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Edited by Alain-G. Gagnon and James Tully  
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## Multinational Democracies

*Multinational Democracies* is the first collaborative, multiperspective critical survey of a new and distinctive type of political association that is coming into prominence in the twenty-first century. These are democratic societies that are not only multicultural but also multinational: that is, they comprise two or more nations. Fifteen leading comparative political scientists and political theorists from Europe and North America clarify the complex character and tensions of multinational democracies by reflecting on four exemplars – the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium and Canada. The work offers a new approach to the study, understanding and governing of multinational societies and, in so doing, of culturally diverse societies more generally. This volume will be of interest to those concerned with diverse societies, nationalism, struggles for recognition, federalism and democratic constitutionalism in conditions of pluralism.

ALAIN-G. GAGNON is Professor of Political Science at McGill University, Director of the Quebec Studies Programme and editor of *Politique et Sociétés*. His recent publications include *Ties that Bind: Parties and Voters in Canada* (1999 with James Bickerton and Patrick Smith), *Québec y el federalismo canadiense* (1998) *Québec* (1998) and *Comparative Federalism and Federation: Competing Traditions and Future Directions* (1993).

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*Edited by*

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(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); 'Liberty, Equality and the Rights of Cultures: the Marching Controversy at Dumcree', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2, no. 1 (April 2000); 'The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus in Northern Ireland: Stretching the Limits of Liberalism', *Irish Political Studies* 11 (1996); and 'Pluralist Justice and its Limits: The Case of Northern Ireland', *Political Studies* 42, no. 3 (September 1994).

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## Foreword

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*Charles Taylor*

This excellent collection explores important new ground. The authors of these chapters examine the constitutive tensions at the heart of contemporary democratic societies.

These societies are in fact the site of two opposite tendencies. On the one hand, they require a new kind of unity and homogeneity which earlier, autocratic or hierarchical societies never needed. On the other hand, they are becoming more and more diverse. The need for unity comes from the conditions of legitimacy which belong to a democratic society. We can see this in a number of ways, three of which are especially evident.

First, democratic societies construe the ensemble of citizens as a ‘people’; that is, as a unit of deliberation and decision. Yet, in order to sustain what can be recognized as a common deliberation, a people has to have a minimal common focus, a set of agreed goals, or principles, or concerns, about which they can debate, argue and struggle. Once they drift apart, with different segments focusing on different things, it becomes hard to construe the upshot as the answer to a common question. But then this upshot begins to lose legitimacy for those who no longer see it as the answer to *their* question.

If a minority, for instance, comes to see the majority as concerned exclusively for its good, rather than that of the whole, they will begin to feel that they are no longer included in this ‘people’. Then, according to the very logic of democracy, they are no longer bound by the decisions arrived at without any concern for them.

Democracies need to be bonded in a common focus, what one could call a ‘political identity’. This can be a set of common principles, as in the Republican tradition, but most commonly in the last two centuries, it has primarily centred on the nation.

Second, the need for unity and homogeneity can also be seen from another angle. A second crucial legitimating condition of modern democracy is the equality of the citizens. Any systematic inequality or mode of discrimination in a modern society is seen as a challenge to its

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right to exist, at least in its present form. Now equality is not homogeneity, although it has frequently been construed as such. In fact, differences frequently can be construed as entailing inequalities, and hence as something to be overcome in the name of democratic legitimacy.

From a third angle, the legitimacy of modern states, in an era in which the aura of traditional hierarchies has been dispelled, also depends on their efficacy, their ability to ‘deliver the goods’. But this ability is often greater in societies with strong common purposes than in those which risk being paralysed by fundamental differences about their goals.

So, the modern state needs some basis for unity, yet this is getting harder to sustain. A common basis is the nation. This would suggest that a democratic world would be made up largely of nation-states, as in the Wilsonian dream. But there are just too many groups in the world which could legitimately construe themselves as nations. Not every one could have a state. In the past, many of these potential ‘nations’ did not see themselves as such, while in our day more and more are making demands for recognition.

We are moreover in an age of identity awakening. People are demanding that differences, not hitherto acknowledged, be recognized, along with a host of dimensions – gender, religious, linguistic and cultural.

And so the tensions rise. The three reasons for unity mentioned above remain true; they cannot be flouted. At the same time, it is becoming harder and harder to maintain this unity on the older bases, by homogeneous, difference-blind republics or homogeneous nation-states. Dilemmas arise which are hard to resolve.

This book attempts to tackle these dilemmas in a very important category of cases, that of multinational democracies. This is important, not only because national differences are among the most powerful and intractable; but also because the category of what can legitimately be called ‘multinational’ states is growing, as previously submerged groups begin to make identity demands.

Now in fact, in a number of societies which have been attempting to deal with these issues, new formulae are being devised. Some of these are examined in the chapters in this volume. This is a very considerable contribution, because not enough is known about these experiments. Furthermore, the authors attempt to explore the fundamental issues, normative and institutional, which the constitutive tensions of modern democracy raise for us. They try to cast these problems in a new light, even to the point of redefining the goal of mutual recognition.

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It is this combination which makes this volume so valuable. Factually well-grounded, these studies also help us to see the dilemmas of our time in new ways. They are indispensable reading for whoever wants to understand the contemporary struggles for recognition.

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