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THE MAJORITY OPPRESSED? ON THE LEGITIMACY OF MAJORITY RIGHTS

Tamar de Waal and Jan Willem Duyvendak

Introduction

Political parties and movements around the globe that warn against the dangerous dilution of current majorities and their cultural identities have been remarkably successful.¹ Take, for example, supporters of Brexit in the UK, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Donald Trump in the U.S., the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Swiss People's Party) in Switzerland, the *Partij voor Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom) in the Netherlands, *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, and strong majority-rights forces in Russia, Turkey, and India. Within this global political tendency, the main endangerment of the majority culture is claimed to be a coalition of current legal and political arrangements, mainstream media, academics, politicians, and activists standing up for diversity, strong minority protection, and the rights of migrants, including refugees.

The proposals put forward by these voices, most often (but not solely) belonging to the radical right of the political spectrum, touch upon a wide range of topics: from banning the construction of mosques, to opposing gender-neutral toilets, to closing the border for (Muslim) migrants and refugees, to combating “the war on Christmas”, to dismantling the European Union, and more. Nonetheless, the basis of virtually all their proposals can be traced back to one underlying point: the preference, anxieties, and demands of the (cultural) majority are ignored but should not be up for discussion (anymore).

Simultaneously, a growing number of academic publications argue in favour of increased protection of majority identities or (cultural) “majority rights”, echoing the political discourses claiming that the interests of majorities have been neglected. Of course, not all these academic analyses are exactly the same or argue in favour of the same solutions. Nevertheless,

there is a clear rise of commentators that claim that academic scholarship has been one-sidedly concerned with the positions, needs, and rights of minorities and, therefore, that our normative thinking has swung too far in one direction (e.g., Bouchard 2011; Kaufmann 2018; Koopmans 2018; Koopmans & Orgad 2020; Orgad & Koopmans 2022). It is argued that a new balance should be found and that academic attention should be given to the interests and sensitivities of majorities, for example, in relation to concerns about the (alleged) erosion of their cultures. Moreover, the underlying suggestion of these publications is that current times, characterized by the rise of the radical right and populism, require new normative thinking that takes the concerns of “native” populations seriously. As such, majority-rights theories commonly present themselves as cutting-edge and reasonable forms of liberalism. They claim to supplement and enhance our current theories and promise to better appease the revolting majorities around the world that want to protect their cultural ways of life and increasingly vote for (illiberal) radical-right populist parties.

This chapter critically examines the legitimacy of this academic tendency and the main arguments that underlie it. Given that virtually all academic majority-rights voices to date take Western democracies as their case studies, this chapter also predominately focuses on Western countries and white majorities; however, in principle, the presented underlying normative analyses can also apply to nonwhite majorities and to other countries. We will demonstrate that it is mistaken that liberal-democratic theory and practices have ignored the importance of the majority (culture). In fact, liberal-democratic theory and practices strongly promote and privilege the majority culture, although in ways that do not violate core individual rights and are, as much as possible, accommodating to minorities. It is, therefore, relevant to raise the question of why some authors, nonetheless, claim that the rights of majorities are forgotten and threatened. We argue that this is caused by a specific understanding of who embodies “the majority”. Most often, pro-majority theories rest on the idea that immigrants and their descendants dangerously dilute majorities, as they are (culturally) “not native”. These theories are, thus, rooted in racialized and essentialized ideas about who belongs to the majority. As a result, amongst other things, majority rights theorists “freeze” the majority culture claimed to be worth protecting in such ways that it jeopardizes equal citizenship. In addition, it hampers possibilities for social and political change, especially changes triggered or asked for by (immigrant) minority groups.

To be clear, our contribution to this emerging majority rights debate does not entail that majorities and their cultures do not have (cultural) rights *tout court*. Instead, we aim to show that the interests of majorities and their cultural identities are well-secured in current liberal-democratic theory and practice and that, therefore, an additional lexicon of “majority rights” is not

needed. Put sharper, the ambition of this chapter is to show that the emerging theories of majority rights are not a necessary correction of liberal theories of justice. Instead, the present-day calls for more majority rights would compromise liberal-democratic values.

Majority Rights: What Are They About?

Given the wide range of political issues that the recent majority-rights thinkers are concerned about – such as national identity, immigration, secularism, gender discussions, and, in the context of the Netherlands, the figure of *Black Pete* – the exact implications and merit of their theories may *prima facie* seem somewhat obscure. To demonstrate that the implications of these theories are profound and touch upon values of liberalism, it is important to map the main claims in this new field of academic scholarship that we respond to. We will also make explicit what we think should be seen as side or separate debates.

