricature. Alternatively, perhaps more accurately, I suspect they are not particularly concerned one way or the other about whether their characterisation is fair or accurate. The 'interculturalism as a remedy for failed multiculturalism' trope is not really intended to offer an objective social science account of our situation, but rather, I believe, is intended to serve as a new narrative, or if you like, a new myth. As I read these reports,[3] the authors have concluded that it is politically useful to construct a new narrative in which interculturalism emerges in Europe from the failed extremes of assimilation and multiculturalism. Such a narrative, they believe, can better sustain public support for progressive agendas and inclusive politics. Like all such narratives or myths, it is intended to enable certain political projects, while disabling others, and the Council of Europe and UNESCO authors believe that this new narrative can enable inclusive politics while disabling xenophobic politics.

Viewed this way – as an enabling political myth – I think that the interculturalism position is interesting and important. Viewed as an objective social scientific analysis, it is intellectually weak, and often fails to meet even minimal standards of academic rigour or objectivity. As noted earlier, it is highly rhetorical rather than analytical. However, I suggest we should take it seriously precisely as a form of political rhetoric, or if you like, a form of political theatre. It is an attempt to tell a story that can revive the flagging political commitment to diversity. Across Europe, and around the world, we see popular discontent with diversity, but this new narrative tells people that their discontent is not with diversity as such, but with a misguided and naive 'multi-culturalism'. Multiculturalism is offered up as a sacrificial lamb, a handy scapegoat for popular discontent, in the hope that this will undercut support for populist, anti-immigrant or anti-Roma, xenophobic parties. The narrative says "don't take your frustrations out on minorities; your objection is not to diversity, which is a good thing, but to the extreme multiculturalist ideology that we have now safely put behind us".

Viewed as a social science diagnosis of popular discontent, this is radically implausible. The evidence suggests that popular discontent with immigrants is in fact higher in countries that didn't embrace multiculturalism, and there's no evidence that adopting multiculturalism policies causes or exacerbates anti-immigrant or anti-minority attitudes. The authors of these reports sometimes reveal their awareness that their narrative is stretching the facts.[4] However, viewed as a political myth, it may not be so implausible. Something needs to be done to bolster the flagging commitment to diversity in Europe, and drawing a rhetorical contrast between a new interculturalism and an old multiculturalism may be politically effective, at least in some contexts. And precisely because the contract is rhetorical rather than real, policymakers can still retain much or all of what they adopted as multiculturalism, and simply re-label it as interculturalism.[5]

There are risks associated with this strategy. The interculturalists may think that they are defending diversity, but their crude anti-multiculturalist rhetoric may simply play into the hands of xenophobes who reject both multiculturalism and interculturalism. Since much of the anti-multiculturalist discourse in Europe is a thinly veiled form of racism and xenophobia, for the Council of Europe and UNESCO to also play the anti-multiculturalist card risks licensing and legitimating anti-diversity views. And while interculturalism is intended to offer a clear contrast with assimilation, it is so vague that assimilationist policies can be defended in the name of 'interculturalism'. Therefore, the rhetoric of interculturalism may not provide an effective check on either xenophobia or assimilationism. For these and other reasons, I am not particularly optimistic about this strategy. However, even if the inter-culturalist strategy is dangerous and improbable, it may still be a better political bet than attempting to defend diversity in the name of multiculturalism. The fact is that multiculturalism has been demonised perhaps beyond repair in many countries.

To be sure, these political calculations are likely to vary from country to country. Where multiculturalism has not yet become a poisoned term – as I think is still true in my own country of Canada[6] – I would argue that the fight for diversity can and

should still be fought in the name of multiculturalism. And this means tackling head-on the myths and the misrepresentations, in just the way that Meer and Modood do in their paper. However, I fear that in many countries, fighting for diversity in the name of multiculturalism may be a political non-starter. In any event, that seems to be the judgement of many of the experts, practitioners and policymakers whose views are reflected in the Council of Europe and UNESCO reports. As I noted earlier, we can dismiss the anti-multiculturalist grandstanding of right-wing politicians like Cameron, Merkel and Sarkozy. However, many authors of the Council of Europe and UNESCO reports have a genuine commitment to diversity. And, as I read them, they have made a judgement that in order to preserve the commitment to diversity, we need to drop the poisoned term of multiculturalism, and to engage in a conscious act of political mythmaking in which interculturalism emerges to rescue us from the failed extremes of assimilationism and multiculturalism.

I think we need to take that judgement seriously. And so we may want to ask, not whether 'interculturalism as a remedy for failed multiculturalism' is a sound scientific analysis (it isn't), but whether it offers a compelling political narrative that can potentially sustain a flagging commitment to diversity. I'm far from convinced it can, but then again it's far from clear what the alternative strategy is for addressing popular discontent with diversity.

In any event, this seems to me to be the real question to ask of the interculturalism vs. multiculturalism trope. It's important to be aware of the misinterpretations and conceptual ambiguities pointed out by Meer and Modood, but recognising the mythical quality of the trope is, from my perspective, just the start of the analysis. We now need to ask what work this myth can do, for whom, in which contexts, and how this compares with alternative strategies for addressing popular discontents. And in so far as we think there is a potentially enabling political myth here, at least in countries where multiculturalism has been demonised beyond rehabilitation, progressive intellectuals may decide to invest their energies, not in deflating the myth, but rather in making it work.

## Notes

[1]   To state the obvious, countries that have embraced multiculturalism are not ethnic utopias, and they confront many challenges relating to the inclusion of immigrants, including social isolation, economic inequality, poor educational outcomes, prejudice and stereotyping. The question is whether these problems are any worse in countries that have adopted multiculturalism policies, as compared to those countries that have rejected multiculturalism in favour of some alternative approach. And the answer here is clear: there is no such evidence (see Kymlicka 2010b).

[2]   Not all defenders of 'interculturalism' engage in these anti-multiculturalist tropes. Many interculturalists view themselves as allies of multiculturalists (and vice versa), differing only in choice of terminology or in level of analysis. My focus here, like Meer and Modood, is only with that branch of the interculturalist literature that offers itself as categorically different from multiculturalism, and as a remedy for its failures.

[3]    In the interests of full disclosure, I should note that I was invited to write a background paper for the UNESCO report, and in that paper I argued (not unlike Meer and Modood) that there were no good arguments or social science evidence for endorsing post-multicultural interculturalism over multiculturalism – it has been published as "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies" (Kymlicka 2010a). I now think that my paper, while sound, was largely irrelevant to the political task that the UNESCO World Report team had taken on.

[4]    We can see this, for example, in the report on interculturalism produced by the Consultation Committee on Accommodation Practices Relating to Cultural Differences, created in 2007 by the government of Quebec, and co-chaired by the philosopher Charles Taylor and the sociologist Gerard Bouchard. In its main narrative, the Bouchard–Taylor Report engages in the familiar anti-multiculturalist tropes identified by Meer and Modood (for example, that it is fragmenting, relativist, etc.), and argues instead for interculturalism as a 'counter' to multiculturalism (see, for example, Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 120, 123, 205, 281). However, in several places, the report acknowledges in passing that these anti-multiculturalist tropes may not actually be true, and that the Committee does not have the empirical evidence to assess them (see, for example, Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 118, 192, 214). It's clear that the report hopes that readers will embrace their narrative of interculturalism as a counter to multiculturalism without inquiring too closely into the social science evidence for it. And, as with the White Paper and UNESCO reports, the Bouchard–Taylor narrative may well be an effective piece of political drama to defend diversity within Quebec.

[5]    For evidence that this indeed is taking place, see the articles in Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf's *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices* (2010), which show that the rhetorical retreat from the word multiculturalism is not matched by any comparable retreat from actual multiculturalism policies, which are often simply re-labelled. See also the cross-national Multiculturalism Policy Index available at: www.queensu.ca/mcp/

[6]    Or at least in English Canada, where support for multiculturalism remains high. The situation in Quebec is more complicated (see note 4 above).

