Liberal Nationalism, Immigration, and the Problem of Multiple National Identities

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Abstract: Critics and defenders of liberal nationalism often debate whether the nation-state is able to accommodate cultural and political pluralism, as it necessarily aspires for congruence between state and nation. In this article, I argue that both sides of the debate have neglected a second homogenising assumption of nationalism. Even if it is possible for the nation-building state to accommodate multiple political and cultural communities, it is not obvious that is possible or desirable for it to accommodate individuals belonging to more than one nation. With the rise of international migration, and the growing number of multinational individuals, this flaw is a serious one. I advance an internal critique of liberal nationalism to demonstrate that, from within its own logic, this theory must either reject multiple national identities, or accommodate them at the cost of the normative justifications of nationalism it provides. By analysing David Miller’s influential analysis of national identity in divided societies, I demonstrate how this framework is unable to support an accepting attitude towards multiple national identities.

Introduction

One of the most heated debates surrounding nationalism involves the ability of the nation-building state to accommodate social, cultural, and political pluralism.

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1 I would like to thank Rainer Bauböck, who provided guidance and helpful comments on the research leading to this paper. This paper was prepared for and presented at the “Liberal Nationalism and its Critics” workshop, Nuffield College, Oxford, June 2017, and benefitted from the comments of Gina Gustavsson, Nils Holtug, Cécile Laborde, Patti Lenard, David Miller, Margaret Moore, and Daniel Weinstock. Earlier versions of the paper were presented at the “Legal, Political, and Social Theory” Thematic Working Group, and at the Max Weber Fellows June Conference, both at the European University Institute. Finally, many thanks to the editors and reviewers for their helpful comments on how to improve the manuscript.

2 The seminal works in liberal nationalism are (Margalit and Raz, 1990; Miller, 1995; Kymlicka, 1995; Tamir, 1993). For prominent critiques, specifically from scholars advocating greater sensitivity to questions of difference and diversity, see (Levy, 2000; Parekh, 2002; Tully, 1995; Young, 2011).
Proponents of radical multiculturalism, identity politics, and the politics of difference have pointed to nationalism’s troubling tendency towards cultural homogeneity, arguing that projects of nation-building are unavoidably in tension with the rights of recognition for ethnic, religious, and national minorities. In response, liberal defenders of nationalism have struggled to demonstrate that, properly understood and qualified, nationalism is not inimical to cultural pluralism and diversity, and that a liberal nation state can accommodate and recognise multiple cultural, religious, and political groups.

Surprisingly, both liberal nationalists and their critics have, for the most part, neglected a second homogenising assumption at the heart of nationalism. Even if it is possible (or desirable) for the nation-building state to accommodate multiple cultures and political communities within its territory, is it possible (or desirable) for it to accommodate individuals belonging to more than one culture, having more than one political identity, or – most controversially – being a member of more than one nation? This latter question – the problem of multiple national identities – is reflected in trenchant public controversy regarding immigrants and their continuous attachment to their origin states, and will be the focus of this article.

In one sense, this critique is not entirely a new one: some critics of liberal nationalism have notably pointed to the possibility of hybrid identities, and the danger of its version of multiculturalism becoming ‘nothing more than a plea for plural monoculturalism’ (Sen, 2006: 157). Liberal nationalists have rejected this accusation, and where they have addressed the issue of multiple national identities, tended to suggest it can be answered in the same way as that of multiple cultural identities. My argument in what follows is that this reduction is flawed: even when they can answer the charge of plural monoculturalism, from within the logic of their own theory liberal nationalists can either reject the desirability of multiple national identities, or accommodate them at the cost of undermining liberal nationalism’s own normative arguments, but not simply accept them. If we take liberal nationalism to be making a normative claim – i.e., that belonging to a nation entails some distinctive obligations for an individual person – then invoking this claim by more than one nation is problematic. Moreover, it is problematic in a way liberal nationalists cannot, within their own existing framework, resolve. Attempts towards accommodation are, in this

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3 This general line of argument is also advanced by A.J Simmons against associative accounts of political obligations more broadly:
‘Political obligation, as this is commonly understood, requires a kind of exclusivity in many of our dealings with political communities. It is only good fortune that allows holders of dual citizenship to satisfy all of the political obligations that we normally suppose citizens lie under. But it may well be that in the final analysis, if we really believe that all citizens owe their states political obligations, we must believe as well that the position of dual (or multiple) citizenship is simply morally untenable’. (Simmons, 2002: 30).
sense, self-defeating: in other words, liberal nationalism’s position with regards to individual identity may not be monoculturalist, but it is necessarily mononationalist. In the first section of this article, I offer an account of what I take to be the liberal nationalist ideal: universal congruence between the state and the nation, and between the co-national and the citizen. I explain what makes this a nationalist ideal, and in what ways it is liberal. This sets the scene for addressing the non-ideal cases of political diversity, given that this ideal is not often, or even ever, feasible. In the second section, I introduce the intuitive problem that multiple national identities pose for liberal nationalists, particularly in the case of immigration. Following this, in the third section, I focus on one influential analysis of the problem of social plurality, David Miller’s ‘Nationality in Divided Societies’ (Miller, 2000b); and, in the fourth section, I demonstrate how this existing framework for thinking about national identity in divided societies is unable to support an accepting attitude about national identity in divided selves, and in particular in the context of immigration. In the final section I consider potential objections to my argument.

The Liberal Nationalist Ideal

Liberal nationalism, first and foremost, is a species of the genus nationalism. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to provide a universally accepted definition of nationalism here. However, the following assertions, articulated by John Breuilly (1993: 3), are shared across different brands of the nationalist argument:

1. Ontologically, there exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character.
2. Ethically, the interests and values of this nation are superior to all other interests and values.
3. Politically, the nation must be as independent as possible. This usually requires the attainment of political sovereignty.