Gérard Bouchard's (2011) contribution to the multiculturalism-interculturalism debate is a good first example of the type of majoritarian thinking we discuss – in his case, in the context of Canada and Quebec. He writes: “While seeking an equitable interaction between continuity and diversity, interculturalism allows the recognition of certain elements of ad hoc (or contextual) precedence for majority culture” (451). He stresses that he does not want to formally or legally enshrine forms of second-class citizenship. He does explain, however, that interculturalism differs from multiculturalism in the sense that the majority culture, *because* it is the majority culture, has a principled precedence over minority cultures. This is indeed a viewpoint that multiculturalists would not endorse in this way. In addition, Eric Kaufmann critically writes on “asymmetrical multiculturalism” (see e.g., Kaufmann 2018, 516–521), a term he coins to describe forms of liberal politics that disregard protecting the majority identity while carefully protecting the identities of minorities. Within the asymmetrical multiculturalism he is especially concerned about, he contends that white majorities are required to identify with (unfeasible) cosmopolitan identities – and asked to transcend and even reject their ethnic identity – whereas ethnic minorities are (effectively) urged to embrace their ethnicity and heritage. For this reason, he advocates what he calls “multivocalism” – a political system in which white majorities can (also) express their ethnically distinct versions of the common national identity.

Along similar lines, Ruud Koopmans and Liav Orgad (2020, 21) argue that “the cultural demands of majority groups” have been ignored and that “the equilibrium between majority and minority rights needs to be adjusted” with theories of majority rights. They paraphrase Kaufmann's concerns of asymmetry, and their main solution is that “moral justifications for cultural minority rights should also apply to majority groups” (3). In addition,

articles on specific discussions and political events echo these analyses. For instance, David Miller (2016, 437) wrote on the minaret ban in Switzerland that “the equal treatment in principle can be triumphed by considerations of national identity” if majorities want this to be the case, as long as this identity “remains open to democratic deliberation”. Indeed, Miller concludes that, for example, “precedence” can be given to “a particular religion” (454) in a political community for historical and majoritarian reasons.

This stream of publications has received some response in the academic literature. For example, Avigail Eisenberg (2020) astutely observes and criticizes the increase of majority rights theories. Our analysis concurs with her conclusions that discourses of majority rights are “unlikely to offer a helpful response to so-called anxieties of majority groups” that “majority interests are already protected in societies dedicated to protecting minority rights” and that they contribute to “encouraging the chauvinism of majority culture” (Eisenberg 2020, 326). Our analysis differs from hers in that she flags that majority-rights theories “carry risks” to transform into a license to restrict minority rights. We will show that this is not merely a (more practical) *risk* but a logical outcome of the type of normative reasonings that underpin these new majoritarian theories.

Allan Patten has argued that a vocabulary of majority rights could be normatively defended in very limited and often temporal circumstances (e.g., Patten 2020). Although interesting, we leave this angle aside because the central aim of the novel majority-rights theorists is not to provide legitimacy to majority rights “in very specific social circumstances and normative considerations” which “face very significant limits” (539). Rather, they argue that majority rights should structurally supplement our standard liberal theories and practices. For this reason, we will also not deal with the idea that forms of cultural majority rights might exist in the context of globalization – say, in response to the dominance of Hollywood over local cultural arts or the rise of English master’s programs at European universities (e.g., Koopmans & Orgad 2020, 9). Again, the central aim of majority-rights thinkers is not to prove that such – in this case, more “externally orientated” – majority rights exist. They are primarily concerned with the cultural power of minorities vis-à-vis the majority on the domestic level.

Last, we also do not respond to “majority rights” in the context of border control. For instance, Orgad (2009, 719) suggests that asking immigrants to accept “some structural liberal-democratic principles as a prerequisite for state admission” (see also Orgad 2015) can be seen as invoking “majority rights”. Yet within the ethics of migration literature, arguments that countries may selectively close their borders to secure, for example, required degrees of liberal attitudes in society or forms of social cohesion are not uncommon (although not labelled as “majority rights”) (e.g., Miller 1995, 24–29). *Even* Will Kymlicka (2001, 166), for example, with his

focus on liberal minority rights, argues that political communities cannot be expected to admit immigration in such ways that would disrupt certain foundational structures of society (e.g., political, economic, or cultural).