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# Interculturalism vs. Multiculturalism: A Distinction without a Difference?

Geoffrey Brahm Levey

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# Interculturalism vs. Multiculturalism: A Distinction without a Difference?

## Geoffrey Brahm Levey

The terms 'interculturalism' and 'multiculturalism' have occupied the same discursive space for a few decades now, especially in Continental Europe and in Quebec. Where they have engaged, it has typically been interculturalists seeking to nudge multi-culturalism out of the way or into a specific corner. Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood do both sides – and indeed, all of us – a service by scrutinising the alleged differences between the two approaches to the negotiation of cultural difference by and within liberal democracies. They find the standard suggestions for interculturalism's distinctiveness and superiority over multiculturalism to be unconvincing. I agree with the general thrust of their argument. The two terms are so discursively fluid and the respective self-identifying camps seem so multifarious as to frustrate any clear or stable demarcation between the two. Moreover, this is true even after restricting the comparison, as Meer and Modood carefully do, to the strand of policy-related multiculturalism that preoccupies liberal political theory. For all that, I demur on some of the details of their case. I will conclude by suggesting that there is, perhaps, something narrowly political at stake in the interculturalists' campaign to supplant multiculturalism.

Compounding the inherent fuzziness of the two rubrics is the range in the possible points of reference. Does one, for example, take the measure of multiculturalism and interculturalism to be their institutionalisation and policy formats or their philosophical elaboration and statement of principles? And if the latter, which elaboration should be deemed authoritative? Geographical and historical variations are also in play. As Meer and Modood note, 'multiculturalism' means different things in different places; it has different connotations and institutional ramifications, for example, as one crosses the USA/Canada border. The meaning of 'interculturalism' also varies contextually. A decade or so ago, interculturalism as used in Continental

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Europe tended to focus on the relations among citizens and groups in civil society rather than on the state's relation to its cultural minorities, arguably, the predominant concern of multiculturalism.[1] However, this was never true of Québécois interculturalism, which always defined itself in opposition to federal Canada's multiculturalism and is expressly concerned with the nexus of state or sub-state policy, national or sub-national identity, and cultural difference within Quebec. And now even in Europe, in the wake of militant Islam and the moral panic over Muslim immigration and integration, interculturalism or 'intercultural dialogue' is being advocated as an alternative to multiculturalism, offering a more acceptable set of principles and arrangements for the state management of cultural diversity (e.g. Council of Europe 2008). In this sense, European interculturalism has been 'Canadianised', although there remain important differences, to which I shall return. Australia's story, like its fauna and flora, is very different. 'Multiculturalism' was and continues to be not so much the preferred as the only rubric invoked for denoting the accommodation of cultural diversity. 'Interculturalism' has little profile here outside some education circles, the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, edited in Melbourne, notwithstanding.[2]

In trying to locate what is at stake in interculturalism's quest for product differentiation, it is helpful, I think, to distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' claims underpinning the alleged contrast. (In concluding, I will distinguish also 'political' claims.) 'Hard' claims for interculturalism's distinctiveness view it as fundamentally different from multiculturalism. In contrast, 'soft' claims see its distinctiveness more as a matter of emphasis. Unlike Meer and Modood, I would not discount outright some of the 'softer' claims differentiating interculturalism.

Consider, for example, the suggestion that interculturalism places more emphasis on the importance of dialogue and communication among groups than does multiculturalism. Meer and Modood note that dialogue and dialogic relations figure centrally also in some of the founding statements of multiculturalism, such as those of Charles Taylor (1992) and Bhikhu Parekh (2000). Regarding Parekh, who expressly advances the idea of 'intercultural dialogue' between minorities and the majority culture, there is no question. However, Taylor's rather more abstract point that 'recognition' is inherently a dialogical process doesn't seem necessarily to entail or imply the kind of discursive exchanges that interculturalists have in mind. After all, part of Taylor's point is that recognition and misrecognition are communicated variously, including through naming, images, symbols, inclusion and, in the case of non-recognition, through silence and exclusion. Other early statements of multiculturalism allowed much less provision for discursive dialogue, such as Will Kymlicka's effort to stipulate certain kinds of cultural rights for particular kinds of cultural minorities based on an interpretation of liberal values (1995).

Intercultural dialogue has hardly figured prominently also in multicultural policy or practice. For example, the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (OMA 1989), Australia's first national multiculturalism policy, is silent on the place of such

dialogue. Moreover, while ethnic communities' councils were among the first non-government institutions of fledgling Australian multiculturalism in the 1970s, they largely have been a case of a small number of ethnic group members talking among themselves. Ethnic and religious minorities have not been encouraged to contribute to public debate from their own perspectives and, where they have sought to do so, they typically have been met with a chilly and rather monological response from 'mainstreamers' (Hage 1998, Stratton 1998, Levey 2008). The reaction to the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams' suggestion that some aspects of shariah law might be recognised in English law (2008), suggests that 'shouting down' rather than 'talking through' minority issues also affects other places ostensibly committed to multiculturalism (at the time).

Therefore, an attempt to place *more* emphasis on dialogue in contrast to the experience with or under multiculturalism does not strike me as unreasonable. Meer and Modood are surely correct, however, that there is nothing in multiculturalism that precludes an emphasis on intercultural discursive exchange, indeed, quite the opposite. Parekh's example shows this much as does more recent work in multicultural theory including, notably, Modood's own 'political' model of multi-cultural politics (2007) (see also Deveaux 2006, Gatens 2008, Eisenberg 2009). Such work doubtless is responding to some of the same perceived deficiencies in earlier multiculturalism that interculturalists have sought to redress. Contrary to Meer and Modood's suggestion, intercultural dialogue is also given a prominent role in some defences of multiculturalism grounded in individual autonomy and human rights (e.g. Bader 2007, Phillips 2007).[3] At the same time, the recent furore over the wearing of the kirpan or ceremonial dagger by Sikhs in the Quebec National Assembly shows that ensuring a genuine dialogue over controversial cases is a challenge even for states that embrace interculturalism (*Globe and Mail* 2011). Any compelling claim for the superiority of interculturalism over multiculturalism on the importance of intercultural dialogue, then, would seem to be passé.

A second area where I think Meer and Modood's critique does not quite hit the mark concerns the related claim that interculturalism is 'less groupist and culture bound' and 'more synthesised and interactive' than multiculturalism. Their rebuttal here comprises citing the work of two defenders of interculturalism for Quebec, Gagnon and Iacovino (2007), and highlighting how they condemn federal Canadian multiculturalism for its emphasis on individual rights, while touting the importance of preserving Quebec as a distinct nation. Suddenly, it is interculturalism that appears to be more groupist than multiculturalism, while the Canadians' concern with Quebec nationalism is a world away from the focus of European interculturalists on migrant communities at the local and neighbourhood level.

There are serious tensions regarding the place and valorisation of the individual in the accounts of both multiculturalists and interculturalists, as we will see. Interculturalism in Europe has indeed tended to be applied less to the state and national identity and more at the local community level, though, as noted at the outset, this contrast has diminished over the last decade. Where Quebec seeks to

protect its language and culture against the tide of anglophone Canada (and the USA), Europeans have been busy refashioning interculturalism into an overarching state and societal approach to governing cultural diversity on the basis of fundamental rights and liberties (Council of Europe 2008). Be this as it may, what Canadian interculturalists such as Gagnon and Iacovino mean, I think, is that the protection and survival of the Quebec nation must be the context within which interaction between groups and cultural synthesis can *then* take place. Their argument is that interculturalism both suits this context and is more amenable to such relations than is multiculturalism, whether in its communitarian or individualist guises. A rebuttal, then, would need to scrutinise the latter part of this claim. As this is hardly the place to do so, suffice it to make two points.

