Migration and the Rawlsian Citizenship

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Abstract
It is obvious to say that recent political conflicts and lack of economic opportunities in different parts of the world have accentuated the process of migration (and immigration) to the Western world. We are familiar with the moral argument that calls upon the developed countries to take more migrants, adopt flexible immigration policy, and absorb the new comers in their social and political systems by allowing them to attain various legal and political rights, including the rights of citizenship. One may ask though what would be the implications of the above moral obligation for the developed countries, particularly to their conception of citizenship and welfare state, and to what extent they can fulfill it. A general argument against migration, no matter how well inspired it may be, remains questionable on various grounds and the global trend seems to undermine it. I do not wish to pursue it in this paper. Instead I intend to focus my attention on the political structure of the liberal democratic states in the Western world and ask if such states can legitimately demand respect for their liberal democratic and cultural values from those who wish to join their political society as citizens. I discuss the above issues in relation to the works of John Rawls (1999, 1993, 1971) and David Miller (2016, 2000).

I. Introductory Remarks

Migration is becoming one of the most pressing problems confronting many Western democratic states. A simple look at the European politics shows that electorates are deeply divided on how to respond to the migration crisis brewing on the continent, with a large number of refugees and economic immigrants arriving at their shores. In the United States and Australia too, we find a considerable difference of opinion on how to address the issues arising out of illegal immigration. Some states may have a more stringent immigration policy than others, but none can avoid completely the challenges that come with the arrival of new comers on their territory. What makes the current migration issue
even more challenging – and divisive – is that the notions of rights and justice that are often invoked in its adjudication remain somewhat unclear in the first place. I believe that there are two main reasons for this. First, under the impact of democratic idealism and human rights theories, most of us believe, and rightly so, that all human beings have a political and moral right to freedom, dignity, equality of opportunity, and justice, and that a democratic state must work to advance these rights. Migrants symbolize our aspirations in a poignant form. No one would take a boat journey in the middle of a night with high chances of drowning in the ocean or facing imprisonment upon arrival, unless faced with extremely awful situations. Second, the political philosophies of our times are dominated by a nation-state model of politics, and migration, illegal migration in particular, seems to undermine state sovereignty, institutions, and governments. Both these reasons, taken together, have led to a painful fragmentation of views on migration and their impacts are becoming visible in the day-to-day politics of democratic countries, particularly in the time of elections. In this presentation, I wish to consider if the Rawlsian political theory, particularly its conception of citizenship, can be helpful in clarifying the problems arising out of migration. I shall argue that since Rawls, under the rubric of comprehensive doctrines, sets aside ethical and cultural beliefs from his conception of citizenship, migrants may have a real possibility to participate in the processes of Rawlsian citizenship, should they reach that moment in their political journey (I shall remain aware that Rawlsian conception of political society is closed, you enter it at birth and exit at death, but suggest some changes in a moment)\(^1\). Next, I shall
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\[^1\] Rawls remarks: “…the fundamental organizing idea of justice as fairness…is that of a society as a fair system of cooperation over time, from one generation to the next” (Rawls 2005, 15), and “…society is viewed not only closed but as more or less complete and self-sufficient scheme of cooperation, making room within itself for all the necessities and activities of life, from birth until death” (Rawls 2005, 18).
also acknowledge that recent debates on migration in the Western societies are taking place mostly under the backdrop of multiculturalism and declining welfare states, and bear their marks. Finally, I draw upon David Miller’s critique of Rawlsian citizenship, arguing that even though Miller makes some interesting arguments against Rawls, his position is not without difficulties. In particular, I shall critique Miller’s contention that migration issue can be addressed within a political framework, without having an ethical support system.

### II. Migration and the Rawlsian Philosophical Suppositions

In his own political writings, John Rawls did not address the issue of migration or immigration in any significant detail, and even when he engaged with them, he did so in passing, in a paragraph or two, here and there, with a purpose of showing clearly why these issues were not a central to his political theory. In *the Law of Peoples*, he writes: “The problem of immigration is not, then, simply left aside, but is eliminated as a serious problem in a realistic utopia” (Rawls 1999, 9). There are many reasons for the above omission, and we may take note of some of them to grasp Rawls’s thinking on this subject. Rawls recognizes that people migrate for a variety of reasons, including religious prosecution, political oppression, population pressure, and economic opportunities, but believes that most of these problems can be addressed within the framework of liberal democratic or decent governments, and devotes his efforts to the clarification of that end (Rawls 1999, 108). In other words, the causes of migration seem more pertinent to Rawls than the fact of migration. As long as we live in a turbulent world marked by religious prosecution, political oppression, and inequality of people, there will be migration of all sorts. The goal, for Rawls then, is not to theorize about migration but rather to remove its
causes, if possible. In *the Law of Peoples*, he suggests that the liberal democratic societies have a duty to assist the burdened societies (Rawls 1999, 105-120). This obligation to assist is not unconditional and can be adjusted according to the performance of recipient societies. Without going into the duty to assist, one may say that this duty can cover only a small number of states and comes with numerous preconditions; hence, it cannot provide us with an explanation for Rawls’s lack of theoretical interest in migration. That explanation can be found elsewhere; I wish to note its three main components.