That said, in relation to all these debates we leave aside, we do *prima facie* also doubt whether introducing a lexicon of “majority rights” would have explanatory power over existing normative or legal vocabularies. Therefore, we believe the most relevant question about this new generation of majority-rights thinkers is: what is it *exactly* that these authors are arguing for?

Minority Rights vs. the Majority

We will, thus, engage with the central claim of majority-rights theories: that majority rights are overlooked by established liberal theorists – most prominently, multiculturalists advocating minority rights – and should structurally supplement our liberal theories on domestic justice. To understand why we think that this claim is incorrect, we must first expound on what multiculturalism is within the academic scholarship on liberal justice.

First, it should be made clear that individual constitutional core rights should not be seen as minority rights that accommodate cultural diversity or support just minority-majority relations. Instead, these rights are individual core rights that all citizens possess equally. Of course, core rights do limit the power of (potentially tyrannical) majorities. However, they also limit, for instance, how minorities treat members internally and how minorities treat other minorities. This is the case because they limit the power of all citizens towards each other – in addition to, perhaps most importantly, limiting the power of the state towards its citizens. On that account, to frame the debate in such terms that individual core rights seem to particularly disadvantage the cultural majority (e.g., Koopmans & Orgad 2020, 7–8; Miller 2016), is not necessarily problematic. However, it is also only one step away from the illiberal claim that core rights, in certain instances, should yield to appease cultural majorities. Therefore, it should be crystal clear that regarding the protection of individual core rights, the most relevant question is not, and can never be, how majorities (or minorities) “culturally” tend to look upon them.

If we then turn to academic debates on minority rights – rights that indeed apply to certain *groups* according to multiculturalists – we see that these debates pertain to how liberal democracies with diverse citizenries should undertake nation-building practices, inculcate citizenship, and promote collective belonging. Naturally, similarly to majority-rights theorists, not all minority-rights theorists argue the same here (e.g., Kymlicka 1995; Modood 2007). On a fundamental level, however, multiculturalists who advocate for the protection of minorities and minority rights agree that the norms, attitudes, and skills of democratic citizenship are not innate but must be learned, socialized, and practised. Thus, liberal democracies have legitimate interests

to engage in practices of *nation-building* and promote forms of shared citizenship by consolidating common national language(s), national (historical) narratives, national symbols, national education curricula, national media, common institutions, and so on. The idea is then that if citizens are living together in an “ethical community” (e.g., Miller 1995, 23) resulting from these practices, they are more likely to fulfil their obligations of justice towards each other and will be better able to participate as equals in democratic deliberations and societal life in a shared historical and intergenerational political community (see also Kymlicka 2002, 265).

However, multiculturalists reject that within practices of nation-building and citizenship, the promoted nationhood should solely exist of (or unreasonably privilege) the identity, language, and culture of the majority. Instead, it should be communicated that the state does not belong to the dominant group but to all citizens equally – and that, therefore, all citizens should have equal access to state institutions and to political and social life. What this exactly entails in terms of minority rights and minority accommodation significantly varies between countries because the histories (of injustice), presence, and cultural characteristics of minorities (and majorities) differ. For example, some countries must accommodate sizable groups that are concentrated on a (more or less) historic territory that have retained their language and that historically have governed themselves. Such cases – say, the First Nations in Canada and several national minority groups in Europe – can require replacing unilingual states with multilingual states or forms of (quasi-)federal territorial autonomy.

Note, however, that the recent majority-rights theories that we focus on pay surprisingly little attention to the potential limits or risks of protection for these types of minorities (i.e., indigenous people and national minorities), considering that the forms of cultural, linguistic, and political rights and protection granted to them by multiculturalists can be extensive and strong. Instead, they focus on minority protection for *immigrant* groups. Nevertheless, given that immigrants inherently have no historic territory in their new country, have no history of self-government, and are often numerically small and dispersed, multiculturalists conclude that upholding equal citizenship in relation to them should mostly involve fighting stigmas, racism, discrimination, and other barriers that prevent them from being fully accepted and participating as equal citizens (e.g., Modood & De Waal 2021). Under multiculturalism, immigrants are asked to learn the national language and “integrate” into the broader society in a liberal fashion.

Within multiculturalism, minority accommodation regarding immigrant groups requires ongoing and systematic attempts to examine public institutions and policies to see if they contain (hidden) biases that disadvantage members of immigrant groups and their descendants. Relevant public institutions are, for instance, courts, schools, universities, media, and hospitals

(Kymlicka 2003, 152). Moreover, multiculturalists stress that all citizens should be acknowledged in the state-promoted national identity. As a result, amongst other things, histories of immigration should be included in “the national story” that is part of school curricula. As such, multiculturalism involves a constant remaking of national citizenship and keeping the national identity “open” so that all citizens can see themselves in the national identity and achieve a sense of belonging together (Modood 2014).