First, regarding the commonplace criticism that the logic of multiculturalism inexorably promotes social fragmentation, it is worth noting that even Michel Wieviorka (1998), who condemns multiculturalism in part on this basis, feels compelled to distinguish 'relatively integrated' versions of multiculturalism as practised in Canada, Australia and Sweden, from other varieties. Second, it is unclear why the choice, cultural hybridity, and multiple-level exchanges that liberal multiculturalism allows are so different from, let alone inferior to, the kinds of cultural interactions and synthesis trumpeted by Canadian interculturalists. In the end, the main point of contention driving at least Québécois interculturalists would seem to be the status of a national identity and majority culture.

This much is clear from a recent programmatic statement on interculturalism by the sociologist Gérard Bouchard (2011), who, along with the philosopher Charles Taylor, authored the 2008 report on 'reasonable accommodation' in Quebec commissioned by the provincial government. In his recent article, Bouchard ventures the 'hard' claim that multiculturalism and interculturalism operate within fundamentally different paradigms. Where multiculturalism is said to operate in a 'diversity' paradigm, in which individuals and groups have equal status under the same laws and there is "no recognition of a majority culture", interculturalism is said to operate in a 'duality' paradigm, where "diversity is conceived and managed as a relationship between [immigrant] minorities and a cultural majority that could be described as *foundational*" (Bouchard 2011: 441–442; italics quoted).

Though they do not discuss Bouchard's article, Meer and Modood address the claim that interculturalism is "committed to a stronger sense ... of national identity and cohesion". In reply, they suggest that the privileging of a national culture is at odds with (some) interculturalists' own principles of mutual integration; note how all democracies are shaped through particular ethno-national and religious histories; and, while endorsing the importance of a shared national identity, insist that its terms and content must be open and a matter of renegotiation among all societal groups and individuals as equals. Each of these points has force, but together they seem to me only to confirm Bouchard's claim of a categorical difference between interculturalism, which wants recognition for a foundational majority culture, and multiculturalism, which wants to refuse it. Such confirmation is unfortunate, and not

only because Meer and Modood set out to refute interculturalism's claim to distinctiveness. It is unfortunate also because it overlooks how multiculturalists and multiculturalisms are themselves divided on the place and status of an established national culture and identity. Some multiculturalists ignore national identity entirely (e.g. Phillips 2007); some, like Modood (2007), stress its importance in principle but decline to give it any living content; while some, in the guise of liberal nationalists, think that the justification of multiculturalism begins precisely from the inevitably in practice and the legitimacy in principle of democracies privileging certain cultural-cum-religious traditions (e.g. Tamir 1993, Kymlicka 1995, Miller 1995).

State multiculturalisms also vary in this respect. As Bouchard's account implies, the federal provisions governing Canadian multiculturalism – the Canadian Multi-culturalism Act (1988) and section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) – do not privilege an established or dominant culture in Canada. However, the same cannot be said for federal Australian multicultural policy and certainly Australian political culture. The 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, for example, acknowledges the importance of "our British heritage" in helping "to define us as Australian", and emphasises that multiculturalism "does not entail a rejection of Australian values, customs and beliefs". True, the subsequent national multicultural policy statements, including the current one (DIAC 2011), have instead emphasised multiculturalism itself as being integral to Australian national identity, which is more in keeping with Bouchard's model. However, the words of the documents here do not capture the centrality of Anglo-Australian institutions and culture to the character and tempo of the country, which multicultural policy nowhere seeks seriously to displace. The most that is ventured is an abstract recognition that institutions and Australian identity will inevitably change over time with the changing composition of the Australian people.

There are, to be sure, aspects to the dominance of the founding Anglo-Australian institutions that properly count as a breach of multiculturalism rather than its realisation in this country. A particularly striking example relates to the "2020 Summit" in 2008. The Summit was the brainchild of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on winning office in 2007, and sought to bring to Canberra 1,000 of Australia's best and brightest to share their ideas for Australia's future. Yet, despite some 30 years of official multiculturalism, and despite every government department having available a list of ethnic, religious and national holidays of Australia's minorities, and despite political leaders conventionally referring to Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage, the government scheduled the Summit on dates that clashed with the beginning of the Jewish festival of Passover, thus making attendance impossible for many of the Jewish Australians invited (*Australian Jewish News* 2008). A national event meant to summon the ideas of a select group of Australians based on individual merit excluded a minority courtesy of entrenched cultural blinkers and/or indifference. This kind of exclusion is precisely what Australian multiculturalism was meant to arrest.

The point, however, is not that Anglo-Australian dominance sometimes eclipses Australian multicultural policy. Rather, it is that Australian multiculturalism fundamentally accepts the dominance of a "cultural majority that could be described as foundational" (Bouchard 2011: 442). This much, of course, does not make Australia's situation akin to Quebec's quest for national–cultural survival in anglophone North America. It does, however, underscore again that multicultural-isms differ on the place and status of a foundational dominant culture. In practice as in theory, some versions of multiculturalism simply resemble more Bouchard's 'duality' rather than 'diversity' paradigm.

Which brings me to the fourth and final marker of interculturalism's alleged difference that Meer and Modood discuss, namely, its readiness to criticise illiberal cultural practices in contrast to multiculturalism's putative cultural relativism. The authors do not really compare interculturalism with multiculturalism here so much as make the independent and quite valid point that ethnic traditions, and not simply religious ones (as often claimed in critiques of multiculturalism), also present the challenge of illiberal practices in liberal societies. The charge of cultural relativism against multiculturalism is, perhaps, the clearest indicator of how caricature has come to suffice for characterisation in these discussions. As Modood (2007: 1) has observed, multiculturalism as a public philosophy and policy historically emerged in liberal democracies from liberal democratic values. While a few liberal theorists of multiculturalism reach highly permissive conclusions (e.g. Margalit and Halbertal 1994, Kukathas 2003), and some theorists, including Modood, are critical of necessarily starting from conventional liberal assumptions, most end up conforming to them when it comes to controversial practices such as clitoridectomy, polygamy, the denial of a general education for girls and the like. What we have in the theoretical debates often resembles the narcissism of small differences, where theories are presented in dramatic contrast while the discussion of cases reaches much the same conclusions.

Certainly, one would be hard pressed to find a multicultural policy in any liberal democracy that sanctions cultural practices that violate fundamental human rights and liberties. If places like Britain and the Netherlands have witnessed more licence (as against liberty), it is only because they have been less vigilant in insisting on the liberal democratic basis of their multicultural policy. As for interculturalists, they occupy both sides of the street. Recall Gagnon and Iacovino's complaint, noted above, that Canadian multiculturalism is grounded in liberal individualism and bound by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Bouchard (2011: 464) also associates multiculturalism with liberal individualism, disapprovingly. Well, interculturalists cannot have it both ways. Multiculturalism cannot be both committed to liberal individualism and a philosophy of cultural relativism. Moreover, we should not forget how the Council of Europe's philosophy of intercultural dialogue is all about promoting and guaranteeing the panoply of human and individual rights (2008).

By way of conclusion, let me distinguish another sense, neither 'hard' nor 'soft', in which interculturalism might be touted as superior to multiculturalism. For want of a

better word, I will call this sense 'political'. Of course, Québécois interculturalism is also manifestly political; the province was never going to accept a federal policy that implied that Quebeckers were like other minorities in the Canadian mosaic. Had the federal policy been dubbed 'interculturalism', Quebec may well have adopted 'multiculturalism' to denote its national status and distinctive approach to cultural diversity. However, here I have a different sense of 'political' in mind. On this account, whether interculturalism differs substantively from multiculturalism is very much beside the point. Rather, what matters is that the term 'multiculturalism' has become so mired in controversy and is so maligned in public debate that its semantic capital, as it were, has been spent. What is needed on this view, therefore, is a new or different label that can appeal and be publicly sold, even if only to (re-)present much of what it claims to supplant. I think something of this 'political' dynamic is driving much of the current fascination with interculturalism and post-multiculturalism (see Vertovec and Wessendorf 2009). Previously, I have suggested that 'interculturalism' is just as semantically problematic as multiculturalism, since both terms conjure images of culturalism ruling the roost (Levey 2009). That interculturalism is nonetheless being embraced and promoted by the Council of Europe, among others, as an alternative to multiculturalism suggests, however, that political considerations and expediency and not merely semantics are involved.

