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Majoritarian Interculturalism and Multicultural Nationalism[[1]](#footnote-1)

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**Abstract**

Interculturalism, in its two forms, critiques multiculturalism. A European version emphasises cultural encounter and novelty, and is relatively apolitical except for its disavowal of the national in preference for the local and the transnational. In contrast, its Quebecan counterpart gives significance to the idea of the right of a national community to use state power to reproduce itself. Whilst the former is a recognisably cosmopolitan vision I ask if the latter represents a distinctive mode of integration. The core of the article is a textual examination of two recent publications by leading public intellectual scholars in Quebec, Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, respectively, including a lengthy discussion of the former’s concept of ‘majority precedence’. I conclude that while such thinkers rightly press multiculturalists to think about the normative significance of the majority, the arguments for ‘majority precedence’ are flawed. Moreover, multicultural nationalism is well placed to balance the normative identity claims of the majority and the minorities that these authors seek when they emphasise the importance of mutual recognition, reciprocity and balance, though they tend to go astray when they express this as ‘majority precedence’.

**Introduction**

A few years ago I outlined what I thought were the major modes of integrating post-immigration ethnic and religious minorities present in intellectual and policy discourses in Western Europe (Modood 2012). I identified them as assimilation, individualist-integration, cosmopolitianism and multiculturalism. One that got no mention was interculturalism despite it having received the support of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe in their White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008).[[2]](#footnote-2) That paper, based on consultations with experts across Europe, rejected assimilation and argued that multiculturalism was irretrievably flawed because it had led to supporting illiberal and sexist practices and groups and contributed to segregationist and centrifugal processes. While there was no reference to this White Paper in my discussion of the modes of integration, I felt I had covered interculturalism, especially in its British version, sometimes known as ‘multiculture’ or ‘connviviality’ or ‘everyday multiculturalism’, by characterising it as cosmopolitanism. Under this concept, I had brought together the interculturalist emphasis on cultural encounters and everyday interaction in localities, schools, clubs, public spaces, the multiple and fluid character of identity, the emphasis on the transnational and on globalisation and the ‘problematising’ of the national. Elsewhere, with Nasar Meer I had examined and rebutted the interculturalist critique of multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2012). In the latter, we had argued that there are in fact two interculturalisms: besides the cosmopolitanism of the European interculturalism, there was the nationalist interculturalism of Quebec. Whilst both argued for the importance of interactions at the micro or everyday level (what Levey 2016 calls ‘soft interculturalism’), and argued with some justice that this was missing from the political theory and policies of multiculturalism, they were otherwise quite different, indeed irreconcilable.[[3]](#footnote-3) One might say that they challenged the macro-level or national-level multiculturalism in radically different ways. European interculturalism (IC-E) confined itself to a micro-orientation or expanded it into a cosmopolitanism (Cantle 2012).[[4]](#footnote-4) Quebecan interculturalism (IC-Q) on the other hand, combined micro-interactionism (about which it had less to say than IC-E) with a nationalist or majoritarian macro-normative theory. It is this latter and the critique of multiculturalism that it represents that I wish to examine here.

I shall engage fairly closely with a text that was not available at the time of my two publications mentioned above, namely: Gerard Bouchard ‘What is Interculturalism?’, *McGill Law Journal*, 56 (2), 2011; and I shall also make some reference to an allied publication, Charles Taylor, ‘Interculturalism or Multiculturalism?’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 38(4-5), 2012. Bouchard and Taylor were of course the co-chairs of the Quebec government *Commission de Consultation sur les Pratiques d’Accommodement Reliees Aux Differences Culturelles* (Bouchard and Taylor, 2008), in which a distinctive Quebecan interculturalism (allied with a distinctive Quebecan ‘open secularism’) is presented as a social philosophical basis for accommodating ethno-cultural and ethno-religious diversity.

Two preliminary comments. Firstly, whilst noting that there is more than one version of IC, I have a tendency to speak of political multiculturalism in the singular. It has been pointed out to me that multiculturalisms are at least as numerous as interculturalisms. Geoff Levey speaks of distinguishing between a number of different models of multiculturalism and believes that they can be fundamentally divided into two in relation to the themes addressed here. That is, between liberal nationalist multiculturalists, who accept institutional privileging of a majority culture, and parity multiculturalists who think that the state must treat all cultures equally without acknowledging a difference between majorities and minorities (Levey, 2016).[[5]](#footnote-5) I personally do not feel that either of these two categories of political multiculturalism fully captures my own position. In any case, the point of this preliminary remark is that when I speak of multiculturalism in this paper I am simply referring to my own position, which generically I have called ‘multicultural citizenship’ and specifically, ‘multicultural Britishness’. It is a form of multicultural nationalism centred on equal citizenship that cherishes historical identities – minority and majority – and embraces what some might call conservative institutions such as the House of Lords and state-funded faith schools, as well as new yearnings such as new hybrid identities or the celebration of St. George’s Day as a national day for England (Modood, 2010: 113-115) but insists on their extension or adaptation to include ethno-religious groups and identities. I know my conception of multicultural nationalism owes much to several prominent authors (most notably Bhikhu Parekh and Charles Taylor), but perhaps it is not identical to any one of them and in any case cannot be held to be representative of political multiculturalism *per se*. I should add however that I do not see my position as one that only exists in theory. It is grounded in the British experience, which has progressively evolved since the 1960s and is best represented in policy terms in the report of the Commission on Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000, aka as the Parekh Report, after its chair) and in the actions of the first New Labour government of 1997 – 2001 (Modood, 2016a forthcoming). The discussion here, however, will be at a theoretical level and with relatively little country-specific or continent-specific reference.