With these assertions as the core beliefs of the nationalist creed, one can plausibly ask: what is so liberal about liberal nationalism? At least intuitively, these core claims seem to be in tension with liberalism’s focus on individual autonomy and moral universalism. In response, liberal nationalists offer two ways of liberalizing nationalism: first, showing that nationalism, properly understood, can be made compatible with liberalism; and second, showing that nationalism, properly understood, is necessary for liberalism.

First, liberal nationalists offer qualifications and adjustments on the three core claims of nationalism to make it compatible with liberalism. While liberal nationalists (often) maintain that nations with a peculiar character exist, they also maintain, in line with modernist theories of nationalism, that their existence is intersubjective, fluid, and open to challenge and re-interpretation. While liberal nationalists agree that the nation is ethically important, and that belonging to a nation entails particular duties and
responsibilities for its individual members, they (a) justify these duties not by subduing individuals to the national interest, but with regards to the interests and rights of other individual members, (b) qualify them vis-à-vis the rights and interests of outsiders, and (c) interpret the superiority of national interests as a matter of priority, rather than exclusivity. Finally, while they agree that nationalism entails national self-determination, they suggest that this is compatible with liberal universalism because (a) this argument is universally and equally applicable to all nations, and (b) self-determination need not necessarily entail full political sovereignty, but merely self-government.

More strongly, liberal nationalists advance three lines of argument designed to demonstrate that nationalism is not only compatible, but necessary for achieving the normative ends of liberalism. First, they argue that individuals can only exercise this autonomy against a stable cultural background, which provides them with both a range of options from which they can freely choose, as well as providing the context for the meaning to their choices between these options. Moreover, they argue that a stable national culture is important for the autonomy of the nation’s members, and that co-nationals (as well as the state in which they live) have a duty to maintain this culture (Kymlicka, 1995: 80; Miller, 1995: 85–86; Tamir, 1993: 84). Call this the autonomy argument. Second, liberal nationalists argue that the kind of institutions required for the implementation of liberal ends require a widespread attitude of solidarity and trust for their stable functioning (Miller, 1995: 92–94; Tamir, 1993: 82; cf. Moore, 2001: 80–101) and that a shared national identity is the primary and perhaps sole source of this motivational precondition in modern states, as it grounds associative duties of solidarity towards co-nationals (but see Abizadeh, 2002; Weinstock, 1999; Erez, 2017). Call this the solidarity argument. Finally, Liberal nationalists argue that only referring to the pre-political community of the nation can determine the boundaries of the demos – i.e., those who are both the authors and subjects of political power – in a non-circular manner (Miller, 2009; Moore 2001; but see Abizadeh, 2012). Call this the democratic boundary argument.

As both proponents and critics of nationalism have shown, these normative arguments in support of nationalism imply that, ideally, there should be congruence between the state and the nation; between the legal and institutional structures of political power, and the culturally and socially defined political community subjected to this power. Without at least a partial overlap between citizenship and nationhood, both the solidarity argument and the democratic boundary argument are undermined, and the autonomy argument is put under severe pressure. Thus, for liberal nationalists, ‘it is not just a happy accident that nation-states happen to exist: rather it is legitimate to use certain measures to try to bring about a greater coincidence of nation and state’ (Kymlicka and Straehle, 2001: 222).
As this ideal is difficult and often impossible to attain in practice, for reasons both of feasibility and morality, different liberal nationalists have suggested ways to accommodate a lack of state-nation congruence. I will discuss some influential attempts towards this accommodation below. First, however, it will be important to show that the liberal nationalist ideal entails not merely congruence between the state and the nation, but primacy of national identity and national allegiance over competing political identities. This is the source of the intuitive problem with multiple national identities, to which I now turn.

**The Intuitive Problem with Multiple National Identities**

A person may have a sense of belonging to more than one nation as a result of migrating from one society to the other, or of being born to a multinational family. These processes are similar to those that explain how it is possible for individuals to be citizens of more than one state, yet the question of formal citizenship is orthogonal to that of national identity. People with multiple national identities may not be legally recognised as dual citizens, and dual citizens may feel no sense of attachment, loyalty, or belonging to one of their states – especially if they became dual citizens by the accident of birth.

This distinction is normatively significant, because it suggests that unlike citizenship regimes – which are determined by the state more or less unilaterally – national identities are generated and sustained by states, communities, families and individuals alike. Nationalizing states and migration-receiving states have a clear interest in sustaining the national identity congruent with the state, and this is reinforced by the practices and behaviours of citizens: in sporting events, artistic representations, the use of language, etc. (Billig, 1995). But it is also clear that immigrants and diaspora groups are often keen to preserve their ties to the ‘homeland’, even beyond the first generation of migration, through ceremonies, stories, cultural practices and travel. In addition, ‘sending’ states and national communities often act in ways that maintain and support these ties – through cultural institutions, or public rhetoric – even if some are still reluctant to extend legal citizenship (see Brubaker, 2010). So while states are able to regulate multiple nationalities in the legal sense, they face a more challenging and dangerous hurdle if they attempt to regulate ‘the politics of belonging’.

This difficulty can be viewed in anti-immigration political discourse, viewing individuals who maintain multiple national identities as suspicious, disloyal, and

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4 Multiple national identities may also be the result of a political process of nation building, where the state has partially succeeded in creating or prioritising one national identity without fully eradicating competing national identities, as is the case in some multinational states. As my focus in this article is on multiple national identities of immigrants, I will limit the scope of the discussion to the first two paths.
potentially treasonous. For the last two decades, British politician Norman Tebbit has been suggesting that British citizens of South-Asian descent were not truly loyal to Britain until they supported the English team at cricket over their country of origin. Former speaker of the US House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, has claimed that failing to require immigrants to ‘absolutely and entirely denounce’ all previous political allegiances is incompatible with ‘the moral basis of American constitutional democracy’ (Fonte, 2005), And French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen has suggested that, if elected, she would have abolished dual citizenship for all non-EU (and Russian) citizens, using explicit nationalist reasoning when stating that dual citizenship holders must decide which is their true homeland (Chazan 2017).