I offer this last observation as political analysis only; I have no wish to endorse it. Politics, after all, is also about striving to clarify the meaning of concepts and to correct confusions and misrepresentations. Meer and Modood are to be commended for pressing the question of whether interculturalism is all that different from multiculturalism.

## Notes

[1]    A situation aptly captured by Will Kymlicka's title (2003), "Multicultural States and Intercultural Citizens".
[2]    The adjective 'intercultural' does have some currency in reference to Australian multi-culturalism, albeit typically as an aspect of it rather than as an alternative to it (see, for example, FECCA 2010: 13).
[3]    I try to show how autonomy-based liberalism invites intercultural dialogue in Levey (2012).

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# Multiculturalism: A Concept to be Redefined and Certainly Not Replaced by the Extremely Vague Term of Interculturalism

Michel Wieviorka

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# Multiculturalism: A Concept to be Redefined and Certainly Not Replaced by the Extremely Vague Term of Interculturalism

## Michel Wieviorka

This paper offers a few comments on Meer and Modood's discussion of interculturalism vs. multiculturalism. Before broaching the subject matter of their paper, I would like to raise an issue that pertains to their epistemological approach. What makes it uncomfortable for me is that it appears to be underpinned by a kind of Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism, applying to both multiculturalism and interculturalism as developed in Meer and Modood's text.

### Linguistic Hegemony and Ethnocentrism

The world is made up of different languages and cultures: not everyone speaks English, not everyone lives in English or thinks in English and, in the first instance, it is this domination of the English language bordering on a monopoly of English that makes me suspicious. I wonder if one can seriously write about multiculturalism and interculturalism by relying exclusively on authors who write in English or by referring to historical experiences that are only accessible through this language. Moreover, if the question of translation – the passage from one language to another in real life and in the social sciences – is not raised, does it not heighten ethnocentrism? Should we not give some thought to multilingualism and interlingualism? Should we leave consideration of the linguistic question to the humanities alone? Are the political and social sciences above this question? Perhaps we should recall here that the first important document, the one that started the discussion on multiculturalism in

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Canada, was the very official preliminary report of the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* (1965) (my emphasis).

The social sciences originated in Europe (France, Germany, England in the trilogy set out by Lepenies 1985) before developing, for the main part, in North America and in Latin America. Today they are becoming less territorialised; thus why do we continue to give primacy, and even accord a monopoly, to approaches, questions and experiences specific to Western societies alone? We might be advised to follow the example of Amartya Sen (2005, 2009) here. He invites us in particular to think of democracy by questioning the classical model whereby democracy is an invention of the Ancient Greeks handed down to what was to become the Western world – democracy also exists in Africa and in India (a country known for its multiculturalism, ignored in the paper by Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood). Similarly, Amartya Sen encourages us to examine forms of justice that, here again, are not those of which we spontaneously think in Western societies, and which are no less worthy of interest. Should we not consider research like that of François Jullien (2008), who, imbued with his knowledge of China, suggests that we think differently about the concept of universal values and that we reconsider the dialogue between cultures not in terms of identity and difference but of distance and cross fertilisation?

Researchers in former colonies, or in any event some of them, far beyond post-colonialism, are producing analyses, categories, modes of approach and research that ranks them at the top level amongst the best in the world without necessarily having given pride of place to what has been written in US, British or 'international' publications; nor have they retreated into either a national or regional relativism involving rejection of universal values and so-called Western knowledge in the name of local values. Moreover, they can do all this in their own languages, and not necessarily in English. The suspicion of ethnocentrism aroused by Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood's paper may also apply to their conception of those Western societies where people do not live and do not think in English. Is it an issue to produce consideration of concepts of the type being discussed here without quoting in the original a single author expressing him or herself in a European language other than English – French, German, Spanish or Italian for example – or in the case of Latin America, to not mention a single text in Spanish or Portuguese? Is it acceptable to state without hesitation, as do Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood that: "the term 'multiculturalism' in Europe came to mean, and now means *throughout the English-speaking world and beyond* ..." (this issue: 181) (my emphasis)?

## Identities on the Move

The limits of multiculturalism as a way of dealing legally and institutionally with cultural differences have long since been pointed out and I will merely focus on those which, in my opinion, are either insufficiently developed by Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, or quite simply ignored by them. As I explained in *9 leçons de sociologie*

(Wieviorka 2008), multiculturalism is permanently under threat of being subjected to two diametrically opposed criticisms and must defend itself on two fronts: on the one hand it can be accused of obscurantism, of refusing the universal values of reason and law, of producing the worst forms of communitarianism and, on the other hand, it can be charged with undermining the Nation, the dominant religion, the traditional values established in the framework of the nation-state and the order and cultural heritage on which the latter is founded. In other words, it is caught in the crossfire between the opponents of the Enlightenment and those who are its heirs. This means that its defence is a delicate matter.

Multiculturalism ensures that cultural differences are dealt with by recognising them and by requesting in the best possible wording, for example, that used by Will Kymlicka, that they be 'liberal' – let me add that this cannot be translated into French by the adjective 'liberal' which has a very different meaning, but, much better, by moderate, well-tempered, respectful of republican values and the democratic spirit. However, we still have to define these differences.

The first point that is immediately apparent to the sociologist is that they are not static but on the move; differences are being produced and not merely reproduced. They are in the realm of invention and not only, or predominantly, of tradition – something that is well expressed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1992) who speak of the invention of traditions. They do not constitute entities that are stable and defined once and for all. On the contrary, they tend to change: recognising them may lead to fixing them in time and encouraging the domination of the group and its leaders over individuals. The processes of invention and transformation of collective differences, this is not a paradox, owe a lot to modern individualism: individuals choose to belong to one identity or another or to free themselves from one: their identity is self-determined. If they claim to adhere to a specific identity or a minority, it is not, or not only, because their parents belong to it; it is rather the result of a personal decision. In democracies, it is very likely that multiculturalism will constantly clash with individualism, which states that rights are granted to individuals and not to groups. Nonetheless, it may also provide a constructive answer to its project of having differences recognised by promoting cultural rights, but on one condition: that these rights are attributed not to groups, communities or minorities and thereby in fact to their representatives, but to the individuals who belong to them. In other words, multiculturalism only provides acceptable models if cultural identities fully accept the working of democracy and respect individual human rights. This is almost always a possible apart from specific and limited problems (like female circumcision).

The historical experience of the past 40 years shows that multiculturalism is not suited to dealing with all differences. Thus, as Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood point out, Canadian multiculturalism cannot adequately cope with the demands for independence of Quebec nationalists or for greater autonomy of the First Peoples. In the case of migrants, multiculturalism is sometimes refused by those who do not wish to be considered from the point of view of cultural difference or origin – this is

the case for the writer Neil Bissoondath (a close relative of V.S. Naipaul). If we really want to give words a precise meaning, multiculturalism must mean *inter alia* provisions for dealing with cultural differences. Now, in concrete terms, it is rapidly apparent that the differences that are in the forefront of public discussion are of another type; notably some are religious. Others are racial and therefore belong to the realm of nature and not of culture, at least in some political cultures. We have here two points of capital importance.

