

Multiculturalism: A tradition of political thought that liberal nationalists can use

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When confronted with a scholar of Tamir's distinction, one is reminded not of Tamir's teacher, Isaiah Berlin, but of a thinker with whom Berlin disagreed. This is Hannah Arendt, as she taught that the *vita activa* had, for too long, been defined in opposition to the *vita contempliva*, yet the two are not opposed. Tamir illustrates this as her first book, *Liberal Nationalism*, helped to create the contemporary forms of a liberal doctrine that we now call "liberal nationalism," and she was an Israeli cabinet minister. Her new book, *Why Nationalism*, reflects her ability to combine theory and practice as she offers a range of moral and prudential insights when showing why contemporary forms of nationalism emerged and how we should react politically to them. I agree with much of the book, but I will discuss three areas of disagreement.

First, in the new book, Tamir argues that nationalism is "back" (pp. 3, 5, 54, 130, 164), yet that liberals are "rejecting" it (pp. xiii, 6, 54, 109, 162), and she will show why they should not do so (pp. xvi, 5, 6, 22, 23, 24, 51). Tamir thus assumes that nationalism went away, as only if this is true, is it plausible to claim that nationalism is back. Yet nationalism spread after the Soviet Union collapsed, and by the late 1990s and 2000s, mainstream liberal politicians from across the political spectrum, from Gordon Brown to David Cameron, advocated inclusive forms of nationalism, as did commentators such as David Goodhart (Uberoi & Modood, 2013). This occurred not just in Britain, but across Europe and was part of the response to 9/11 (Joppke, 2008). Thus, the claim that nationalism is back is peculiar as it never went away, and something more subtle seems true: culturally *exclusive* forms of nationalism are now visible even in countries in which elites have long promoted inclusive forms of nationalism.

Tamir also claims that liberals are rejecting nationalism. But this ignores the influence and success of her early work and the work of other liberal nationalists. For example, John Rawls had long assumed a "closed society" and thus implicitly seemed to use an idea of nationhood; and in *Law of Peoples*, this subtly changed, as Rawls (1999, p. 25) explicitly endorsed Tamir's early ideas in a footnote. Likewise, liberal thinkers who once rejected nationalism, such as Martha Nussbaum, now endorse inclusive forms of it (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 211). Equally, liberal nationalist theorists have convinced some liberal social scientists (Banting & Kymlicka, 2017, p. 20) and some liberal commentators (Goodhart, 2013, p. 285) of their arguments. Of course, liberal opposition to nationalism has not disappeared. But repeatedly suggesting, as Tamir does in her new book, that liberals are rejecting nationalism conveys the impression that few liberals accept its value, even though many prominent liberal philosophers, liberal social scientists and liberal commentators now do.

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Of course, ignoring the influence and success of her early work and the work of other liberal nationalists is admirably modest. But this modesty also exposes Tamir to a criticism: it is convenient for her new book to omit how so many liberals now endorse forms of nationalism as doing so enables her to suggest that her argument is unique. It also saves her from showing how her argument differs from, and is more plausible than, those of other liberal nationalists. This inadvertent omission is thus regrettable, as it exposes Tamir to criticism.

My second area of disagreement relates to the fact that if Tamir's liberal nationalist argument is to be plausible, it must address liberal nationalism's long-standing problems. Yet it does not. For example, like other liberal nationalists, Tamir seeks to convince other liberals to accept nationalism, even though we have seen that many already do. Hence, it is unclear, for example, why conservatives, socialists and those who borrow from different ideologies should be convinced by her argument. And if convincing other liberals is the goal, then Tamir's scholarly readers will expect her to show why the most sophisticated criticisms of liberal nationalism by liberal thinkers are mistaken (Abizadeh, 2002; Mason, 2012; Patten, 2014). Unfortunately, her book ignores these sophisticated liberal criticisms; thus, it is unclear how it can persuade such liberal critics, or non-liberals, and it is thus unclear who the book is designed to persuade. But this book also ignores the following long-standing problems with liberal nationalism.

When we refer, for example, to a person "feeling British" and to "Britain's identity," we seem to be referring to different things, both of which are often called national identity. Yet liberal nationalists say nothing about these two ways of thinking and talking about national identity; and it is unclear whether they have one, both or neither of them in mind when they make claims such as national identity fosters trust. Prominent liberal nationalists also do not clarify what such trust is; thus, it is unclear how it differs conceptually from, for example, confidence or faith. Instead, they make empirical claims about national identity fostering the trust that welfare states require even though their ideas of national identity and trust are, we have seen, far from clear and even though they accept that empirical evidence neither proves nor disproves their empirical claim (Kymlicka, 2015, p. 8; Miller, 2016, p. 28; Miller & Ali, 2014, p. 254). Before we accept Tamir's liberal nationalism in her new book, we need to see that these and other problems are resolved. Yet Tamir ignores the two obvious ways of thinking about national identity referred to above and continues to suggest that national identity fosters the trust that welfare states need (pp. 36, 53, 88), regardless of the problems of doing so.

A third area of disagreement is that Tamir (pp. 60, 128, 137) criticises multiculturalism as a "convenient distraction" from "class-based conflicts." Tamir uses no evidence to support this claim and does not consider whether justice requires attention to, *inter alia*, issues of culture and class. It thus becomes difficult to know why we should believe her claim about multiculturalism, but there is also the following problem.

There is a way of conceptualising multiculturalism that can help Tamir to address some of the unresolved problems with liberal nationalism that I mention above. This is because, like "nationhood," "race," "class" and much else, multiculturalism can be conceptualised in a range of plausible ways and need not be conceptualised merely as a multicultural society or as policies of multiculturalism. Instead, multiculturalism can be conceptualised as a tradition of political thought that began with those who advocated the first policies of multiculturalism in the 1970s (Uberoi, 2009, 2016). This tradition culminated in political theorists showing why liberals should endorse some of these policies (Kymlicka, 1995; Patten, 2014) and showing how multicultural societies can become united enough to not fear their cultural differences and be at ease with them (Parekh, 2000; Uberoi, 2018). National identity has been a feature of this tradition since the 1970s, as it helps facilitate such unity (Parekh, 1974; Uberoi & Modood, 2019). And certain multiculturalists who contribute to this tradition show the value of national identity regardless of liberal, conservative or other ideological positions (Modood, 2007; Parekh, 2000; Uberoi, 2018). They also clarify the nature and value of the two ways of thinking and talking about national identity that are mentioned above; and they do so in ways that circumvent the unclear language of trust while showing how to make national identity more inclusive using policies of multiculturalism (Uberoi, 2008, 2015, 2018). In short, there are ideas in this tradition that Tamir can use, but she must be more open to multiculturalism to do so.

Fortunately, Tamir (p. 22) says that there is now a need to be more "more open" to the beliefs of others, and I think, therefore, that there is an inconsistency if she is not open to the views of multiculturalists. Likewise, she says

that we should avoid equating liberalism and nationalism with their most extreme and indefensible forms (p. 22) and something similar is true of multiculturalism. Like nationalism and liberalism, multiculturalism is a tradition of political thought that contains more and less plausible strains. If Tamir focuses on some of the most plausible features of this tradition, she will find ideas about the nature and value of national identity that are a useful resource for her own important form of liberal nationalism.

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How to cite this article: Uberoi V. Multiculturalism: A tradition of political thought that liberal nationalists can use. *Nations and Nationalism*. 2020;26:531–533. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12618>