Mistaken Claims

This brief overview of the tenets of multiculturalism, we believe, makes it intelligible that several foundational claims of the new majority rights theories are mistaken. The following are the most important ones:

- 1) Multiculturalism has forgotten the needs of majorities to maintain and protect their culture;
- 2) Multiculturalism assumes that majorities can take care of themselves for empirical (numerical) reasons;
- 3) Because minority rights exist, majority rights must as well.

The first claim we want to discuss is that multicultural theories of justice only focus on the rights of minorities while neglecting the interests of cultural majorities. For example, Koopmans and Orgad refer to Kaufmann’s asymmetrical multiculturalism argument and suggest that, according to multiculturalists, majority cultures “should be neutral, or be universal, while minority cultures are allowed to preserve their religious particularity” and that this “creates asymmetric political and normative realities” (Kaufmann 2018, 516–521; Koopmans & Orgad 2020, 18; see also Koopmans & Orgad 2020). The culture of the majority would, therefore, be vulnerable, powerless, and stuck between “universalism” and “minority rights” (see also Koopmans 2018).

However, multiculturalists observe that no state can be culturally neutral. In fact, this is their theoretical *starting point* rooted in acknowledging that liberal countries (also) promote national identities, historical narratives, official languages, et cetera. Nevertheless, as said, the concern of multiculturalists is that these nation-building projects do not sufficiently accommodate (different types of) minorities and protect equal citizenship. The claim that theorists who advocate and protect minority rights *also* ask the majority to remain culturally neutral and universal thus makes a straw man of multiculturalism. Rather, remarks such as that “it is perfectly legitimate” for majorities to have an interest in “perpetuating and maintaining their culture” (Bouchard 2011, 438) are, in principle, not at odds with multiculturalism at all. For multiculturalists, again, the normative crux of the matter is as follows: given that

the state's nation-building practices – which in principle legitimately uphold an “ethical community” needed for a functional liberal democracy – cannot be culturally neutral, they should be as fair as possible in terms of accommodating just majority-minority relations and cultural differences.

It is true that within these practices of nation-building, majorities should be extra vigilant not to overpower minorities given their numerical and factual position of advantage. However, the need to protect both majority and minority cultures is *not* only an empirical matter for multiculturalists but also, and even mainly, a normative one. This brings us to the second incorrect claim of majority-rights theories – that multiculturalism allegedly assumes that, for numerical reasons, the majority “can take care of itself”. This is mistaken because, within multiculturalism, the culture of the majority – its language(s), cultural reference points, symbols, history, et cetera – is *constantly and actively educated, cultivated, and promoted by the state* within its nation-building practices (e.g., in schools, on national TV, and during memorial days).

Moreover, as we explained, the majority has a particularly strong position of cultural hegemony in the context of post-migration minority protection – about which majority rights proponents seem most strongly worried. According to multiculturalists, in response to immigration, states should remain unitary: no forms of territorial or political power sharing between dominant groups and immigrant groups are needed. There is also no need for adjustment of the official languages. Of course, given its liberal principles, multiculturalism does emphasize that immigrants should not be required to fully assimilate into the cultural majority to be regarded as equal citizens. Citizens can retain, within the boundaries of liberal democracy, their own cultural characteristics, languages, and outlooks – but the main idea is that they should “integrate” into broader society.

This leads us to the third misconception of majority theories that we want to highlight – the argument that because minority rights exist, majority rights must as well. Indeed, the normative necessity of minority rights is used as a direct theoretical stepping stone to prove that majority rights should exist: if minorities have a right to their culture, then surely majorities have this too. Our analysis, however, shows that this is a wrong take. In essence, the fallacy is: you cannot receive cultural, linguistic, or political compensation for public arrangements that are installed as safeguards to counterbalance your position of cultural, linguistic, and political predominance. The same logical error underlies the sometimes-heard line of argument that “straight prides” should be organized because “gay prides” exist. The mobilizations of gay prides around the globe are reactive: they have been a response to the permanent hegemony of heterosexuality (in practically all layers of politics, law, and society). Thus, it is logically impossible to argue that straight prides must be organized *because* gay prides exist.