## Religion, Race and Culture

Religion is not culture, even if they do overlap or are linked, as Clifford Geertz in particular thought. Moreover, as religion becomes globalised it becomes delocalised and loses its ties with the original culture of the place where it appeared. It becomes, in Geertz' words "a floating object, deprived of any social rooting in a resonant tradition or in established institutions" (2007: 428).[1] When there is a separation, even if only in part, between religion and culture, it must be clearly stated that multiculturalism deals with culture and not with religion. The legal and institutional approach to religion in democracy falls within the domain of what the French call *laïcité* or secularism – a concept of which it would be wrong to imagine they have the monopoly, as is demonstrated for example by the Quebec sociologist, Micheline Milot and the French sociologist, Jean Baubérot (Baubérot and Milot 2011). In its countless material variants, secularism ensures the separation of the religious from the political; it does not constitute a policy of recognition of identities.

   This point is all the more important as the recent discussion on multiculturalism, in particular in several European countries, has been mainly concerned with religion and, more precisely, with Islam. Within the space of a few months, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, in autumn 2010, then the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, in February 2011, immediately commended by the president of the French *Front National*, Marine Le Pen, and the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, all declared, in practically the same words, that multiculturalism was a failure; if they did so it was mainly to target Islam locating it at the core of an amalgam including immigrants, terrorism, criminality, delinquency and insecurity. If we exclude Islam from the scene, in the situations referred to, multiculturalism is only applicable to a much narrower and less sensitive set of problems.

   A similar observation has to be made concerning groups defined racially, by physical attributes beginning with skin colour. Whether members define themselves in this way or whether they are considered different by others, the question is not one of a cultural difference but one of a natural difference and the main problem posed is not one of the recognition of a cultural identity, but that of racism and discrimination. There again, multiculturalism is not appropriate, when processes of racialisation and self-racialisation are intensifying in numerous societies.

### An End to 'Methodological Nationalism'

However, the main difficulties encountered by multiculturalism, particularly as it was conceived of in the 1970s and 1980s, derive from its being necessarily set in a precise political, legal and institutional context that is almost always that of the nation-state (sometimes local experiences are reported like that in the town of Frankfort-am-Main in Germany at the time when Dany Cohn-Bendit was in charge of this same dossier on behalf of the town council). Now this context poses a problem. As the German sociologist Ulrich Beck puts it so forcefully, globalisation forces us to put an end to 'methodological nationalism' whereby the analysis of major social, cultural and political questions can only be considered within the arena of the nation-state, whereas these questions are global and extend far beyond this space. This is particularly true of cultural differences. There is an increasing tendency for these to be located in diaspora networks, which sometimes justify speaking in terms of transnationalism, a theme launched in the 1990s and open to discussion. The space of differences does not coincide with that of nation-states and this can make a multicultural policy tricky, difficult and even impossible. Take the Kurds for example: there are Kurds in several countries in the Middle East (Iraq, Turkey, Syria in particular), and in several European societies. Any multicultural processing of this identity in these societies is constantly subject to the weakening effect of the impact of the political and geopolitical implications of what is happening for example in Turkey and Iraq.

This point is exacerbated and made even more critical if we consider another aspect of the problem that is also neglected by Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood: the fact that when cultural differences are linked to migratory phenomena, they do not form a unified whole. Some migrants correspond to the most classical models of immigration, being assimilated into the host society, or at least integrated, preserving, in these cases, for generations a few cultural traits, for example, in dietary matters. However, others circulate, coming and going between two or even several societies without settling anywhere, present-day nomads in the well-turned phrase of the late Alberto Melucci (1989). Yet others are in transit, they are only passing through the society in question endeavouring to reach other shores. Multiculturalism is not suited to all these situations; for example, it is totally unsuited to migrants in transit, no matter what their differences.

All these difficulties do not ruin the concept of multiculturalism as long as it is amended quite extensively to take them into consideration – in a recent book (Wieviorka 2011), I suggested some paths to follow. In this book, I deal specifically with the question at the core of Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood's paper, that of interculturalism as a possible substitute for a multiculturalism; the latter supposed to be shaky or in considerable difficulty – an observation that, as I said, does seem to me to be exaggerated.

## Weakness of Interculturalism

The concept of interculturalism, as Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood quite rightly observe, is an integral part of communication and dialogue and some see therein an effective answer to the challenge constituted by the project of reconciling universal values and cultural specificities. However, over and above indicating a positive attitude and good intentions, can interculturalism take the shape of a concept as well worked out, in its different variants, as that of multiculturalism? A text like the European Union one that dates back to 2006[2] leads us to doubt it. Intercultural dialogue, it explains, should "strengthen respect for cultural diversity" and contribute to portraying "a diverse, pluralist, solidarity-based and dynamic society, not only in Europe but also in the world": the least that one can say is that the concept here is vague and much too general. Is it possible to make it more specific, as a few of the authors quoted by Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood attempt to do? Their endeavours are never as clear, conceptually, but also legally and institutionally as is multiculturalism.

Moreover, in many respects interculturalism comes up against the same difficulties as multiculturalism. What cultures are we talking about? Are they defined exclusively in the framework of the nation-state – the only context seriously considered by Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, as if it was not necessary to consider the much larger spaces in which cultures are often situated? Are they stable? Is there not a risk of confusing them with religions? Is it a question of organising communication between cultures or, which seems to me more relevant, between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures? If this is the case, under what conditions is it possible? Is there not a need for a third party who acts as an intermediary as in the experiences I describe in my book, with reference for example to New Caledonia, when the dialogue in 1988 between Kanaks and Caldoches was only possible through the intermediary of Michel Rocard, Prime Minister at the time; or the Oslo Accords negotiations organised at the beginning of the 1990s by Norwegian intermediaries to enable Palestinians and Israelis to talk, which came up against political but also cultural obstacles?

Finally, the main limit to a potential concept of interculturalism is due to the fact that it proposes to connect cultures with each other while multiculturalism is concerned with setting up a legal and institutional framework enabling each culture which it considers to find a place in a society while, at the same time, being recognised at the level of public authorities and the State.

My conclusion as to the fundamental question involved is therefore in the last analysis close to that of Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, even if their approach seems to me in many respects open to criticism: multiculturalism is a concept that can and must be re-enchanted, while interculturalism functions at a much less sophisticated level, and a much less political one for us to be able to assert that it can act as a substitute. At the most, it may be possible to envisage it as complementary.

## Notes

[1]   This was the distinguished social anthropologist's last article before his death.
[2]   Decision 1983/2006/CE of the European Parliament and the Council.

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# Rejoinder: Assessing the Divergences on our Readings of Interculturalism and Multiculturalism

Tariq Modood & Nasar Meer

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# Rejoinder: Assessing the Divergences on our Readings of Interculturalism and Multiculturalism

## Tariq Modood & Nasar Meer

The responses to our paper vary in their level of agreement and thematic focus but not in their scholarship and intellectual generosity, and so we wish to begin this rejoinder by registering our thanks to each respondent for reading and engaging with the piece in the spirit in which it was authored. Indeed, we are delighted to learn of the intent of agreement amongst us, which of course varies, and so we will take the opportunity provided here to address issues of potential disagreement and departure as we understand it.