These views are not restricted to nationalist politicians, of course, and have been expressed by conservative scholars sympathetic with nationalism. Samuel Huntington’s book (2005), *Who are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, points to holders of dual citizenship and those who maintain dual political allegiance (primarily Mexican-Americans) as responsible for eroding the unifying sense of national identity in the United States. Political psychologist Stanley Renshon’s book, *The 50% American*, criticises ‘liberal political theorists and their allies’ for accepting the postmodern fallacy of virtually unlimited and replaceable selves, without acknowledging that not all of these identifications have equal weight, and that national identity takes precedence over all others: ‘I am much more a father than a Caucasian, much more a political moderate than an Upper West Sider. And, I am definitely more of an American than most of the other categories in my list’ (Renshon, 2005: 146).

In the rare instances in which liberal nationalist theorists have considered this issue, they seem to suggest that it does not constitute a special reason for concern. The reasoning behind this argument reflect liberal nationalism’s response to the charge of plural monoculturalism. Liberal nationalists often argue that the project of nation-building does not require the repression or subordination of other group identities, including other national identities. Thus David Miller associates the idea that the nation should be given an exclusive place in one’s practical ethical identity with conservative forms of nationalism advocated by Roger Scruton (1990). Conservative nationalists believe the right attitude towards one’s nation is one of piety and deference, as one would have towards a parent (or a god). But liberal nationalists, Miller argues, should think of the right attitude towards one’s nation as one of loyalty, not piety; ‘national identities are not all-embracing, but can co-exist peacefully with other commitments and loyalties in a person’s conception of himself’ (Miller, 1995: 121).

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5 The flipside of this view is (Spiro, 2016), who argues that dual nationality undermines the value of citizenship – but that this is both desirable and unavoidable.
This view of loyalty is crucial for Miller’s success in dealing with two difficult normative questions relating to competing national identities: those of minority nations, and those of immigrants. In his discussion of the feasibility and desirability of multiple national identities, in the context of Scottish national identity within Britain, he writes that

The idea that one must belong exclusively to a single nation is linked to the idea that national loyalty must take precedence over all other ethical demands to which one is subject. Clearly, if one’s supreme duty is to act as the interests of one’s nation require, it makes no sense to suppose that one might belong simultaneously to two nations. But the ethical doctrine is untenable, and once it is abandoned, it is not difficult to think of a person balancing her loyalties to a larger and to a smaller country.. (Miller, 2000b: fn. 10).

And in his discussion of immigrants’ allegiance towards their home countries, he writes that,

The deeper question is how far immigrant groups can be expected to make the nation-state they move to their primary object of political allegiance. It is very common for members of such groups to retain a strong emotional attachment to the country they have left, and therefore to feel some loyalty to it. This may be formally recognized through the increasingly widespread institution of dual citizenship. There is clearly nothing objectionable in this: the idea that immigrants must identify exclusively with their new homeland becomes anachronistic once the multicultural character of the receiving state is recognized (Miller, 2008: 382 [my emphasis]).

Are these positions tenable? I will argue that, from the point of view of liberal nationalism, they are not. Miller is right in pointing out that liberal nationalism need not suggest that acting on behalf of the nation’s interest is all citizens’ (and each citizen’s) sole and absolute ethical duty, nor that loyalty should be understood in terms of piety, nor that national identity should be seen as exclusive with regards to other group identities. Nevertheless, the normative aims of liberal nationalism do require a widespread attitude of partiality towards the nation and towards fellow co-nationals, with regards to competing sub-, trans- and supra-nation group identities, at least when citizens act qua citizens in the public sphere. This compatriot partiality claim is more often made explicitly against supra-national identities than it is against sub-national identities – duties to fellow nationals take priority over duties to humanity – yet it is clear that the argument applies to subnational cases as well.  

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6 See the classic argument by Mill (1861), Chapter XVI, as well as (Miller 1995: 135-139; Miller 2000a) for explicit examples of this claim vis-à-vis subnational identities. Cf. (Buchanan, 1997; Moore, 2001: 47-50) for critiques of this argument.
To illustrate this point, consider the Solidarity Argument. As I wrote above, liberal nationalists argue that stable political institutions, specifically those associated with deliberative democracy and distributive economic policies, require a shared national identity as the source of solidarity and fellow feeling (Tamir, 1993: 82; Moore, 2001: 80–101). Often these motivational preconditions are justified as a way to transcend both narrow self-interest and the supposed motivational impotence of abstract morality, arguing that citizens would support progressive policies and seek the common good in deliberative practices out of solidarity and fellow-feeling even when they could personally be better off through bargaining and power politics (Erez, 2017).

It is equally important, however, that citizens transcend competing group allegiances they may have, either to sub-nation groups or groups beyond the boundaries of the nation (Miller, 1995: 139–140). While liberal nationalism should aspire to keep tension between these different identities to a minimum, when they do clash it is the duty to fellow nationals that carries more weight.