First, Rawls writes in the modern political tradition and takes the states to be key players in international politics. His theory of justice and citizenship are largely an attempt to provide us with the political principles of co-operation that can guide citizens’ interactions in the public arena. In other words, unlike the cosmopolitans and advocates of open borders, Rawls does not think that the boundaries of sovereign states are arbitrary, having no normative explanation or force. He writes: “In the absence of a world-state, there must be boundaries of some kind, which when viewed in isolation will seem arbitrary, and depend to some degree on historical circumstances” (1999, 39). Secondly, he also justifies the presence of national boundary on the grounds of property rights of citizens, stipulating that an important function of people’s government is to look after national territory, natural resources, environmental integrity and the size of population as well. Defending the individual ownership view of property and responsibility, he contends that property tends deteriorate if there is no specified owner and that the purpose of territorial ownership is to support the population in perpetuity. More strongly, Rawls demands that “people must recognize that they cannot make up for failing to regulate their numbers or to care for their land by conquest in war, or by
migrating to another people’s territory without their consent” (1999, 8). In addition to these two, Rawls also provides a third justification for limiting immigration. In a footnote in the *Law of Peoples*, he writes: “another reason for limiting immigration is to protect a peoples political culture and its constitutional principles” (Rawls 1999, 39). Whereas the first two justifications offered against immigration deal with the host country’s interests, the third pertains to migrant’s home political system.

It should be apparent now why Rawls did not feel the need to elucidate his views on migration at length. He treats migration as an accidental problem that arises due to the conditions of our social and political world order, and can be addressed in a *realistic utopia* marked with liberal and decent societies. Indeed in *the Law of Peoples*, he takes great pains to explain systematically how liberal and decent societies can function in the international arena. However, even if we accept Rawls’s proposals regarding a *realistic utopia*, it remains unclear if it will have any practical impact on migration in near future. The political world of our times is deeply divided and it would be an impossible expectation to hope that such a realistic utopia could be realized anytime soon. Assuming that Rawls is correct in his contentions, we can still say that he leaves the migration problem unattended in its immediate context. To say that a problem will be resolved in a realistic utopia is not much different from saying that it is not a serious problem, requiring urgent theoretical attention, or that it will go away with time, under ideal conditions.

Despite Rawls’s reluctance to engage with the issues of global migration, I believe that a relevant approach on migration can be constructed within the Rawlsian political framework – with some theoretical modifications, of course. Two main
considerations guiding Rawlsian political theory in general and his conception of justice in particular are: 1) the stability of a political society and 2) the conception of a citizen. Both these considerations can be used to make an argument for the inclusion of migrants in the Rawlsian democratic discourse. Rawls’s concern for the stability of a political society was one of the main factors contributing to the revisions of his philosophical position stated in the Theory of Justice, and consequently its re-statement in the Political Liberalism (1993). But the concerns regarding stability that led to the first major revision may be present in the context of migration too. Many Western democratic states have a sizeable migrant population, and others are grappling with the necessity of migrant workforce and refugee crisis.

Reflecting over stability, Rawls stipulates that an essential feature of a well-ordered society outlined in A Theory of Justice is that all citizens endorse the conception justice as fairness in the sense of a comprehensive doctrine and that that could be a problem because “a modern democratic society is characterized not simply by a pluralism of comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines but by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines” (Rawls 1993, xvi). He recasts his account of stability of a well-ordered society accordingly, making room for divergent comprehensive doctrines, thinking that all such doctrines would remain individual specific and reasonable as well. Moreover, Rawls also thinks that incompatible comprehensive doctrines are the “normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime” (Rawls 1993, xvi). The Rawlsian accommodation of comprehensive doctrines opens up the doors for toleration towards all those citizens, including migrants, who may hold radically
divergent belief systems within the sphere of reasonableness, respecting public reason in political matters\textsuperscript{2}.