### Political Expediencies and Academic Knowledge

In his broadly supportive assessment, Will Kymlicka distinguishes between, on the one hand, sound scholarship investigating the role and impact of multicultural policies, which establishes these policies' relative success according to a number of indicators (or at least does not support the thesis that where adopted they have been detrimental), and on the other hand, politically useful narratives or 'myths' that (reflecting mixed motives) play to the gallery and eschew reliable social science research. He suggests therefore that though intellectually sound, our assessment of political interculturalism risks being politically inert. Reflecting on his own engagement with the UNESCO *World Report on Cultural Diversity* (2008), he concludes that his submission of an evidence-based defence of multiculturalism policies was not attuned to the political task that the report's authors had taken on. Therefore, and while he will continue to be an advocate of multiculturalism as relevant to many countries the world over, he is not convinced that it is best to do so whilst using the term 'multiculturalism', which is too politically damaged in too many

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countries, and especially in Europe. As it is clear that some of the advocates of broadly multiculturalist policies, especially those able to influence European governments, have given up on the term 'multiculturalism' in favour of 'interculturalism', progressive intellectuals should consider abandoning the term 'multiculturalism' to promote their policies and join the interculturalist bandwagon (or 'fad', as he calls it on p. 213).[1]

Kymlicka understands better than most the dynamics of intellectual–political engagement, and as a leading publicly engaged scholar from whom we, as indeed very many others, have learned a great deal, this is a forceful observation. In our view, however, he overestimates the political power of the term 'interculturalism' in Europe, and certainly in the UK. Kymlicka argues – by reference to the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue issued by the Council of Europe in 2008 after consultations with various experts, NGOs and stakeholders and signed by ministers from the 47 member states – that by 2008 "there was a clear political consensus that we need a post-multicultural alternative, to be called 'interculturalism'" (Kymlicka this issue: 213). While we acknowledge that not all European countries are in the same position on interculturalism, we would emphasise three issues in particular. First, the Council of Europe is a forum for international discussion and is certainly not to be in any way confused with European institutions such as the European Union and its Council of Ministers, the European Commission and the European Parliament.[2]

Second, it is simply not the case that there is a consensus amongst European governments in favour of interculturalism, nor have European governments made much if any effort to promote the White Paper (a Google search on 15 October 2011 showed that of the first 100 items listed by Google, there were no newspapers, popular magazines, TV or radio channels, only the Council of Europe and various NGOs, think tanks and related networks' websites). We suggest that this is because 'interculturalism' belongs to certain kinds of NGOs, and not to those making or implementing policies or the media that comments on them. When we do hear Western European politicians such as Merkel, Sarkozy and Cameron talk about multiculturalism, as they most conspicuously and loudly did in the winter of 2010–11 to denounce it (Fekete 2011), they did not mention let alone offer any advocacy for 'interculturalism'. The most favoured alternative term to 'multiculturalism' is 'integration' and its synonyms in various languages. Given that this is the case, it is not obvious that the best political strategy is to subscribe to the intellectually shoddy 'interculturalism myth' (as Kymlicka describes it). A better strategy is to ensure that multiculturalism is presented as one, amongst other, modes of integration, and that is what one of us has done (Modood 2012). Just as some politicians have recognised that 'assimilation' is too politically damaged to be resuscitated and so have preferred to use terms such as 'cohesion', 'integration' and 'national identity' while giving them an assimilative interpretation, so advocates of multiculturalism should contest those meanings and demonstrate that these concepts are capable of multiculturalist interpretations. In so doing it is not unreasonable to

point out to interculturalists that whilst they have good reasons for wanting some aspects of multiculturalism reformed, they should not be joining the pillorying of multiculturalism, as they do not have good reasons, intellectual or political, for abandoning multiculturalism.

Third, we would wish to complicate the relationship between popular politics and policy by distinguishing between political actors "who look to public opinion as a source of guidance … and as a means of gauging the resonance of its [their] own programme" (Boswell 2009: 20) and administrative departments who have to substantiate policy through consultation and forms of legitimisation. This is some-times termed 'epistemic authority' (Guess 2001 in Boswell 2009) and refers to the ways in which government departments and agencies need to exhibit "confidence that their decisions are well founded" (Boswell 2009: 20). Looking at the UK we can identity a number of multiculturalist policies that have been facilitated by sound social science and pursued at some political cost and public (especially media) opposition. This would be true of the introduction of the Incitement to Religious Hatred Act (2006) (Meer 2008); the increasing number of Muslim faith schools supported by public money (Meer 2009); and the further introduction of Equalities legislation and its incorporation into public sector duties (Meer 2010b), amongst others. Our argument is that unpicking the intellectual weaknesses of public policy oriented arguments remains a highly valuable activity precisely because of the wider conditions that the enactment of public policy must satisfy. To put it another way, scholarly interventions critiquing the intellectual coherence of interculturalism remain a powerful means of distinguishing between purely instrumental statements and intellectually robust research that is debated and taken up in the public sphere. This complicates the relationship between academic knowledge and its political uses, and in so doing reveals why intellectual appraisals garner a public force that amounts to more than their internal integrity.

In a different manner, Pnina Werbner too brings out the political character of multiculturalism, the element of a bottom-up struggle as well as policy-making, the aspect of 'multiculturalism-in-history' and not merely multiculturalism as day-to-day tolerance. This is central to our understanding of multiculturalism, and our dis-satisfaction with interculturalism in part stemmed from what we saw as an attempt by its European advocates to displace the political; to critique a political multiculturalism with an apolitical, local-encounters-based individualism. Our literature searches failed to identify a political interculturalism in Europe in the English language (we will come back to the language issue later) and we had to turn to Quebec to identify a political interculturalism. We were aware that the latter was being picked up by some European academics (for example, Zapata-Barrero 2009). We were also aware that the single most important characteristic of political interculturalism as developed by authors and advocates in Quebec was its emphasis on national identity within a multi-national state. This was of course related to the promotion of a francophone Quebec identity against a Canadian federal multiculturalism perceived to be indifferent to the dis-tinction between a sub-state nation and an ethnic group, which resonated for some

with the position of, for example, Catalunya, Flanders and Scotland in Spain, Belgium and Britain, respectively.

We realised therefore that there were two different political thrusts. One critiqued multiculturalism's alleged encouragement of multi-ethnic segregation; the other critiqued the alleged blindness to the importance of sub-state minority nationalism. Neither of these positions are automatic political allies. The former was primarily the position of national state integrationists and liberal individualists; the latter implied anti-state nationalism, which may or may not be liberal and may or may not be sympathetic to minority identities within the minority nation. However, as both these critiques of multiculturalism were present in the positions of self-stated interculturalists we examined them both. Our view at the time of writing our paper was that the anti-groupist individualistic critique was more political in the damage it did to multiculturalism than in any alternative it put up. As we have already noted, Will Kymlicka has drawn our attention to the fact that the Council of Europe, with its 47 member states, embraced this critique of multiculturalism in the name of interculturalism in 2008 (Kymlicka this issue). Levey points out that while up to then European interculturalism had focused more on civil society rather than the state, this new state interculturalism critique of state multiculturalism "Canadianised" the European debate (this issue: 218).

Actually, it did not. Whatever the Council of Ministers had agreed to at their Council of Europe jamborees they did not intend it for their national audiences and made little or no effort to promote it in their own countries. They may have shared the view that multiculturalism had to be politically dislodged, but they certainly did not have any deep interest in interculturalism (or a new multi-nationalism) to replace multiculturalism. In their own countries, they declared multiculturalism divisive and a failure but they did not contrast it with interculturalism. Their chosen vocabulary for the alternative to multiculturalism came out of a portfolio consisting of 'community cohesion', 'integration' and the various ways in which ideas of national citizenship (at the state level) are expressed.

## Methodology and Positionality

To some extent this last point is about political strategy and is raised in Geoff Levey's typically precise and thoughtful reflection, in which he too concludes that because multiculturalism's 'semantic capital' has been spent, political considerations necessarily come to the fore. Unlike Kymlicka, however, Levey is more cautious of engaging in this debate on others' terms, and we share with him the view that it is preferable to strive "to clarify the meaning of concepts and to correct confusions and misrepresentation" (Levey this issue: 223). In this pursuit, Michel Wieviorka provides a critical reflection on the alleged 'Anglo-Saxon ethno-centrism' reflected in our paper.[3] It is of course difficult to deny that because we work in English we are to some extent limited in our access to materials not in English, and so try to work with materials from non-English authors who also express their views in English (as in our paper we refer to

Gagnon and Iacovino who offer a francophone account presented in English). It is probably worth stepping back however to distinguish between seeking to be all-inclusive and our relatively modest objectives.