Note that this is fully compatible with Miller’s rejection of conservative nationalism’s view of national loyalty as piety. The conservative position (as Miller reads it) views duties to the nation as overriding duties to outsiders, such that when national duties clash with duties to one’s family or with universal morality, the latter should be dismissed regardless of their urgency. The liberal version of national loyalty is far more moderate, as duties to the nation are restricted to the public sphere, and are not absolute. Liberal nationalists need only postulate that when weighing the competing interests and claims of different groups, duties to fellow-nationals should be granted more weight. For example, special duties towards fellow-nationals may justify prioritising their economic interests over those of economic migrants, but they cannot justify blocking the entry of asylum-seekers (Miller, 2016). A similar logic applies to competing claims from different groups to which one belongs. While it will be an injustice to require individuals to act against their duties towards particularist identities – for example, to require British Jews to eat pork to demonstrate their commitment to the national culture – institutions of social justice and democracy require people to act qua members of the national community (Miller, 2000a, 2013).

With cases of multiple national identities, however, this conceptual framework reaches a dead-end. Even if we accept that in some contexts duties to the nation and the interests of co-nationals should be given more weight in the balance, this provides no guidance for cases in which an individual belongs to two nations, and their respective interests clash. In other words, while one’s national identity is viewed as primary vis-à-vis other group identities, it must be seen as exclusive vis-à-vis other national identities. By way of analogy, liberal nationalism is similar to a theory of familial duties: it might say that, in cases of tension, the interests and needs of family

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7 For a similar analysis, see (Soutphommasane, 2012: 225-228).
members should have more weight, but not how to resolve cases of disputes within the family.  

**Nationalist Non-Ideal Theory (1): National Identity in Divided Societies**

We can see, therefore, that multiple national identities are intuitively problematic even for *liberal* nationalists, as they are in tension with the greater weight of national identity as a reason for action in the political sphere. This, however, is not sufficient in order to establish the case. After all, liberal nationalists can easily concede that their ideal theory faces problems when applied in practice, while also maintaining that these tensions could be mitigated from within the theory itself. This is comparable, they may argue, to the case of the multinational state: while ideally the state and the nation should be in congruence, there are ways to accommodate minority nations within the liberal nation-state. There may be, then, ways to accommodate multiple identities within the multinational self. In this section, I analyse a prominent liberal nationalist strategy for addressing the non-ideal condition of the multinational state, before demonstrating, in the next section, why this strategy cannot hold for addressing the problem of multiple national identities.

As I already argued above, the ideal of state-nation congruence is problematic in practice, for multiple reasons. First, the sheer number of existing and possible nations exceeds the number of existing states, and arguably that of feasibly possible states (Gellner, 1983). Second, and more importantly, historical contingencies have resulted in states with minority nations (e.g. Quebecois in Canada), multinational states (e.g. Belgium), multistate nations (e.g. the two Koreas), and states with overlapping nations (e.g., Russians in the Baltic States). Even if it were possible to redesign the world map such that each state would comprise of one nation, the moral costs of this solution would bar liberal nationalists from endorsing it. Partly for this reason, some maintain that cultural self-determination does not require statehood (Gans, 2003: 67–70). Nationalists who wish to hold on to political self-determination, on the other hand, must show that they can deal with the non-ideal situation of cultural and political diversity without forgoing either their liberal or nationalist commitments.

One strategy liberal nationalists employ to address this problem is to suggest that, since national identity is malleable and dynamic, nationalism can accommodate cultural difference and even incorporate it within a particular national identity. Will Kymlicka, for example, argues that for liberal nationalism to be fully justified, it must

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8 This is a political, not a psychological, argument: it involves a claim about the sustainability of social solidarity and allegiance at the aggregate level, not at the level of the individual. There are, in fact, studies that suggest that there is no necessary psychological tension between dual political allegiances, nor is there a clear diminution of political participation among individual dual nationals. For a discussion see (Chaudhary, 2016; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Schlenker et al., 2017).
become multicultural. Part of what being Canadian means, for example, can be reshaped to include toleration and recognition of different cultural, religious and ethnic groups (Kymlicka, 1995). Similarly, David Miller (1995) suggests that the interaction between minority cultures and the dominant national culture could and should lead to mutual adjustments, such that, for example, certain specific cultural attributes considered central to national identity (say, Catholicism in France) would become less central. Through accommodating ethnic, religious, and cultural difference, liberal nationalists seek to maintain a separation of the national public culture significant for the political sphere, on the one hand, and more particular cultures belonging to civil society, on the other hand.

This strategy faces a problem, however, when pluralism within the state is expressed not through cultural differences in, say, religious beliefs, but in different national groups within the same state. Again, different liberal nationalist theorists suggest different ways to address this problem. As my aim is to demonstrate a general liberal nationalist strategy, I will focus in what follows on one specific position, defended in David Miller’s ‘Nationality in Divided Societies’ (2000b), where he provides a typology of social divisions within the state, and what he considers to be the appropriate liberal nationalist response to them (see Table 1 below).

This is not to suggest, of course, that Miller’s liberal nationalism stands for all other liberal nationalist accounts, and non-statist accounts (e.g. Gans, 2003) would lead to different conclusions. I use Miller’s framework here mainly because (a) his theory is sufficiently influential to be considered representative, and (b) his typology of liberal nationalist responses to the non-ideal condition is sufficiently similar to other liberal nationalist accounts.

While ‘Nationality in Divided Societies’ is concerned with claims of national self-determination, and thus obviously relevant to the democratic boundary argument, we must note here that multinationalism is a challenge for all three of liberal nationalism’s main normative arguments. Take for example the Solidarity Argument: if the stable functioning of the welfare state and democratic institutions requires a sense of solidarity arising from a common national identity, as liberal nationalists argue, then the lack of this shared identity is at least a prima facie problem for the state (e.g. Miller, 2013). The Autonomy Argument, similarly, is at the very least under pressure in multinational states, which are required to distribute goods and resources necessary for sustaining the distinct national cultures in a publicly justified manner. To mitigate

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9 Kymlicka, for example, is notable for his distinction between minority nations and ethnic minorities, with differing collective rights within the multicultural state – minority nations have the right to self-determination, while ethnic minorities have the right to recognition and accommodation.