Next, Rawls constructs his concept of citizen in a like manner, without having any comprehensive commitments in their political life. He intends to show how a society of free, equal, and deeply divided citizens’ can be stable overtime, functioning in accordance with the percepts of public reason. Accordingly, Rawls attributes two normative (moral) powers to citizens: 1) “a capacity for a sense of justice” and 2) “a capacity for a conception of the good” (Rawls 1999, 19). A capacity for justice requires them to adhere to the conceptions of justice espoused within the framework of justice as fairness, respecting two principles of justice\textsuperscript{3} and their lexical priority, where as “the capacity for a conception of the good is the capacity to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of one’s rational advantage or good” (Rawls 1993, 19). Note that the mentioned normative powers of the citizens have no historical or cultural component, which is significant because it implies that no one, including migrants, can be disadvantaged on the above grounds.

\textbf{III. David Miller’s Critique of the Rawlsian Political Society}

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\item Rawls consistently draws upon public reason to set the parameters of political discourse in a liberal society, within the framework of justice as fairness. In other words, his understanding of reasonable implies the functional presence of political liberalism. Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift raise questions regarding Rawlsian method: “By defining ‘the reasonable’ as including a commitment to a politically liberal version of society, Rawls defines anyone who queries or rejects that vision as ‘unreasonable’, but he offers no independent reason for accepting that morally driven and question-begging definition (Mulhall & Swift 2003, 483)."
\item The two principles of justice are as follows: 1) “Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value”, and 2) “Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under the conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society” (Rawls 1993, 6).
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Many thinkers have criticized Rawlsian conceptions of political society and citizenship on theoretical as well as practical grounds. Theoretically questions have been raised regarding the background conditions and suppositions involved in justice as fairness and practically too the concept of citizen seems individualistic and self-enveloped, lacking in fraternity and public welfare. Rawls has addressed many of these criticisms, but some questions persist. I want to focus on the objections that gravitate around the moral inadequacies of Rawlsian citizenship and their implications for migration in particular. On the communitarian view, for instance, it is a mistake to see a political society in terms of contractual obligations, and claims of citizens against one another. On the contrary, a state must be viewed in terms of an ethical, cultural and historical project where citizens come together from different walks of life to deliberate over their common interests and futures, making sure that they listen to each others rational arguments and persuasions, and remain open to modifying their views in the light of their public deliberations. David Miller elucidates: “The deliberative ideal also starts from the premise that [citizens’] preferences will conflict and that the purpose of democratic institutions must be to resolve this conflict. But it envisages this occurring though an open and uncoerced discussion of the issue at stake with the aim of arriving at an agreed judgment” (Miller 2005, 9). Furthermore, Miller’s notion of agreed judgment implies that once the process of deliberation comes to conclusion, citizens will transform their preferences in view of the arguments and reasoning presented to them even if they go against their own personal interests (Miller 2005, 9, 22). As to why citizens would forgo their interests this way, Miller relies upon his theory of nationality.

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4 Given that Miller criticizes Rawlsian citizenship for creating a gap between an individual’s private identity and her citizen identity, thinking that such differentiation insists on the priority of the latter over
In opposition to the Rawlsian political society, Miller takes an historical view of a nation, arguing that political principles that sustain a nation can be traced, in many ways, to the cultural, moral, and social associations of citizens over a period of time in their intergenerational engagements. During the course of this historical co-operation, citizens come to realize that their relations with one another go deeper than their contingent interests, and along with this realization comes a sense of solidarity and mutual trust in one another. They view themselves belonging to a particular nation, constituting a particular nationality. Accordingly, Miller attributes three interlinked propositions to his conception of nationality (Miller 2005, 6).

In the first place, he emphasizes that nationality can play an important role in the understanding of a person, and her sense of personal identity. How a person views herself and her political and institutional life, what ends and goals she wants to pursue in her social and political interactions are shaped, to a large extent, by her sense of nationality. Consider, for instance, the notions of welfare state and competitive individualism in two different countries, Denmark and the United States. The Danish people and their political culture seem to prioritize the aspirations of a welfare state whereas individual entrepreneurship and responsibility get much attention in the US political discourse. Generally speaking, these differences can be observed, in various degrees, even among the citizens of these two countries. Miller explains this difference in terms of historical and cultural situatedness of citizens, i.e. their different nationalities.

former and cannot be attained in practice, his claims that citizens can transform their preferences seems rather optimistic. Miller writes: “What, for Rawls, does it mean to be a citizen? It is first of all to adopt a certain perspective on the world, and then to govern one’s behavior in accordance with principles derived from this perspective. The perspective is to see oneself as one among many free and equal individuals and to acknowledge that the political society to which these individuals belong must be governed by principles that all can potentially accept” (Miller 2005, 46).
Second, on Miller’s view nations are ethical communities, having a sense of belonging and solidarity among citizens (Miller 2005, 6). By implication, citizenship has to be viewed not simply as a mutually advantageous relationship but as an ethically engaging and socially rewarding experience. The bonds of citizenship impose special obligations of care and concern among citizens, which are of much different kind than their obligations towards non-citizens. Miller is not saying that non-citizens cannot be a worthy object of our political concern or priority but that the ties of citizenship have stronger claims and provide us with an intrinsic justification as well.