This also relates to my second preliminary remark. Whilst it is clear that the version of IC under discussion owes considerably, perhaps everything, to a Quebecois struggle for the rest of Canada to recognise it as a founding nation and refusal to be defined within the terms of Canadian multiculturalism and the preservation of a Francophone society, my interest is not in this provenance (on which see Weinstock, 2013). Indeed, one of the striking features of these two texts, especially Bouchard’s, is that IC is not defined in terms of its aptness in contexts of minority nationhood, where a nation, like Quebec, is a minority within a larger state. Furthermore, while IC is presented as an alternative to and superior to Canadian multiculturalism, it is not conceptualised in terms of the relation of one nation to another. Bouchard does not mention minority national identity in his account of IC, which he says distinctively ‘concerns itself with the interests of the majority culture’ (Bouchard, 2011: 438) and Taylor explicitly concludes his discussion of the meaning of IC in Quebec by suggesting that it may fit majoritarian anxieties in Europe (Taylor, 2012: 420).[[6]](#footnote-6) My interest in IC is at this level of general applicability, regardless of its origins, though I note that this has a certain real world logic too. If Quebec was an independent state, its government and publics would presumably continue to subscribe to interculturalism. They would not say that interculturalism was no longer more suited to Quebec than multiculturalism just because Quebeckers had a state of their own. Quebecan Interculturalism (IC-Q) is thus about integration in relation to a national state and not in relation to a minority nation; it is because so many Quebecers understand themselves as a nation and a semi-nation state that IC has developed in Quebec. It is however worth noting that while Taylor now uses ‘interculturalism’ to capture the desire of the Quebecan *majority* to preserve its culture, in his famous essay on multiculturalism, Quebecers are the central illustration of the right of a *minority* to preserve its culture (Taylor, 1992).

Explicitly drawing on ‘authors from Quebec who have a long history of reflecting on the topic’, Bouchard (2011: 439) considers interculturalism to be a model that ‘aims at integration within a single nation’, which, as a pluralist model, ‘concerns itself with the interests of the majority culture, whose desire to perpetuate and maintain itself is perfectly legitimate, *as much as* it does with the interests of minorities and immigrants’ (438; my emphasis). As an aside, it is worth reflecting upon the highlighted ‘as much as’. It seems reasonable but it is not usually how egalitarian perspectives are stated; such perspectives normally assume a starting point where one party’s interests need to be highlighted. Feminism, for example, does not normally consist of the view that men do not have legitimate interests but rather that they are in the main already catered for, or over-catered for or can best be met by considering the interests of women more than hitherto. Hence, IC is being presented as a rectification of MC’s unbalanced concern with the rights of minorities or the disadvantaged. To anticipate, I shall argue that this is a pertinent rectification but does not involve the claim that multiculturalism denies that majorities as well as minorities have legitimate claims and no authors are cited as holding such a position.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Of the various characteristics Bouchard offers of IC I wish to consider only two, the two that I believe are distinctive to his version of IC: a **diversity/duality distinction** and a **majority cultural precedence**, which presupposes an assumption of duality. My purpose, then, is not to summarise Bouchard’s multi-aspected position but to bring out, explore and learn from what I think is distinctive about his interculturalism and challenging for multiculturalism as I understand it. While Bouchard’s conception of IC is based on a contrast with MC, and that this contrast is rooted in his understanding of the discourses and policies of Federal Canada and Quebec, nevertheless he wants to theorise at a more general level and illustrates his argument by reference to a number of countries. For example, in relation to the first point I am interested in, he holds that MC takes different form in different countries and changes over time (and not just in one direction) but to the extent that it is MC it exists in a ‘Diversity’ model. The central feature of a Diversity paradigm is ‘there is no recognition of a majority culture and, in consequence, no minorities per se’ (441). Bouchard sometimes refers to the inherently individualistic character of MC (464; which for a European is very confusing as in Europe IC is the individual-friendly correction of ‘groupist’ MC, eg., Council of Europe, 2008) but that is not the issue. The key idea of Diversity is that all individuals and groups are on equal footing. Taylor**,** without using the same analytical framework or vocabulary, takes the same view: ‘the ‘multi’ story decentres the traditional ethno-historical identity and refuses to put any other in its place. All such identities coexist in the society, but none is officialiszed’ (Bouchard, 2011: 418). They are both clearly thinking of federal Canadian multiculturalism as put by Pierre Trudeau: ‘although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other’ (House of Commons, 1971).

IC by contrast, ‘as a global model for social integration… takes shape within the duality paradigm’ (445): a recognition of ‘the majority/minorities duality’… ‘an us-them divide’ (443). ‘More precisely’, Bouchard says, ‘I am referring to the anxiety that the majority culture can feel in the face of cultural minorities. Indeed, they can create a more or less acute sense of threat within the majority culture not only in terms of its rights, but also in terms of its values, traditions, language, memory and identity (not to mention its security)’ (445).