10 On the similarity between Miller’s typology and Kymlicka’s approach in particular, see (Kymlicka, 2011b; Miller 2011).
these effects, Miller’s typology is aimed at demonstrating that despite appearances to the contrary, ‘real’ multinational states are in fact a rare occurrence.

The first case Miller considers is what he calls ‘Ethnic Cleavages’. Ethnic groups, he concedes, are conceptually close to nations. Like a nation, an ethnic group is largely an ascribed identity for a set of people sharing common values and often a common language, whose identity is predicated on intersubjective recognition. But the multi-ethnic state should not be confused with the multinational state: unlike nations, ethnic groups do not aspire to be self-governing, and have no particular territorial claims within the state. Because of these differences, Miller believes that there is no inherent tension between the social fact of the state being multi-ethnic and a shared national identity – as long as both ethnic groups and national cultures adjust to each other, with the shared national identity limited to the public sphere, and ethnic identities limited to civil society. He acknowledges that, of course, there are cases in which ethnic identities are politicised in the wrong way, but considers this as a sign of injustice or extreme unfavourable conditions. But ‘the principle remains clear, that in societies with ethnic cleavages national identity should be forged or remade in such a way that all groups can take part in a collective project of self-determination’ (Miller, 2000b: 128).

The second case is that of ‘Rival Nationalities’, where two or more nations exist within the same territory and have competing claims for either parts or the whole of the territory. Jews and Arabs in Israel/Palestine, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks in the former Yugoslavia are the prime examples of this model. These cases, for Miller, truly deserve the title ‘Multinational States’. Because there is no shared national identity between these groups – in fact, they often define their national identity as opposition to the rival group – they may formally share a common citizenship, but not a political community in the full sense of the term: the state is ‘either an instrument in the hands of one nation [as in the case of Israel and its Jewish majority].. or the arena where the rival nations jostle for advantage [as in the case of the former Yugoslavia]’ (Miller, 2000b: 131). The normative implication of liberal nationalism in these cases would require, if possible, a partition of the state, or, as a second-best alternative, a constitutional arrangement where national frictions are kept at a minimum.

These (in Miller’s view) rare cases should be differentiated from his most innovative category, ‘Nested Nationalities’. In these cases, two national communities exist within the framework of a broader national identity, and their members see themselves as belonging both to the smaller, ‘nested’ group, and to the wider group. Miller argues that many of the states commonly described as multinational states – including Belgium, Britain, Canada, Spain, and Switzerland – fall under this category. Where the development of both national identities occurred within a common historical and cultural framework, and where there is a mutual benefit in preserving the shared
national identity, both nations have sufficient convergence to allow members to coherently identify as British and Scottish, or Quebecois and Canadian, without becoming ‘schizophrenic’. It would be wrong, in these cases, to suggest that secession or partition is what liberal nationalism requires; instead, nested nationalities call for granting autonomy and devolution of particular cultural affairs to each nationality, but not the break-up of the shared political community.\footnote{As Kymlicka writes, ‘British politicians may promote a common British identity in a way that downplays the significance of regional identities; Scottish politicians may promote a sense of Scottish nationhood that views British authority as usurped or derivative; and EU politicians may imply that both British and Scottish national identities are anachronisms in an increasingly post-national European demos. And yet citizens themselves seem able to reconcile these loyalties, and get on with the business of building multi-level political orders that are democratic and free.’ (2011, 288).}

So, in Miller’s typology, liberal nationalism is generally compatible with multiple political identities within the state. The apparent tensions between different national identities, in most cases, could be seen as tensions between national identity and ethnic identity, or between a nested and an overarching national identity; these may be in tension under some specific circumstances of injustice (specifically on part of the majority group), but are not conceptually incompatible. The only case in which the ideal liberal national state faces a problem is when there are genuinely rival nationalities competing for control over the same territory – but as I stated above, Miller argues these cases are relatively rare.\footnote{In addition to the three cases described here, Miller also mentions (in a footnote) the possibility of aboriginal or indigenous peoples as a fourth category – not quite ethnic groups, certainly not nested, but also less than rival nationalities. This suggests that this typology may not be exhaustive, as is exemplified in Kymlicka’s treatment of minority nations. I leave this complication aside for the sake of clarity.}

Table 1: Nationality in Divided Societies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Social Division</th>
<th>Political Solution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic Cleavages</td>
<td>Civil Society / Public Sphere division</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mutual Adjustments</td>
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<td>Nested Nationalities</td>
<td>Federalism</td>
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<td>Devolution</td>
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<td>Rival Nationalities</td>
<td>Secesssion / Partition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Constitutional Modus Vivendi</td>
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Nationalist Non-Ideal Theory (2): National Identity in Divided Selves

Miller’s typology may be challenged, of course, but for the sake of argument let us accept it as is. Liberal nationalists may argue, then, that the supposed problem of multiple national identities is not different from the problem of the multinational state;
that is, the added complexity of individuals belonging to two nations at the same time does not generate new normative problems.\textsuperscript{13} If this were the case, then the framework discussed above would be applicable here. I argue, however, that it is not. Thinking about multiple national identities through the liberal nationalist lens, it becomes clear that liberal nationalists cannot coherently accommodate it. In what follows, I apply Miller’s three types to multiple national identities, first in cases of multinational states, and then in cases of immigrant identities.