Minority rights and protection are reactive in a similar fashion: they exist *in response* to processes of nation-building and citizenship promotion by liberal states that use the majority culture (e.g., language, history, national and historical reference points) as the main “vehicle”. Considering this context, the claim that “since certain minority rights exist, the same rights must exist for majorities as well” is puzzling. In addition, it is also bound to lead to illiberal outcomes. It justifies taking measures *against* reactive measures that aim to somewhat neutralize the robust hegemony of the majority culture. As such, it obscures the necessity of protecting the equal citizenship of minorities and enabling their equal access to mainstream society and its common institutions as much as possible.

Why Would Majority-Rights Thinkers Claim That Majority Rights Are Threatened by Minorities?

We hope, so far, to have demonstrated that the cultural rights and interests of majorities are not forgotten but, in fact, well-protected in normative liberal-democratic theory. In addition to this conceptual discussion, it is important to also note that empirically seen, majority cultures are privileged and powerful, even if states accommodate minorities in ways hoped for by multiculturalists. To be sure, we do not argue that it is necessarily undesirable that newcomers or citizens with immigrant backgrounds question or change existing hegemonic norms, values, and practices – culturally or otherwise – and that they should (fully) assimilate. Instead, our focus here is to show that those who warn about majorities being dangerously culturally replaced or diluted by immigrants are blind to the empirical evidence to the contrary.

Eisenberg (2020) illustrates well that accommodating diversity, in practice, often strengthens the dominance of the majoritarian group. She shows that assessing what “reasonable accommodation” of minorities vis-à-vis the majority entails often has in-built biases towards the majority (Eisenberg 2020, 317–318). Moreover, the majority has what Tariq Modood calls a “sociological privilege”, which entails that the majority has all sorts of cultural capital and cultural power to reproduce the majority culture (e.g., in art, media, school, politics, and public life) more easily than minorities ever can (Modood 2014, 309).

Furthermore, Alba and Duyvendak (2019) demonstrate that the vast majority of immigrants eventually “integrate” into a broader shared liberal-democratic mainstream of the country of arrival – and not the other way around, where they would fundamentally change the receiving society – broadly in the way multiculturalists envision. This integration process, however, may take time and is rarely linear.

Nevertheless, majority-rights thinkers claim that majorities are currently disappearing, whereas the numbers show that the mainstream national culture is, in fact, still dominant, even in highly diverse cities. They, for example, mention

immigration numbers (e.g., see later, where we discuss Koopmans and Orgad), highlighting that in certain cities, no group holds the majority status in numbers (anymore). However, to have a better understanding of the integration processes of immigrant minorities in multicultural societies, Alba and Duyvendak (2019) show that we must take the dimension of social power into account. This dimension overlaps with nation-building practices, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and is also constantly reinforced in many other institutions (including local schools, hospitals, and civil society). Its power becomes visible in the cultural adjustments, such as fluently learning national languages or identifying with national reference points, made by members of immigrant-origin minorities, particularly among those who aspire to social mobility. Importantly, this power axis is not strictly dependent on the demographic distribution of ethnic groups, given that “natives” remain very powerful even when they are a numerical minority. Citing percentages of citizens with immigration backgrounds in cities, for this reason, is not a relevant statistic. The crux is whether a broader liberal-democratic mainstream – to which citizens with all types of backgrounds can belong and integrate – continues to exist and emerge.

It is questionable, however, whether majority-rights thinkers are genuinely worried about declining majorities owing to confusion about what the relevant empirics are. The justification for their theories seems fuelled by worries about the declining “rights” of a very specific majority – that is, the *current* majorities in Western countries. Indeed, in majority-rights theories, the relevant “majority” – and who belongs to it – is too often implicitly or explicitly essentialized and racialized. Kaufmann is the most outspoken representative of this idea, and his work comes dangerously close to the “replacement theories” of the radical right (e.g., Ford 2020; Holmwood 2020). Instead of acknowledging the processes of mainstreaming among migrants and the rise of mingling and intermarriage (Alba & Reitz 2021), he explicitly aims to keep the majority “white”. Indeed, in his book *White Shift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities*, he argues that majorities in the West have the right to claim their cultures in terms of protection of *white* culture against dilution. Kaufmann (2018) justifies this on the basis that any attempt to create a shared culture that transcends ethnicity has failed. Apart from this highly questionable claim, his work suffers from the logical fallacy with illiberal outcomes expounded previously: instead of thinking through about why Black and other nonwhite citizens have to mobilize and struggle for equality based on their ethnic identity (*in reaction* to the oppression they experience owing to their ethnicity and in response to the hegemony of whiteness), his solution is that white citizens should also mobilize based on their – white – identity, as if that identity is not hegemonic.