This is an interesting contrast but I do not think it does the work that Bouchard wants it to do. Firstly, it is not clear to me that it adequately distinguishes different states. Bouchard believes that a number of countries have at some time or other during the past 50 years or so, partly or fully, embraced Diversity, ie., denied that there are minorities/majorities and have disavowed an official recognition of a (historical) culture: USA, Federal Canada, Australia and Britain are explicitly mentioned. This characterisation of each of these countries can be disputed though I will not pursue that here. Note, however, that Bouchard thinks that they have been moving away from Diversity to Duality in recent years – exactly the opposite sense that European cosmopolitan interculturalists have of where the world is going (Cantle 2012).[[8]](#footnote-8)

Related to this and secondly, the term ‘Diversity’ is often appropriated by certain critics of MC. Bouchard has chosen a term to characterise MC which is the term of choice of those who offer an anti-groupist and individualist alternative to MC (cf. Faist 2009). Similarly, its presence in the approach known as ‘Diversity Management’ is to positively express an individualistic understanding of ‘difference’ as an alternative to MC and related egalitarian approaches (Kandola and Fullerton 1994, Wrench and Modood 2001), and not just in the Anglophone sphere, but also in France (Charte de la Diversite En Enterprise, 2014). So, at a minimum, Bouchard’s Diversity/Duality distinction risks cross-national misunderstandings.

Whilst my first reservation about whether any Western country has in practice ever denied the existence of a foundational or official culture in the name of multiculturalism might be countered by saying that some intellectuals and politicians have flirted with this idea; and my second point that Bouchard’s vocabulary confuses multiculturalism with those of its critics who self-define around a concept of ‘diversity’ may be regarded as unfortunate but not a major objection. My third point is the one I want to press here. This is that it does not distinguish IC-Q from MC at a conceptual level.

It is true that an emphasis on majoritiarian anxieties is a radically different starting point from MC. The latter originates in a sensitivity to the condition of minorities: with negative perceptions and treatment of minorities in the form of racist stereotypes, group labels, misrecognition, discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation and various other forms of inequality that are centred around the existence of a public space that is reflective of the culture of some citizens and not of other citizens (Modood 2007: 37-41; 2013: 34-37). Nevertheless, it should be apparent from the last sentence that MC is framed within the majority-minority duality, at the very least its starting point is ‘an us-them divide’. My own way of expressing this is that MC begins with ‘the fact of negative difference…an unequal ‘’us-them’’ relationship’ (2007: 37; 2013:34). I begin with ‘difference’ and speak of minorities (as does all the MC positions that I know) so, once again it is not MC but IC-E or cosmopolitanism that seems to fit ‘Diversity’ and seems to be Bouchard’s unintended target. Perhaps the difference between IC-Q and MC is that the former is framed in terms of a duality, an ‘us-them’ that the majority is uncomfortable with, even threatened by; while MC is framed simultaneously in terms of an us-them *and* a certain conception of equality. I understand this idea of equality in terms of a use I make of Taylor’s (1994) discussion that equality today is not only about individual rights but also a recognition of group identities (Modood 2007/2013: 51-53/47-48). I do not take Taylor to be saying that state recognition of minority identities means disavowing majority identities or ‘official culture’ or lack of state support for national culture and nor does a multiculturalism based on this idea of equal respect require that. It seems then that a multiculturalism committed to a positive recognition of marginal or oppressed minorities seems to fit within a ‘duality’ paradigm or does not fit within a duality-diversity classification. Either way, Bouchard’s duality-diversity distinction fails to contrast MC-IC in the intended way because he mischaracterises multiculturalism or assumes that all multiculturalists are captured by his characterisation of multiculturalism.[[9]](#footnote-9) The critical difference is not the starting point of duality but a normative response to that duality based on the idea of ‘recognition’ or equality – which does not entail there is no official culture.

**Majority Precedence**

I turn now to the second of Bouchard’s two defining ideas of IC: ‘While seeking an equitable interaction between continuity and diversity, interculturalism allows for the recognition of certain elements of ad hoc (or contextual) precedence for majority culture’ (451). Lest there is a misunderstanding, he immediately adds: ‘I say ad hoc because it is out of the question to formalise or establish this idea as a general legal principle, which would lead to the creation of two classes of citizens’ (451). Taylor seems to be making the same qualified claim when he writes: ‘The ‘inter’ story starts from the reigning historical identity but sees it evolving in a process in which all citizens, of whatever identity, have a voice, and no-one’s input has a privileged status’ (p. 418). It is being suggested that central to IC is a certain legitimate majority precedence but not a legal privileging of majority citizens.

So, while for some European authors intercultural dialogue and exchange are the key characteristics of interculturalism and the best characteristics of multiculturalism (Rattansi, 2011: 152, 160), these are not the key features of the interculturalism of Bouchard and Taylor. It is the idea of majority precedence and this is a significant difference from most accounts of MC.[[10]](#footnote-10) Moreover, it is different from classical assimilation and liberal individualism which do not so much seek a lower status for minorities but their gradual dissolution and the confinement of ‘difference’ to private spaces and weekends. Moreover, while Bouchard in several places contrasts his perspective from liberalism, it could be said that his ideas here are within a touching distance of at least one version of liberal nationalism, namely, that expressed very recently by Tim Soutphommaasane, which includes the claim that ‘the liberal nationalist suggests that any minority cultural identity should be subordinated to the national identity’ (Soutphommaasane, 2012: 76) and Geoff Levey has expressly argued that Australian multiculturalism as state policy has always recognised the foundational character of Anglo-Australian majority culture (Levey 2008) and that this indeed is the defining feature of liberal nationalist multiculturalism. Levey has gone on to argue in an interesting essay that the important and perhaps only difference between Bouchard’s IC and liberal nationalist MC (including that of Will Kymlicka’s) is about time: whilst the former hold that the majority culture has the right to preserve its majoritarian character and prerogatives in perpetuity, liberal nationalists accept the fact that today’s majority may lose its majority status one day (Levey 2016).