The third feature of Miller’s theory of nationality pertains to the principle of political self-determination. Miller recognizes that nations have a right to self-determination, acknowledging that a state may have multiple nationalities. He cites Canada, Belgium, Spain and the UK as the examples of multiple nationalities, calling them nested nationalities as well. The idea is that different nationalities can peacefully co-exist together, without giving up their historical frame of reference altogether; but when such a co-existence is not possible, the right of self-determination may be exercised to secede. Also bear in mind that in today’s world it may neither be possible, nor desirable, to maintain a truly homogenous state with one nationality and so political theory must adapt creatively to dealing with different nationalities within a single state-system.

On the basis of the above account of nationality, Miller concludes that migration poses a challenge to the solidarity of citizens and also to the notions of a welfare state.\textsuperscript{5} The solidarity is compromised when diversity occurs beyond a certain point, where

\textsuperscript{5} He writes: “the upshot is that we may face a trade-off between higher levels of immigration and creating or maintaining a strong welfare state, assuming the latter is one of our goals” (Miller 2016, 10).
citizens strain their historical sense of belonging and ethical concerns for one another. Once solidarity is weakened, the trust among citizens dissipates quickly, leading to a series of domino effects in the political society. In such a society it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain the services of a welfare state, because people start rethinking the fundamental tenets of their political association. Miller takes note of one such episode. He writes: “Popular resentment of immigrants often appears to be fueled by a perception, accurate or not, that they enter in order to receive benefits without having made an adequate contribution before hand” (Miller 2016, 9). It is understandable to some extent how such a perception can develop in the countries that take a large number of unskilled migrants, putting an economic burden on their own citizens. The economic data on this issue is not totally clear; but it cannot blunt Miller’s point because he does not see a nation simply in economic terms (Miller 2016, 19). If a significant number of citizens in given country see immigration as a problem then it is a problem and we cannot explain it away. We should try to understand it and find a way forward in a deliberative way.

A notable difficulty with Miller’s account of citizenship, it seems to me, pertains not to migration, but to his understanding and elucidation of political society in ethical and cultural terms. It is one thing to say that citizens have a sense of solidarity with one another because they share common social and political experiences and aim to encourage future co-operations together, and quite another to describe their nationality

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6 I tend to think that progressive’s dilemma is real in the case of small states that have less capability to absorb large number of migrants. However, it may not be so in the case of big states with bigger capabilities.

7 A fuller discussion of this issue can be found in an edited volume on “Multiculturalism And The Welfare State: Recognition and Redistribution in Contemporary Democracies”. In that work, Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka challenge, along with their colleagues, Richard Johnston and Stuart Soroka, the ‘heterogeneity/ redistribution trade off’ hypothesis (i.e. diversity makes it difficult to build or sustain strong welfare state), and ‘recognition/ redistribution trade off’ hypothesis (i.e. politics of recognition makes it difficult to sustain economic redistribution) (Banting and Kymlicka 2006, 49).
with ethical and cultural amplifications. Moreover, a conception of ethical and cultural citizenship can not only compromise individual liberty but also be manipulated in a perfectionist way; and Rawls worries about it. Thomas Nagel remarks: “An important element in Rawls’s conception of liberty is the requirement that a just state refrain, so far as possible, from trying to impose on its members a single conception of ends and meaning of life” (Nagel 2003, 72). Miller acknowledges that his view of politics remains “vulnerable to exploitation” but reasons that the liberal view has its own inadequacies (Miller 2005, 10). Whether liberalism, Rawlsian political liberalism in particular, provides us with a satisfactory solution to our political predicaments or not is legitimate question, but of much different kind than the difficulties associated with perfectionism, assuming that the conception of ethical nationality can be exploited at its worse.