If we then turn to Koopmans and Orgad (2020), we see that they explicitly claim to not focus on keeping the majority white, but they do emphasize the need for majority rights because the percentage of “people with migrant

backgrounds” (defined as being born abroad or having at least one parent born abroad) is “between 20 and 25% of the population in several European States” (Koopmans & Orgad 2020, 8). Insofar as these groups do not “adopt the political and cultural values that are the core of the majority self-understanding of society”, they write, “the majority may end up feeling culturally ‘strangers in their own land’” (8–9). Although Koopmans and Orgad claim that “blood and place of birth are irrelevant” in determining who belongs to the majority because “what counts is identification” (2022, 17), they, in fact, do introduce a distinction between those who are perceived as natives to the country and others who remain “external” to the country and are an enduring threat to the native population. Therefore, if we closely read their argument, the place of birth turns out to be relevant. Moreover, based on this distinction, Koopmans and Orgad argue that there should be a “legal right” for the majority “from changes imposed against its will, that is, a right to avoid certain unwanted changes by *external* forces” because when it comes to cultural change, “it is for members of the majority to generally decide the content of their cultural essentials, and the process/pace of the change” (19, emphases added). There is some ambiguity here because, in a democracy, majorities can surely decide upon a lot of things, including cultural practices, but it seems that they strongly conflate “the majority” with “natives”.

Therefore, as we see it, their reasoning has two consequences. First, the distinction they make jeopardizes equal citizenship (Kešić & Duyvendak 2019; Duyvendak & Kešić 2022). Why would “foreign” citizens “with a migrant background” not have an equal but conditional voice in political matters, including those regarding cultural norms of “the majority” – defined as citizens without immigrant backgrounds – and their perspective on the national identity (De Waal 2021, 104–110)? Why do they form an “external force”? This boils down to immigrant citizens having less equal standing to comment on political issues, especially if these involve protesting against certain national traditions or parts of the national identity.² From the perspective of equal citizenship, there is no reason to say that (certain) citizens must wait to hear what a fixed conception of “the majority” thinks of the cultural changes they propose.

Second, Koopmans and Orgad (2020) have no conception of changes within mainstream values and cultures – except that they are threatened in their existence by “outsiders”. Nevertheless, how do social and political changes happen within their allegedly homogeneous majority? Does this reasoning imply that activists for gay rights and feminism in the past should have first consulted the “majority”? Moreover, attitudes of the majority are not frozen like this: political and social changes happen, and new majorities emerge, often gradually but also all the time, for various reasons, and at times in response to minority activism. Their essentialized idea about who belongs to the majority hence freezes the majority culture in such a way that

it stigmatizes and silences (immigrant) citizens who use their democratic voice on political issues, especially if they comment on, protest against, or propose improvements to parts of the national identity and majority culture.

Conclusion

In sum, we see little reason to rejoice at the rise of theories of majority rights in academic scholarship. These theories rest on erroneous depictions of multiculturalism; deny empirics on the integration processes of immigrants in liberal democracies; rest upon nativist or even racist normative premises; advocate practices of unequal citizenship; and aim to hamper social, cultural, and political change triggered by immigrant minorities.

We believe that the suggestion that these majority-rights theories are normatively required or can provide an answer to the global shift toward illiberal democracy is mistaken. Even stronger, based on our analyses, we believe that majority-rights theories should be careful not to provide unjustified legitimacy to the troublesome worldwide rise of replacement conspiracy theories often premised on nativism, in which cultural majorities consider themselves entitled to inherently deserving special treatment in comparison with minorities, particularly in matters of culture, gender, and religion. The current times assuredly ask for increased attention and vigilance regarding the protection of liberal democracy. However, if these majoritarian ideas take further root, it would be a step in the wrong direction.

Notes

- 1 The authors of this chapter have also published an article that builds on the findings and insights discussed in this chapter (De Waal & Duyvendak 2022).
- 2 Moreover, at times, it appears that this unequal civic standing also applies to citizens who struggle for gender or sexual rights, given that Koopmans mentions this as a threat to the majority culture as well, if majorities think differently on these political issues (Duyvendak & De Waal 2019). Koopmans mentions “gender-neutral toilets” as a threat to the majority culture in certain Western liberal states during the conference *Majority and Minority Rights*, 25–27 April, 2019.

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