Bouchard argues that it is difficult, given that it is emphatically not to be given a legal or official status, to express what this precedence means in the abstract. Hence he gives some examples of legitimate and illegitimate precedence from the Canadian and Quebec context. I do not have the space here to consider such nationally specific examples and to do so would distract from the idea of majority precedence as such and in what way it is different to and a challenge to MC. Bouchard’s emphasis on majority precedence, while by no means the only point of interest in his complex position, is most challenging for multiculturalists, as it is fair to say multiculturalists have not explicitly addressed the issue about the majority and do need to do so. Of course multiculturalists have written a lot on the re-making of a national citizenship in order to make it more inclusive (Modood, 2007/2013; Uberoi 2015a, 2015b), as that is central to multiculturalism as I understand it;[[11]](#footnote-11) and I have already mentioned that MC – certainly my own work – assumes that minority accommodation is to take place in an ongoing historic nation-state, and MC is not about opposing a given nation-state but of co-operatively and dialogically adapting it and re-imagining it, ie., multiculturalising it. So perhaps it is not entirely accurate to say that multiculturalists have neglected to note the normative significance of the majority *tout court*. Yet, on the whole, while the national culture is assumed as an appropriate normative context, multiculturalists do not explicitly discuss the concept of the majority or the idea of majority rights or recognition.[[12]](#footnote-12) In so far as multiculturalists distinguish between the majority culture and the public or civic culture, it is about its tendency to dominate and pass itself off as the whole of the national culture. It is assumed that a minority culture can be identified as distinct from what it needs to be included into but much less is said about the majority culture in this respect. I confess to being guilty here. Stimulated by this sense of neglect I would like to reflect on the place of the majority in MC.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Having admitted that multiculturalists like myself have not engaged much with the concept of ‘the majority’, I think a good way to approach Bouchard’s view on this topic and to consider what multiculturalists may learn from it is to ask what might be the current view of the concept of the majority implicit in MC.

I think what I have said to date about minorities in relation to the majority can be summarised in terms of two ‘protectionist’ statements and two positive statements:

1. Protection from racism, cultural racism and Islamophobia (not from majority culture *per se*)
2. There should be no insistence on assimilation but nor should there be any hinderance against uncoercive social processes of assimilation or self-chosen assimilation; different modes of integration should be equally welcomed
3. There should be multicultural accommodation of minorities within shared public institutions
4. Minorities should be able to make claims on the national culture and identity in their own ways and this remaking of national identity is part of multicultural citizenship and should be welcomed and encouraged by the majority.

So, while multiculturalists may need to think more about ‘the majority’, it is not the case that existing theories are *negative* about majority culture *per se* or even that multiculturalism is about protecting minorities from majority culture. I said earlier that MCs have a different starting point from ICs, and the above list allows us to note that one of the noticeable differences between MC and IC text is the emphasis the former put on anti-racism and beyond that to acknowledging the role of the political, of contestations and the challenging of power relations (CMEB 2000 is a very good example).

Let me consider what I think are the three main arguments for ‘majority precedence’. Bouchard’s distinctiveness is not in the arguments as such but in their deployment to support the idea of majority precedence. I accept the starting-points of the arguments but not the conclusions. The arguments show that the majority culture has a normative significance, but not normative precedence if that means the majority is able to make normative claims that minorities are not, or that majority claims always trump minority claims, or that there is always some *prima facie* presumption in favour of the majority culture.

*No Neutral Space*

Here the idea seems to be that liberal or democratic or secular states, ‘beyond their founding principles, values, norms and laws’ ‘typically incorporate a number of contextual and historical elements’ (453). Such states have a national identity that is not reducible to universal laws and norms or even to a legal-political framework but also have a cultural aspect – such as a language(s), a specific history, a religion or set of religions, national memories and an official calendar, ceremonies, memorials and other symbols marked by these religions and histories, and this culture is central to what state funded schools are required to teach. Whilst these national identities should be common to all citizens they are inevitably deeply shaped by ‘the majority culture’, parts of which sometimes may even be indistinguishable from the ‘national culture’. Liberal states may aspire to be culturally neutral but this is impossible as all societies must have a symbolic-normative core which acts as an integrative mechanism, and liberal states are no exception. In short, liberal democratic states are not a neutral public space but have a cultural character then it is reasonable to give the majority culture a certain legitimate precedence.