\textit{Dual Nationality as Ethnic Identity?}

The first strategy for dealing with cases of multiple national identities is to treat one of the competing nationalities as an ethnic identity – that is, one that involves cultural claims of recognition, but not political claims of self-rule. Miller himself seems to be most in favour of this strategy. While acknowledging that ‘Italians in the US will care about the fate of Italy, Ukrainians in Canada about Ukraine, Jews in Britain about Israel’, these concerns are part of an ethnic, cultural identity and not of a national identity, since Italian-Americans, Ukrainian-Canadians and British Jews do not seek to be self-governing, nor do they make territorial claims. More importantly, the individuals in question would view these identities as ethnic ones, compatible with an overarching national identity, such that, for example, ‘Italian-Americans will standardly think of themselves as ethnically Italian but as having American nationality’ (Miller, 2000b: 127).

There are, however, several problems with this strategy. First, it should be noted that categorising collective identities as cultural, ethnic, or national is not a purely theoretical move, especially when it is accompanied by the normative assertion that the national identity carries more weight in cases of tension.\textsuperscript{14} Within the context of competing nation-building projects within the same state, consider, for example, the case of Kurds in Turkey. Turkish nation-building involved the claim that Kurds are not a distinct nation, but are, at best, merely one ethnic group – ‘Mountain Turks’ - encompassed within the Turkish nation (see Levy, 2000; Norman, 2006). Many, although not all Kurds reject this classification, and so it is not clear that multicultural policies of recognition would be sufficient in this case (Kuzu, 2016). Beyond questions of territorial control and aspirations for political autonomy, it is important to notice that the conflict involves also which individual identification is legitimate as a national identity.

Of course, this example is arguably different from the case of immigrants’ political identities, since immigrants arrive when the majority national identity is already in

\textsuperscript{13} Again, this may be extended to associative accounts of political obligation more broadly (e.g. Horton, 2007) See note 2 above.

\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, classifying a state as mono-national or multi-national is in itself a questionable classification, which arguably cannot be made purely theoretical. One this point, see (Levy, 2000); and, from a more methodological perspective, (Stojanovic, 2011).
place. However, this does not justify describing immigrants’ identities as non-national (e.g. Kymlicka, 2001: 278-279). Insofar as national identity depends on intersubjective recognition, liberal nationalists should be wary of predetermining the national identity of individuals, especially in cases of competing claims. Some immigrants may, over time, relegate their affiliation with their state of origin to the status of ethnic identity, but it is not predetermined that this will be the case.

This leads us to the second problem with this strategy. Even if immigrant groups do not make claims for territorial self-government within the state territory, they do often advance distinct political agendas. We cannot ignore the fact that the allegiance of immigrant ‘ethnic groups’ to their homeland is not merely a natural fact, but one that is often itself part of the nation-building project of their homeland state. These often include cultural support of these groups’ unique identity, but they often also include political advocacy.

A clear and oft-cited example here is Israel’s policy towards Jewish populations in Europe and North America, which explicitly attempts to mobilise these populations’ identification with Israel in support of the state’s interests. Other recent examples are Turkish politicians in the Netherlands during the 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum campaigns, and the controversial 2018 visit of Mexican presidential candidate Ricardo Anaya Cortes in California, courting the Mexican-American expatriate votes. Indeed, the Dutch government went so far as to bar Turkish ministers from entering the country and addressing Turkish nationals in a rally, with Dutch PM Mark Rutte proclaiming that ‘Dutch public space is not the place for political campaigns for other countries’ (Sanchez, 2017). The internal logic of liberal nationalism supports this conclusion: insofar as the Netherlands is reasonably multicultural, it may recognise the distinct ethnic identity of Turkish immigrants, but not their national identity.

Dual Nationality as Nested Nationality?

A second possibility for liberal nationalists is to consider one of the competing identities as nested within the other, and thus allowing for it to be described and recognised as a national identity. According to this interpretation, for example, Italian-Americans are not simply Americans of ethnic Italian descent; rather, they are both Italian and American. There is no inherent tension in this ‘split’ identity, since, as Miller argues, ‘national identity can exist at more than one level’ (Miller, 2000b: 131). Obviously, multiple national identities which relate to independent states are not nested within each other, but the model of alternating identity that Miller suggests for nested nationalities may be applicable here as well. Individuals with multiple national identities may express or emphasise different aspects of their dual identity in different contexts and for different purposes – in our example, they may present themselves as
Italians or as Americans (or as Italian-Americans), in different social and deliberative contexts both in the US, in Italy, or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{15}

Crucially, Miller also emphasises that for deliberative democracy to function, citizens should deliberate and act \textit{qua} members of the political community, or, in other words, as co-nationals; otherwise, there will be an erosion of civic trust. With nested nationalities within a loosely federated state, this problem is supposedly resolved through the devolution of certain policy areas to the territory of the minority nation: citizens are Scottish when voting for their Holyrood MPs, but British when voting for their Westminster MPs. Similarly, one might argue, insofar as Italian-Americans are politically active, they should act politically as Americans in the US and as Italians in Italy.

Unfortunately, the separation here cannot be so neatly defined in the case of immigration, when the two nation-states in question do not share an overarching institutional framework. Policies in one state often have serious consequences for other states, and so the dual national, acting as a member of one of her identities, cannot forgo the interests and duties to the other. In some cases, of course, this will not be consequential; if a certain policy or political agenda has mostly domestic effects or if the duties to both nations can be coherently met. But when there is a tension, the dual national is faced with a dilemma: preferring one nation over the other will be seen as a violation of a duty to one’s people.