As we state at the beginning of our paper: "It is important to register at the outset that the article is concerned with what we understand as 'political interculturalism'" (Meer and Modood this issue: 177), by which we mean the ways in which there are at least two types of interculturalism: one focusing on the encounters of difference – and which is relatively apolitical even though there is a politics to it – and another which is explicitly a form of political interculturalism. Our interest is in the ways in which political interculturalism offers a critique of multiculturalism. As such, the purpose of this paper is not to offer a comprehensive account of interculturalism, but to provide an entry point in developing a discussion, especially in relation to multiculturalism and interculturalism as frameworks for political relations in a context of cultural diversity. We should perhaps have added the word 'Europe' in our sentence, but we assumed it self-evident that we were not making developments in South Asia or Latin America central to our discussion. Having said this Wieviorka is quite correct to quote us as claiming:

> ... the term 'multiculturalism' in Europe came to mean, and now means throughout the English-speaking world and beyond, the political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race, ethnicity or religion, and, additionally but more controversially, by reference to other group-defining characteristics such as nationality and aboriginality. (this issue: 181)

Yet this need not be evidence of ethno-centrism anymore than its reverse: a reflection of how a concept has come to assume a wide-ranging meaning that takes into consideration different contexts and life-worlds. Indeed, and although we ourselves do not in our piece apply the definition to, for example, India, it is not clear to us why our description would necessarily be inaccurate given how closely it corresponds to readings found in the work of scholars who have (see, for example, Bhargava 1998, Parekh 2000). It is, for example, interesting to note the extent to which Indian political theory is presently an anglophone activity conducted in English (Parekh 1992). More broadly, we readily acknowledge how our argument has been informed by studying the experiences of ethnic, cultural and religious challenges comparatively in contemporary Europe (see Meer and Modood 2011, Modood and Meer 2011, and more broadly Modood and Werbner 1997, Modood *et al.* 2006, Tryandifillidou *et al.* 2011). It is also worth noting that we spend some time in our paper offering the intellectual health warning that multiculturalism as a concept is – like very many others – 'polysemic'. We point in particular to Bhabha (1998: 31) who discusses the tendency for multi-culturalism to serve as a 'portmanteau term', one that encapsulates a variety of sometimes contested meanings (see, for example, Meer and Modood 2009). None-theless, we accept the thrust of Wieviorka's argument that location can make the difference as to what one is capable of understanding and empathising with; something

all social scientists must remain cognisant of. Where we are in less agreement is over the charge of methodological nationalism in the context of 'super-diversity'. Here we think there is a tendency to subsume the *study of* state-level discourse and policy into a monolithic category (methodological nationalism), and indeed ignores the extent to which we are comparative in scope in registering debates in Federal Canada (see Kymlicka this issue), Australia (see Levey this issue), and Belgium.

## Religion and Culture (and Groups)

Two of our discussants make a similarly sharp distinction between, first, the concepts of religion and culture, and second, the kinds of normative implications that arise from them. Beginning with the first issue, in her wide-ranging account Pnina Werbner, drawing upon her wealth of research in the field, shares with Wieviorka a conceptual hesitation to couple too closely 'religion' with 'culture'. More precisely, in her view, multicultural and religious discourses are of a different order to one another, reflect diverging content; and herald different implications for thinking about contemporary diversity. In contrast, our position leaves open the question of coupling or non-coupling religion and culture by placing the focus upon the subject instead of the object. Our approach therefore shares something with Fredrick Barth's formulation that, first, critiques anthropological traditions that focus exclusively upon cultural content, and so seeks to emphasise the *subjective* dimension of recognition – an internal self-awareness – over the *objective* definition of the group designated by an external party (1969). Second, and in shifting the emphasis away from the possible characteristics of a group – that is, taking us away from definitions of groups as heralding displays of particular traits or comprising particular coherent behaviours in the classical anthropological sense – Barth (1969: 10–11) argued that we should focus upon the 'boundaries' between groups as sites of identity maintenance. This does not mean, however, that we should think of religion or culture in terms of "a world of separate peoples, and each organised in a society which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island to itself" (Barth 1969: 10–11; see Meer 2010a: chap. 3).

The methodological implications of listening to these internal voices is not only relevant to ethnographic work, however, but can be adopted in large-scale survey design. For example, in the last of the 10-yearly Policy Studies Institute surveys into the conditions of ethnic minorities in Britain, Modood *et al.* (1997: 291–338) investigated the question: "how do ethnic minority people think of themselves?" Recognising the situational and contextual nature of the question, they worked on the understanding that the answers entailed "not what people do but what people say or believe about themselves". Thus self-description is central and includes expressions of what might be called an 'associational or communal identity', as well as cultural practices. Contrasting this with a designated ethnicity according to country of origin or parental heritage, they found that while people with African-Caribbean ethnicities maintained that skin colour was the most important factor in terms of their self-description, for people with

South Asian ethnicities it was religion that proved most important. Although they looked at various dimensions of culture and ethnicity such as marriage, language, dress – all of which 'command considerable allegiance' – they concluded that religion "is central in the self definition of the majority of South Asian people". Thus when they asked South Asian respondents "Do you ever think of yourself as being black?", only about a fifth of over 1,500 respondents gave an affirmative answer.

Of course, this raises the related issue of groups and group identities. In our view, the idea of a group intrinsically involves some degree of positioning within and between the sites of 'boundaries'. These are not unproblematic, can be multiple and may be informed by common experiences of racism; sexuality; socio-economic positions; geographical locality and so forth. In this sense, all groups are socially constructed and it is clear that people tend to associate with those with whom they perceive some shared affinity. One of the reasons that it can be important to recognise religious minorities as a cultural group is that this can be how they understand themselves. As Modood (1994: 9) has argued, it is inconsistent to protest against the use of religious group categories as analytical categories simply because it has the same "dialectical tension between specificity and generality" that all group categories are subject to. This is not to 'essentialise' or 'reify' the category, for example, of Muslim, since it can remain

> as internally diverse as 'Christian' or 'Belgian' or 'middle-class', or any other category helpful in ordering our understanding of contemporary Europe; but just as diversity does not lead to the abandonment of social concepts in general, so with that of 'Muslim'. (Modood 2003: 100)

This leads us nicely to the second issue of what multiculturalism should rightly be about and what should be covered in the policy field. We recognise as legitimate those group assertions that project positive images and demands for respect (in a manner that means the demand for inclusion might invoke and repudiate the differences that have been denied inclusion in the first place). Key to this potential assertiveness is that recognition of a group's mode of being rather than a protracted mode of oppression should be recognised where it is deployed. The implication being that groups should not be silenced or coerced into abandoning what is most important to them by succumbing to hegemonic categories (see Meer 2010a: 55–80). What is being advocated, therefore, is the space for minorities to draw upon resources to resist constraints in creative and dynamic ways.

We can all agree that one of the main reasons that multiculturalism has become unpopular amongst voters, politicians and academics is that in the last decade or two it has been used by some Muslim political claims-makers and sometimes positively responded to by policymakers. Wieviorka and Werbner additionally argue that multiculturalists have conflated culture and religion with the result that Muslims have made inappropriate policy claims and have been accommodated inappropriately. For Wieviorka, "the legal and institutional approach to religion in democracy falls within the domain of what the French call laicite or secularism" (this issue: 228), while for

Werbner "issues usually regarded as a matter of multicultural policy, for example the dispensation to wear exotic headdresses to school or work (turbans, veils, skullcaps) more rightly belong in the constitutional domain of religious pluralism" (this issue: 204). (One of the other discussants has argued a similar position elsewhere (Kymlicka 2009)).