I fully endorse the impossibility of a neutral public space but query the implication of precedence. I can see that by the mere fact of what I might call ‘sociological privilege’, members of the majority culture will enjoy advantages of identification, access, discursive and other capabilities – in short a certain kind of cultural capital or cultural power – over those less steeped in the majority and therefore the national culture. Yet while it does not follow that those advantages are unfair – given that there is not a neutral public space some will always have some advantages of that kind relative to others. Neither, however, does it follow that some particular normative precedence should be acknowledged by all in addition to these socio-cultural advantages. If Bouchard means that the sociological-precedence, the fact of the power imbalance, the mechanisms by which the majority culture reproduces itself and incorporates minorities and manages change is not illegitimate *per se*, is not necessarily illegitimate, that would be right and is a useful point to make if some multiculturalists and theorists imply that it is necessarily illegitimate. But it is not legitimate in all instances either. In talking of national culture and citizenship we necessarily invoke a concept of equality and therefore have to formulate concepts of intercultural dialogue as Parekh does (Parekh, 2000/2006), or of oppression in relation to public culture as Iris Young does (Young 1992) or concepts such as misrecognition as Taylor does (Taylor 1994) in order to identify the ways in which minorities can have their claim to equal dignity and equal respect ignored or compromised. Positive aspects of this equality can include the expunging of racist language and imagery from the public space or widening the register of symbolic prestige to include demeaned and marginal groups. The fact that a polity cannot be culturally contententless or neutral between all cultures does not mean that the concept of equality becomes secondary to majority precedence.

*Identity Preservation*

This argument is that ‘[i]n order for the majority group to preserve the cultural and symbolic heritage that serves as the foundation of its identity and helps to ensure its continuity, it can legitimately claim some element of contextual precedence based on its seniority or history’ (451).

Here I query if the right to identity preservation – with which I have no quarrel – depends on ‘seniority or history’?[[14]](#footnote-14) If yes, then by definition no new minority has a right to identity preservation, which is a very extreme view, and I do not think there is anything to indicate that it is Bouchard’s view. If, however, minorities do have a right to identity preservation, then such a right does not depend on ‘seniority or history’ but depends upon being a group that is not harming anyone. In which case, the majority does have this (qualified) right but so do the minorities. Sometimes, there will be clashes and we will have to work out ways to handle them, but automatic precedence of one party over the other does not emerge simply because of seniority or history, as there will be other considerations to take into account, such as individual rights, marginal utility, the vulnerability of a culture and some sense of fairness and even-handedness such that one argument like historical precedence does not unduly trump all others.

Indeed, the relatively secure place of the majority, their enjoyment of ‘sociological privilege’ and cultural power to reproduce themselves and wanting to extend to minorities what majorities claim for themselves is one of the origins of multiculturalism.[[15]](#footnote-15) Every group and not just a majority should have aprima facie right to identity preservation (as long as the rights and interest of others - groups and individuals - are taken into account, cohesion is maintained, the cost is not too high and so on). Multiculturalists are mindful of how minorities can be under various pressures to assimilate and can become anxious about their identities and so argue that minorities should be allowed to preserve, change and adapt in their own way and at their own pace. Bouchard usefully alerts us to the fact that under some conditions, which seem to be growing today, the majority may feel anxious about a sense of cultural loss, of losing control about the pace of identity change. Multiculturalists normally assume that the majority already has what the minority is seeking, but suppose it has not? Or parts of it – such as say, parts of the white working class - has not? As a matter of fact, the growing presence and empowerment of minorities, the multiculturalist project, itself may be a cause for identity anxiety amongst the majority (Goodhart, 2013, Jones, 2011, Orgad, 2015). Where this is the case multiculturalists need to show the same sensitivity to change and identity anxiety in relation to the majority as to the minority. This may lead to some political difficulties at times but I do not think there is a theoretical problem as such. After all, one of the fundamental philosophical arguments for minority recognition is based on a dialogical or relational sense of identity that posits that it is not only members of minorities whose sense of self and self-worth is dependent on the perceptions and treatment by the majority but also *vice-versa* - as in Taylor’s use of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic (Taylor 1994: 60-63). So, where appropriate, emphasising mutual recognition, or as Bouchard puts it, reciprocity, and not merely minority accommodation may be a political adjustment but is not a philosophical difficulty for multiculturalists. Multiculturalists can, therefore, acknowledge that the majority and minorities have a right to be supported through state structures and policies without conceding that the majority has an exclusive right to identity preservation or the precedence of seniority, let alone the right to suppress a minority’s right to publicly express and preserve its identity simply because that would mean the public space is less reflective of majority culture. I suggest therefore that we can recognise that majorities have legitimate claims without taking the additional step of conceptualising these claims in terms of precedence. This would enable us to overcome the sense of contradiction one feels in reading Bouchard’s text where ‘precedence’ sits alongside a vocabulary of ‘mutual recognition’, ‘balance’ and ‘reciprocity’.

*National culture as ‘useful and necessary’*

The last argument I will examine is the suggestion that the fact of non-neutrality, which means that every liberal democratic state has a distinctive national-cultural identity, can be ‘useful and necessary even in a liberal democratic state. For example, it allows for the consolidation of national identity, which is at once a source of solidarity and a foundation for responsible citizen participation and social justice’ (452). Bouchard cites a number of authors who hold this view, including several multiculturalists including myself and also liberal nationalists such as David Miller, who is amongst those who have argued this most fully (Miller 1995). Some of us have utilised this argument without the implication of majority precedence. The argument establishes that a national-cultural identity, because of its linkage with a national citizenship, has some political and normative significance but is only acceptable as such if interpreted in a very liberal way. For example, if racist or intolerant aspects of the national culture get dropped. Individuals and groups have some freedom in emphasising different aspects of the national identity, which is differently and freely interpreted and allowed to change over time and through the inclusion of new groups. State-manufactured identities are not imposed on people and there is not an expectation that a national identity – shared with minorities but largely reflective of the majority – has to be everyone’s most important and cherished identity and must always trump all other identities.