Miller is not unaware of potential tension with regards to national duties. In discussing the duties of immigrants, he considers this possibility in the extreme case of war:

\begin{quotation}
...what should we say when loyalties conflict, in the extreme case when an immigrant’s adopted homeland finds itself at war with the country he has emigrated from? Can a person in this position be compelled to support the war? May he even be drafted, or would his conflicting loyalty serve as a conscientious reason for refusing the draft? These are difficult questions, and we should keep in mind that any citizen may justifiably oppose, and refuse to serve in, a war that he reasonably believes to be unjust. If, however, the war is a war of defence against external aggression, then every citizen whatever they feel about the conflict is obliged to offer support and participate as required (Miller, 2008: 382–283).
\end{quotation}

Yet, this answer is wholly unsatisfactory; while it may be true that any citizen may justifiably oppose to serve in a war he believes to be unjust, the reasons underlying

\textsuperscript{15} See also Miller’s discussion of ‘symbolic identity’ (Miller, 2000a: 69–70). This solution is proposed by some legal scholars as a model of dual legal citizenship, where one can maintain a ‘dormant’ citizenship which is activated only when certain conditions of residence apply, as is the case with Spanish citizens who naturalise and are residing in Iberoamerican countries.
conscientious objection will be perceived differently in the case of dual nationality. A mono-national conscientious objector can be interpreted as acting *qua* member of the political community, albeit with a differing (or even wrong) interpretation of the common good, the national interest, or the requirements of morality (e.g. Asheri-Shahaf, 2016). But a dual national objector would risk being seen as acting on behalf of another community, and as such to be excluded from the discussion.  

It may be tempting to think that this kind of conflict is only salient in extreme cases such as wars, but it is not. Consider the position of a British-Polish dual national voting in the Brexit referendum; while voting and campaigning for Remain is certainly compatible with, and perhaps required for, acting for the common good of the British nation, dual nationals risk being viewed as having foreign interests in mind. It is also common to exclude dual nationals from public office precisely given these worries over conflicting loyalties, even when the individual in question has shown no tendency to act against the state’s interests.

Note that what I advance here is not an empirical claim on the psychology of dual nationals; I am not suggesting that dual nationals are unable to act conscientiously, balance competing loyalties, or place more weight on one of their identities more than the other. What I am suggesting is that insofar as the normative justification of liberal nationalism depends on the claim that shared national identity is necessary for generating trust and solidarity, it is within this logic that the existence of multiple national identities undermines these attitudes on a societal level.

**Dual Nationality as Rival Nationality?**

The above discussion would seem to suggest that the problem of multiple national identities is best construed as a case of rival nationalities. This will be misleading: rival nationalities, in the discussion above, are defined as mutually antagonistic, fighting for control over the same territory and state institutions. It may be the case that some dual nationals belong to two rival nationalities in this sense, but this is not necessarily the case as the two national identities may be entirely apathetic or contingently compatible towards each other. There may be, as I suggested above, clashes of interests between the two nations; but these do not consist of the kind of existential rivalry that is entailed by the concept of rival nationalities.

However, in cases where one individual belongs to two rival nationalities, the framework provided by liberal nationalism provides little to no guidance. Recall that in Miller’s depiction, since rival nationalities within the same state compete for control over territory, the best solution would be for one of these nations to secede and form

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16 In his discussion of the treatment of Japanese- and German-Americans during the Second World War, Miller writes that ‘the state should act towards immigrants on the basis that they are committed citizens, until in the case of any particular individual there is clear evidence to the contrary’ (Miller, 2008) – wouldn’t refusing to serve in a war be such evidence?
an independent state, or, where this is not feasible, to find a constitutional arrangement of power-sharing as a *modus vivendi*. But these answers are wholly inappropriate in the case of dual national identities, where rival nations compete not over control the same territory but over the allegiance of the same *individuals*. In these cases, division or power-sharing are not feasible; and even when such territorial division takes place, the fight over identity does not end. Competing rival nations aim to not merely make their identity primary, but to eliminate the possibility of being a dual member of both communities.

Examples of this are most obvious in cases of ethnic conflict within nation-building states. According to some scholars, ‘Arab Jew’ was a possible identity category for Jews in Arab-speaking countries before the establishment of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict (Shenhav, 2006). As a consequence of nation-building on both sides, however, this identity became impossible. Arab nationalists saw Jews, at best, as a religious group or an ethnic minority, not as an independent nation. As for Zionists, the hostility between the groups meant that it was no longer possible to belong to both, and ‘Arab Jews’ were conceived as members of the Jewish nation who happen to reside in (hostile) Arab speaking countries. Similar rejections of social identities can be found in other contexts of nation-building in conflict, for example in the exclusion of the possibility of hybrid identities in the aftermath of the Yugoslav civil wars (Denitch, 1996; cf. Levy, 2000: 82–84).

In the context of immigration, similar conflicts of identity arise in states with an imperial history and immigrants from their former colonies, such as Algerians in France and Koreans in Japan (Kymlicka, 2003: 200-201). The latter case is particularly telling: Korean permanent residents in Japan (*Zainichi*), who can trace their roots to Korea under Japanese are by and large culturally and socially integrated in Japan yet remain one of the largest community of non-naturalised residents in the country. While there are complicated political and historical reasons for this unusual phenomenon of ‘fourth generation immigrants’, at least some of it is due to widespread Japanese and Korean attitudes to these national identities as mutually exclusive (Lie, 2008; Chung 2010).

These are of course extreme and comparatively rare cases, which arise in particular socio-historical contexts. My point here, however, is not that these are the paradigmatic cases of multiple national identities, but that the framework provided by liberal nationalism is silent with regards to the appropriate remedies for even such cases, and would have to resist the recognition of the competing national identities in order to remain consistent.

**Possible Nationalist Rejoinders**

What I’ve aimed to demonstrate in the discussion above is that, from within liberal nationalism’s own commitments, multiple national identities cannot be
accommodated, or rather, can only be accommodated only weakening liberal nationalism’s normative justifications. Both horns of this dilemma are unattractive to liberal nationalists, so they would want to resist this argument. To conclude this paper, I here try to pre-empt some possible objections.