As we elaborate in our original discussion, especially our discussion of illiberalism and culture, when we are talking about racialised post-immigration ethno-religious political assertiveness, confining it to the area of religious pluralism or secularism is inadequate, for it is likely to lead to tolerance or even an exclusion from the public sphere when what these groups, no less than those defined by race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, are seeking is legitimate *recognition* of their presence in – and in the (re)making of – the public space (Modood 1997). Our concern therefore is not only with the concepts of culture and religion, with analytical categories and classifications, but with their role in the politics of minority identities. There is a direct parallel here with Wieviorka's view that multiculturalism is not about racialised groups (this issue: 228). The African-American shift from civil rights to 'black and proud', 'black nationalism' or 'afrocentrism' was a critical component of the 1960s marginalised-identity assertions and movements, and some years later also occurred in Britain and other places.

## Discourse and Analytical Precision

Also worth noting is that while Werbner is not comfortable about the conflation of religious pluralism and identity politics and notes that "the discursive attack on multiculturalism may be conceived of as a rejection by British politicians and the media of the invasion of religious discourses into the public sphere" (this issue: 206), she rightly notes that "the reasoned responses of Muslim leaders however, utilising the national platform of their own ethnic press, has carved out a space of intercultural civility in which they argue against allegations of extremism passionately and yet rationally" (this issue: 206).

Despite a different position on the culture–religion nexus, there is nevertheless much in Werbner's contribution that we share, especially her emphasis on multiculturalism as a discourse as well as policy. Though it is not clear to us how we support the view that Muslim groups will "disappear by fiat if politicians and policymakers refuse to support them, either rhetorically, on official occasions, or with small dollops of cash" (Werbner this issue: 202). On the contrary, while Cameron, Merkel and Sarkozy may mean to endorse assimilation or individualistic integration, they are also acknowledging and possibly reinforcing the sociological reality of group difference because their lament is that some groups (especially Muslims) are clearly visible as distinct when they should not be (they attribute this fact to a separatist tendency in the groups, encouraged by allegedly 'multiculturalist' policies). Hence paradoxical as it may sound, fierce critics of multiculturalism are usually deploying the sociology of multiculturalism even while rejecting its political dimensions. If they thought these

groups were merely the product of stereotypes and exclusion (in the sense that 'racial' groups are a product of racism) or were primarily socio-economic in character (perhaps a working-class 'fraction'), then that would be a sociological disagreement with the multiculturalists. The irony is of course that the accusatory discourse of 'some groups are not integrating' may actually be reinforcing group identities and therefore contributing to the social conditions that give multiculturalism a sociological pertinence. On the other hand, a sociology that marginalised ethnicity in favour of say, individuals, class and gender, would have a better fit with anti-multiculturalist politics but may be unable to explain or predict the relevant social reality. A normative orientation – individualist or multiculturalist – suggests to us an ideal sociology but also recommends itself to us as feasible politics because it is as though that sociological model is more accurate than not.

Moreover, it is not just at the level of sociology that anti-multiculturalists may find themselves using multiculturalist ideas; even while deploying an anti-multiculturalist discourse they may enact multiculturalist policies. For example, they may continue with group consultations, representation and accommodation. The latter have actually increased. The British government has found it necessary to increase the scale and level of consultations with Muslims in Britain since 9/11, and, dissatisfied with existing organisations, has sought to increase the number of organised interlocutors and the channels of communication. Avowedly anti-multiculturalist countries and governments have worked to increase corporatism in practice, for example, with the creation by Nicholas Sarkozy of the *Conseil Francais du Culte Musulman* in 2003 to represent all Muslims to the French government in matters of worship and ritual; and by the creation of the *Islamkonferenz* in Germany in 2005, an exploratory body, yet with an extensive political agenda. These bodies are partly top-down efforts to control Muslims or to channel them into certain formations and away from others; nevertheless, such institutional processes cannot be understood within the conceptual framework of assimilation, individualist integration or interculturalism. There is indeed a new intolerance in relation to certain Muslim practices (for example, the burqa) and this is leading to some new laws or policies in parts of Europe (though not yet in Britain).

The point is that we do not so much seem to be witnessing a paradigm shift, for example, from pluralistic integration to individualist integration, but a shift in discourse, a point of agreement with Kymlicka and perhaps also Werbner and brings us to Geoff Levey's summation that discursive opposition is the motivation, so that, for example, "[h]ad the [Canadian] federal policy been dubbed interculturalism, Quebec may well have adopted 'multiculturalism' to denote its national status and distinctive approach to cultural diversity" (this issue: 223). Moreover, Levey makes a very useful distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' claims deployed in the interculturalist critique, and whilst we are in agreement over the status of 'hard' claims (i.e. that the rejection of multiculturalism in favour of a superior interculturalism is unpersuasive; see, for example, Bouchard 2011), Levey does see something of value in the 'soft' interculturalism, especially its stress on communication.

Taking Taylor as a philosophical example, and Australia's first national multi-culturalism policy as praxis, he concludes that "*more* emphasis on discursive dialogue in contrast to the experience with or under multiculturalism does not strike me as unreasonable" (Levey this issue: 219). As ever Levey makes this point persuasively. One objection to this selective reception, however, may be that to attribute a lesser tendency for communication to multiculturalism per se, rather than the wider make up of the civil society and state, would endorse the analyses that multiculturalism *has prevented* dialogue and discussion, which we think it has not. Indeed we would maintain that even Charles Taylor's position allies itself with that of Parekh on the importance of intercultural dialogue (Parekh, 2000). The related point, however, is that taken with the other potential 'soft' clauses interculturalism may propose, we are not convinced that the conditions for multi-directional dialogue would be better secured by an appeal to interculturalism rather than to multiculturalism. Where we are in more agreement with Levey is in his appraisal of the division between multiculturalists on the precise status of national culture and identity, and how this is formulated in state multiculturalism. Our discussion of interculturalism Quebec-style perhaps focused too greatly on the counter-example, of strong ethno-national groups under the remit of interculturalism, in a manner that didn't also register the variations in multiculturalism. Indeed, there is much more in Levey's very thoughtful consideration with which we can wholly agree and so share much common ground.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was not to offer a comprehensive critique of inter-culturalism per se, but instead to provide an entry point in developing a discussion in relation to multiculturalism and interculturalism as frameworks for political relations in a context of cultural diversity. In focusing on the divergences between our original paper and the invited responses, this rejoinder has also foregrounded the many agreements between us. The chief one being a relative consensus that for the objectives of the integration and recognition of various migration-related minorities in contemporary Europe, political interculturalism as it is currently being discussed is an unpersuasive alternative to modes of multiculturalism.

## Notes

[1]   He presently exempts Canada from such a strategy as he thinks there continues to be sufficient support for the term there. We take the view that despite Prime Minister Cameron's Munich speech the fate of multiculturalism in Britain also remains as yet undecided. Indeed, the *ethic* that it is commonly deemed to entail (respect for difference and ethnic cultural vitality) appears to have achieved some resolute traction in spite of some forceful assaults (Modood 2012), and it is arguable that the 'defence' of multiculturalism is more audible today than when the first critiques appeared in the post-9/11 environment. This is particularly evident in the readings of multiculturalism as either a source or outcome of hybridity, but is more contested in the multiculturalism of 'groups' and especially of ethno-religious groups (see Meer and Modood 2009).

[2]  See Council of Europe [online], *About Us* (n.d.): http://www.coe.int/aboutCoe/index.asp?
     page=CommentTravaillonsNous&l=en

[3]  Yet Wieviorka's conclusion is entirely consistent with our own, when he argues:
     "[M]ulticulturalism is a concept that can and must be re-enchanted, while interculturalism
     functions at a much less sophisticated level, and a much less political one for us to be able to
     assert that it can act as a substitute. At most it may be possible to envisage it as
     complementary" (this issue: 230).

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