In this way the national identity and its component parts, including key aspects of the majority culture, has to be made consistent with democratic values such as liberty, equality and solidarity and can therefore in principle also be consistent with multicultural citizenship. In this formation the majority culture again does not enjoy a unique position. Minority identities, such as that of Catholics or of black people, or specifically in relation to my own work, Muslim civic identities too participate in and thereby both potentially adapt and support the shared citizenship (Modood 2007/2013). Of course they may do so in different ways and in the process extend and complexify the relevant conception of national citizenship, giving it a multicultural character. I think that in principle all group identities can and should be encouraged (but not pressured) to support and adapt citizenship in this way. This is best done through dialogues or multilogues in which conceptions of citizenship and corresponding national identities are contested and reworked. Dialogue is indeed an idea central to multicultural citizenship and *pace* certain versions of IC, it is not thought of only in relation to micro, everyday interactions but also in relation to controversies as for example Bhikhu Parekh demonstrates in relation to *The Satanic Verses Affair*, where the majority have a chance to make their point but often do so in a tone that is not conducive to dialogue or mutual learning (Parekh 2000/2006).[[16]](#footnote-16) Parekh shows that such dialogues inevitably have a majoritarian or status quo starting point because even while wanting to express unfamiliar sensibilities and bring in new arguments minorities are primarily trying to persuade the majority that what they are seeking is not so different to what the majority at one time or another has sought for itself and in so arguing the minority must justify itself by appealing to – even while seeking to modify - the existing ‘operative public values’ which structure public debate and what is thought to be legitimate or reasonable in that polity at the time (Parekh 2000/2006).

These three arguments (no neutral space; identity preservation; national culture as useful and necessary) then press multiculturalists to acknowledge not just recognition of minorities but mutual or multilogical recognition and thereby to be sensitive to anxieties about threats to identity on the part of the majority as well as minorities. They also remind us that the power of the majority to preserve their culture and to enshrine it within a national identity supported by the state is not necessarily illegitimate though it does not invalidate multicultural concerns about the ways majorities can oppress, misrecogonise and marginalise, formally and informally. These arguments, then, that I have been discussing do not establish a majority precedence and are not a basis to repudiate the multiculturalist project of remaking national citizenships so that all citizens can see themselves in the national identity and achieve a sense of belonging together. A living national identity is a work in progress, a conversation between where we are coming from and where we are going. The past is central to the sense of nationhood today, we have to be able to see it as our past, as how it has formed us, but equally we must appreciate the country we are becoming. It is a story in which the white or ethnic majority is central but it is a developing story, and one in which new minorities too are characters and not just replicas of the majority or mere ‘add-ons’.

**Multicultural Nationalism**

So, whilst I welcome the stimulus that interculturalists/liberal nationalists like Bouchard, (recent) Taylor and Levey offer to (other) multiculturalists to think more normatively about the majority, I do not accept their characterisation of MC nor of the majority. Bouchard’s characterisation of Diversity as ‘no recognition of a majority culture’ (441-2) may or may not be true of Canadian MC but it is not based on a reading of MC authors. I have argued that MC assumes that the majority culture already has recognition of some sort – that is what is meant by saying the liberal state is not neutral - and so it is a matter of extending this valued condition to minorities. MCs like me clearly accept that liberal democratic states may promote a national culture (within liberal limits and respecting other group identities) and this would be of benefit to the society or polity as a whole. This is reflected in the importance I give to both British national identity and the role that the state may play in relation to it. Moreover, it is not an ad hoc addition but follows from the core of my position which puts a special value on identity. So I cannot see how I can possibly be characterised as someone who considers appeals to majority cultural heritage as illegitimate *per se*. The multiculturalist point is that the predominance that the cultural majority enjoys in the shaping of the national culture, symbols and institutions should not be exercised in a non-minority accommodating ways. So, the goal is legitimate but the constraints are not just about traditional liberal freedoms of the individual, which may be enough to ensure non-discrimination and non-coercive assimilation, but also respect for post-immigration ethnoracial, ethnocultural and ethnoreligious group identities. This respect is both a constraint on the kind of national cultural identity building that may be pursued but, more positively, it is an opportunity for creating a certain kind of national identity, namely one which is not just constrained by those kinds of group identities but includes them in the revised or reformed national identity, critically reforming but without displacing the narrative of the majority within the national identity. Minorities may wish to contest dominant narratives which exclude them or fail to respect them and their contribution but they do not compete with the majority in a zero-sum game. I have argued that the process should be seen as a kind of egalitarian levelling up, not a form of dispossession (Modood 20xx). More positively still, that the accommodation of minorities should not be seen as a drag on the national identity but as a positive resource; not as diluting the national culture but vivifying and enrichening it. Whilst liberal nationalism is often offered in relation to facilitating the solidarity that enables social democratic redistribution of resources, the distinctive goal of multicultural nationalism is to allow people to hold, adapt, hyphenate, fuse and create identities important to them in the context of their being co-citizens and members of socio-cultural, ethnoracial and ethnoreligious groups.