One possible objection is that my argument unduly conflates ideal normative considerations with the vagaries of realpolitik. Multiple national identities may create a problem where nation-states have a clash of interests, but these occur only when at least one of them acts unjustly; when it engages in a war of aggression, imposes unjust trade tariffs or immigration restrictions, or manipulates its national diaspora. But the fact that nation-states act this way does not make liberal nationalism incompatible with multiple national identities, any more than the violent and illiberal history and present of nationalism makes it incompatible with liberalism. In a world of just liberal nation-states, multiple national identities would not be a problem – perhaps in the same way in which dual nationality within the European Union is not currently considered a problem.

My response to this objection is twofold. First, while it is certainly true that a possible world comprised of liberal nation-states would mitigate the problem of dual nationality, even that world would have conflicting interests, policies and normative aims. Unless we imagine that states in that world operate in complete autarky, or be politically and culturally unified and homogenised, there will always be cases in which one nation-state pursuing justified goals which are not be in the best interests of another nation-state. This does not require us to imagine extreme injustice on part of these states or to adopt a bleak view of world politics, just a realistic interpretation of conflicting aims and political judgement. Given the normative commitments of liberal nationalism, the problem of multiple national identities arises again in these cases even under the assumption of a world solely inhabited by just liberal nation-states.

Moving back from this ideal world to our own, it is unclear that, according to liberal nationalism, individuals have duties of loyalty towards their nation and co-nationals only insofar as they are just. Indeed, a major line of argument in the liberal nationalist tradition suggests that individuals have duties to their nations not because they are just, but because they are their own (Tamir, 1993: 95–117; Miller, 1995: 3; For a critique see Wellman, 2000). Perhaps these duties of loyalty are not absolute, all things considered; and perhaps loyalty could be reformulated as loyalty to the ideal nation, rather than to the government currently acting in the name of that nation. But even with these qualifications, dual nationals cannot simply shake off their loyalty to their unjust nation.

A second, related, objection is to the attitude towards dual nationals, rather than those of dual nationals themselves. I argued above that even when dual nationals are able to balance their ethical commitments given competing duties to their two nations, they
cannot avoid being viewed with suspicion by mono-nationals. Liberal nationalist may argue that this only reflects an injustice on the part of mono-nationals. Apart from cases where there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, dual nationals should be viewed just as all other members of the nation are viewed: as sharing similar values, trustworthy members of the community, and acting to promote what is their best understanding of the common good of the nation.

Again, it is clear that accusations of being a fifth column or having dual allegiance, and the general sentiment of lack of trust towards foreigners as they actually exist, are clear manifestations of social injustice (Baron, 2009). Nevertheless, liberal nationalists advancing this kind of objection will put themselves in an uncomfortable position. Recall that part of the normative justification of nationalism relies on certain empirical claims with regards to human psychology and the basis of social trust – namely, that national identity is a necessary precondition for such an attitude. Assuming that these empirical assumptions about the effects of national identity are factually correct, it is unclear how the liberal nationalist can appeal to one psychological effect to support their normative argument, and at the same time reject the other as a manifestation of injustice, without suggesting how the link between the two can be loosened or mitigated.

By way of analogy, suppose that we find that empathetic identification is necessary for altruistic behaviour, but that at the same time it distorts our moral judgement (Prinz, 2011). In both cases, it clearly would have been better if people did not have these biases – i.e., if they could maintain the social trust generated by national identity without the accompanying mistrust of outsiders, or be altruistic without having impaired and biased moral judgement. But if this is not possible, and the positive and negative consequences of these psychological facts are generated in tandem, the negative effects should be acknowledged and mitigated. Liberal nationalists cannot simply argue that one facet of the psychology of national identity demonstrates its necessity, and simultaneously maintain that the other facet should be ignored or sidelined. If the argument I have articulated above is persuasive, even strengthening the multicultural elements of national identity would not be sufficient for mitigating this problem – to reiterate, liberal nationalism may be multiculturalist, but not multinationalist.17

These two objections and my responses highlight the broader tension in liberal nationalism between the ideal and the non-ideal, between empirical facts and normative principles, and between questions of feasibility and questions of desirability (Lægaard, 2006; Erez, 2015). This tension and the attempts to resolve it are well beyond the scope of this article. What this demonstrates, however, is that the framework provided by liberal nationalism sits very uneasily with the idea of multiple

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17 I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this point.
national identities, given the reality of states’ behaviour, the practices of nation building, and the social psychology of trust.

Conclusion

Liberal nationalists are faced with a dilemma regarding multiple national identities. In order to maintain the normative justification of nationalism, their theory ideally requires a congruence of state and nation, and an exclusive, or at least primary individual belonging to one nation. While the existing liberal nationalist framework has provided some answers to non-ideal cases of divided societies, it does not – and, as I showed, cannot – do the same for cases of divided selves. Following Sen’s terminology, the argument can be summarised thus: liberal nationalism may be multiculturalist, but cannot be multinationalist (at most, it can be plural mononationalist).

Liberal nationalists are therefore forced to choose one of two unattractive alternatives. They could argue against multiple national identity, but this would come at a cost – unlike the rejection of dual citizenship, the rejection of multiple national identities would have to involve policies of cultural assimilation that many would consider illiberal. Alternatively, liberal nationalists could qualify some of the assumptions that lead to the tension (for example, the ethical value of national belonging, or the motivational force of national identity), but this would come at the cost of undermining their normative justifications for nationalism. This gives us a strong reason, I argue, to reject liberal nationalism, even in its more multicultural formulations, as a viable political theory of citizenship.

References


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