Levey has suggested that my acceptance of the cultural predominance of the majority is simply as an empirical fact and is not sufficiently normative (Levey 2016: 211). Yet, in a recent work Bouchard himself recalling (Bouchard 2015: 111-112) that the Bouchard-Taylor report spoke of ‘*de facto* precedence’ (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 214) and abandons the term ‘majority precedence’ as he believes that the idea he wants to state ‘simply reflects the historical demographic and sociological weight of the majority’ (Bouchard 2012/2015: 140). So, perhaps there is at least an evolving strand of Bouchard’s thinking that is converging on multiculturalism. In any case, given that I do not think that the priority of the majority culture in the national identity and public culture is necessarily illegitimate and Bouchard is explicit that the principle of precedence can be abused, it may well be asked how substantive are our differences? I mentioned that Bouchard draws on some of the controversies today in Quebec and Canada to illustrate what he thinks is legitimate from illegitimate majority precedence. While I do not want to get drawn on the specifics of those cases, nevertheless, I do owe some examples in order to give content to my own position. I shall therefore briefly move towards a conclusion by giving two examples that I think illustrate two different aspects of multiculturalism.

The Church of England is clearly an institutionalised feature of England’s and Britain’s historical identity. This is reflected in symbolic and substantive aspects of the constitution. For example, 26 Anglican bishops sit by virtue of that status in the upper house of the UK legislature, the House of Lords. It is the Archbishop of Canterbury that presides over the installation of a new head of state, namely the coronation of the monarch. Given the rapidity of changes that are affecting British national identity, and the way in which religion, sometimes in a divisive way, is making a political reappearance, I think it would be wise not to discard lightly this historic aspect of British identity, which continues to be of importance to many even when few attend Church of England services and when that Church may perhaps have been overtaken by Catholicism as the largest organised religion in the country. Yet, in my advocacy of a multiculturalised Britain I would like to see the Church of England share these constitutional privileges - which should perhaps be extended - with other faiths. However, multiculturalism here does not mean crude ‘parity’. My expectation is that even in the context of an explicit multifaithism the Church of England would enjoy a rightful precedence in the religious representation in the House of Lords and in the coronation of the monarch, and this would not be just a crude majoritarianism but be based on its historical contribution and its potential to play a leading role in the evolution of a multiculturalist national identity, state and society. Both the historical and the multiculturalist contributions to national identity have a presumptive quality, and usually they qualify each other, but where they are complementary the case for ‘establishment’ is enhanced and most of all where there is simultaneously a process of inclusion of non-Anglican faith communities and humanists.[[17]](#footnote-17)

My second example is about religion in non-denominational state schools. I think multiculturalism should support a compulsory religious education (RE) in which children of all faiths and none are taught about a variety of faith traditions and their past and current effects upon individuals and societies, upon the shaping of humanity, taught to classes comprising those of all religions and those of none. Such classes should certainly include the contribution of humanism as well as the atheistic critique of religion and can be combined with ethics as I believe is the case in Quebec. In many countries there are advocates for RE as part of a national curriculum.[[18]](#footnote-18) The main issue in relation to majority precedence is in relation to religious instruction (RI), the induction into a specific faith. Broadly speaking there are two majoritarian possibilities. We have a society where there is a majority religion and that alone is allowed as RI, and minorities might be exempted from those classes but no alternative religious instruction is provided. Or secondly, the majority view is that there should be no RI in state schools, as in the USA or in France (except in state-funded religious schools). Is it fair to impose either of these policies on minorities that do want RI?

That is certainly an appropriate subject for a national dialogue but if after that certain minorities want RI as well as RE, then a truly national system, certainly a multicultural system, must make an effort to accommodate minority RI. In my understanding then, under both the majoritarian possibilities the minorities should have their religions instructed or worshipped within the national system. On the other hand, minorities do not have the right to stop the majority from including the instruction of their religion. We should not, for example, ask schools to cease Christian RI or worship or celebrating Christmas *because* of the presence of Muslims or Hindus; rather, we should extend the celebrations to include, for example, Eid and Diwali. Such separate classes and faith-specific worship needs to be balanced with an approach that brings all the children together and into dialogue; indeed, without that it would be potentially divisive of the school and of society. But where that is in place, voluntary pursuit of one’s own faith or philosophical tradition completes the multiculturalist approach to the place of religion in such schools. Learning together about different faiths, including what they have in common and being instructed in or inducted into one’s faith community heritage as a normal school occurrence and not something excluded from the school community are then the two mutually balancing aspects of multiculturalism.

These two brief examples, then, illustrate what I take to be a multiculturalist recognition of the legitimate claims and limits of majority culture. I will let others comment on their closeness or distance from interculturalism. My conclusion is that the idea of majority precedence as found in the work of Bouchard and Taylor and within Quebecan IC more generally is a significant difference from most accounts of MC. Despite it containing a rather simplistic account of MC that is not found in or even said to be found in the work of multiculturalists, the latter can benefit from engaging with it. I have said I accept the starting-points of the arguments in question but not the conclusions. The arguments show that the majority culture has a normative significance, but not normative precedence if that means the majority is able to make normative claims that minorities are not, or that majority claims always trump minority claims, or that there is always some *prima facie* presumption in favour of the majority culture. Engaging with these arguments show that the kind of multicultural nationalism that I and Bhikhu Parekh have been developing (Uberoi, 2015a and 2015b) have tended to take the majority for granted as a normative context without explicitly discussing it, yet there is nothing in that MC that stands in the way of doing the majority justice. Indeed, the opportunity to reflect on this theme makes me think that multicultural nationalism is well placed to balance the normative identity claims of the majority and the minorities that these IC-Q authors seek when they emphasise the importance of mutual recognition, reciprocity and balance, though they tend to go astray when they express this as ‘majority precedence’.

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1. ### This is a significantly modified and expanded version of Modood, T. (2014) ‘[Multiculturalism, Interculturalisms and the Majority’, Kohlberg Memorial Lecture, *Journal of Moral Education*, 43(3): 302–315.](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03057240.2014.920308) I am grateful to have received many stimulating comments on the penultimate draft from Francois Boucher, Jean-Francois Gaudreault-Desbiens, Rafele Iocovino, Geoff Levey, Nasar Meer, Liav Orgad, Dan Pfeffer, Luc Tremblay, Luc Turgeon, Varun Uberoi, and Elke Winter; and also to them for nudging me to make certain points more explicit.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As Bouchard notes (Bouchard 2015: 178, note 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For an attempt to reconcile them, see Zapata-Barrero, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Loobuyck too uses the macro-micro distinction to distinguish between IC and MC but he conflates it with a state – civil society distinction ( Loobuyck, 2016: 230) and does not see that MC is not confined to the state and extends to citizen-to-citizen relations (Modood 2007/2013: chapter 6). Contrary to another distinction he makes, multiculturalism is not just about justice and neglects the importance of belonging: on the contrary, belonging is more central to multicultural nationalism than either the liberal goal of furthering autonomy or the social democratic means of redistribution of resources. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A more standard distinction is between liberal multiculturalism (eg., Kymlicka) and a more communitarian multiculturalism (eg., Parekh, Taylor) (Murphy, 2013; Crowder, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In a subsequent work (Bouchard 2015) does focus in a more restricted way and does emphasise that one of the reasons that IC suits Quebec is that the Quebecois are a minority nation within a federation even while they assert themselves as a majority culture within Quebec. As there are few countries in the world with this particular kind of duality, this considerably limits the scope of application of IC-Q. I am however interested in IC-Q as having general applicability and discuss its normative character in that context. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Turgeon (2015) in a review of Bouchard (2015) notes how Bouchard tends to ignore MC authors. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. These issues are matters of debate in Europe too but no European country has come close to the view that there is no such thing as a national historic culture, and few MCs are demanding that they do, a position that comes closer to cosmopolitanism than multiculturalism; and actually the same tensions exist within IC-Q too (Maxwell et al, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Interestingly, Levey 2016 utilises Bouchard’s duality-diversity distinction while arguing that liberal nationalist multiculturalism is on the ‘duality’ side of the distinction and works hard to find some decisive ‘diversity’ aspects in my position, though not I think with success. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In a private communication Bouchard has said that he thinks I am ‘making way too much of the idea of precedence’. He says that he sees it as ‘stemming from a sociological necessity… every society , in order to function and to survive, needs a strong symbolic foundation’ and his ‘point is that it should be preserved not as the culture or identity of the majority… but as a necessary social feature.’ I have re-read his article in the light of this communication and do not feel the need to make any changes to my text. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Will Kymlicka has written extensively on the re-making of a national citizenship but I hesitate to cite him here as I am mindful of Levey’s argument that Kymlicka is a liberal nationalist and therefore not a parity multiculturalist and therefore is not a good example of a multiculturalist that Bouchard is arguing against (Levey, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For a path-opening discussion and typology of the majority, see Orgad 2015. He, however, confines his normative discussion to uses of majority culture in relation to just two areas of policy, namely, immigration and naturalisation. This is partly because his interest in ‘majority rights’ is only in those that can be expressed in law. MC is not only or even primarily focused on law and Bouchard, as stated above, is not arguing for majority rights in law, and neither MC nor IC is primarily interested on immigration and naturalisation but in state-citizen and citizen-to-citizen relations. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I appreciate that examples are necessary to understand general propositions and offer two examples below. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ‘Preservation’ here does not imply the absence of change, for, as Oakeshott said in a different context, no tradition without the means of change is a living tradition (Oakeshott 1962). The issue is the right to protect identity from change by others. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I suppose Bouchard and liberal nationalists are objecting to views such as: ‘The [multicultural] state accepts an obligation to accord the history, language and culture of non-dominant groups the same recognition and accommodation that is accorded to the dominant group’ (Kymlicka 2003: 150). Yet, interestingly, Bouchard has also written of the ethnocultural majority in Quebec having ‘a right like any other to a form of recognition… *just as legitimate* as those of ethnocultural minorities’(2015: 95)...’ that the majority has *the same legitimacy* as the minority cultures’ (103) (my emphases). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Dialogue is one of the foundational ideas of MC (Parekh 2000/2006, Taylor 1994) in contrast to political and social theories which centre on logics of conflict, abstract rationality, market choices, legal mechanisms and so on. Multiculturalists have mainly thought of dialogue at the level of public discourses and political controversies, interculturalists have added the micro in terms of interpersonal cultural encounters and group dynamics at the level of youth clubs, neighbourhoods, towns and cities (Meer and Modood, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. On the relationship between multiculturalism and moderate secularism, see Modood, 2016b). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I appreciate that this will read oddly to US readers. They should bear in mind that the US is not typical of how religion is treated in schools in the western democracies. For example, all states of the European Union give funding either to religious schools or for religious education in state schools (Stepan 2011: 117). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)