Another constraint on Miller’s theory comes from the human rights of migrants. Miller’s conception of political society as an ethical community prioritizes the solidarity and welfare within a given state but leaves out the rights of migrants. Writing as if in the realist tradition of international politics, Miller construes the rights of migrants from the point of view of receiving state, not through the prism of human rights theorists. He argues that human rights approach to migration cannot accommodate the collective values of receiving country and that it must make room for a new perspective. In this

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8 He writes: “Persons join together to further their cultural and artistic interests on the same way that they form religious communities. They do not use coercive apparatus of the state to win for themselves a greater liberty or larger distributive shares on the grounds that their activities are of more intrinsic value. Perfectionism is denied as a political principle (Rawls 1971/1999, 289).

9 In A Theory of Justice, Rawls remarks: “Persons join together to further their cultural and artistic interests in the same way that they form religious communities. They do not use the coercive apparatus of the state to win for themselves a greater liberty or larger distributive shares on the grounds that their activities are of more intrinsic value. Perfectionism is denied as a political principle” (Rawls 1971/1999, 289).

10 This is a contested issue. Some eminent theorists and philosophers have defended multiculturalism as an extension of the human rights revolution in modern era. Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka remark: “the same human rights ideals that inspired the struggle against colonialism, racial segregation, and caste
new perspective, the human rights of migrants matter in the sense that they should not be deliberately violated; but they do not have a preponderating application such that they can trump the will of a democratic majority in the receiving state (Miller 2016, 13). More strongly, if a migrant arrives in a country without legal permission to do so, the people of that country should have the right to decide whether they want to keep the migrant or exit her from their political space: “By arriving at the border, or indeed crossing it illegally, the migrant is putting herself at the mercy of the receiving state” (Miller 2016, 15). Even though Miller views a political society internally in an ethical sense, his approach on migration is guided by political considerations alone (Miller 2016, 17-18)\textsuperscript{11}.

It follows from Miller’s account that the receiving states should have the final say on migrants and that no ethical and political constraints should be placed on them, except the basic ones, such as a respectful and dignified treatment of the migrants while they are on a foreign soil, waiting to hear about their admission in the receiving states. Furthermore, if they are allowed to stay in the receiving state, migrants must integrate with the native society, to become productive members of that society. Miller is aware that many Western states have a significant immigrant population, which is not integrated with native communities, causing frustration, resentment, lack of opportunities and trust among the immigrants as well as the natives. He differentiates among three kinds of integration: 1) social, 2) civic and, 3) cultural, approving the first two completely and

discrimination have also inspired the struggle by other historically disadvantaged ethnocultural groups to contest the lingering manifestations of ethnic and racial hierarchy” (Banting and Kymlicka 2006, 9).

\textsuperscript{11} He writes: “The approach I shall take will be realist in another sense as well...It will ask about the institutions and policies we should adopt in dealing with immigration rather than trying to tell individual people how they ought to behave” (Miller 2016, 17). This is somewhat problematic because one of the main reasons that has caused ripples in our consciousness in the past some months and years is not the political right of migrants but their moral rights. Many have asked what obligations, if any, the privileged citizens of developed countries have towards the migrants who are risking their lives for survival or for a better life? This is a human question, even though politically posed.
third with qualifications. Social integration relates to the behavioral patterns of the members in a given society, appreciating what people do and participating in that activity if possible. It includes a common interest in sports, public events, and social festivities etc. Civic integration pertains to the respect for political values of a society, such as democratic and civil institutions, a non-discriminative and non-judgmental attitude towards fellow citizens, and equality of women etc. Cultural integration is hard to pin down, and remains problematic in its manifestation\textsuperscript{12}. It is about cultural associations and engagements of citizens; this much is obvious. But Miller goes a step further suggesting that cultural integration may require, if necessary, revision of migrant’s cultural values or adoption of some prevalent cultural values of the receiving society. Assuming that the host country is European and that the migrant is African or Asian, cultural integration would necessitate a respect, or adoption of European values, and not the reinforcement of her home values that are in conflict with the European values. Miller elucidates the issue thus: “Moreover in order to function as a citizen, a person must also align, herself with the political system of which she now forms a part. To play the role adequately, she must respect institutions and take on at least some of belief that lie behind them” (italics mine, Miller 2016, 7). It may not be possible to give an exhaustive account of what these beliefs are, but it seems clear that they have ethical, cultural and political implications.

IV. Migration and the Rawlsian Citizenship

\textsuperscript{12} For a detailed discussion, see Ryan Pevnick’s \textit{Immigration and the Constraints of Justice: Between Open Borders and Absolute Sovereignty}, 133-151. Pevnick remarks: “…I worry that any attempt to institutionalize an immigration policy that seeks to encode and ensure the future survival of a particular cultural form is likely to travel a road similar to the quota system [in the US]. This is because national identity is an amorphous concept, and attempts to operationalize it are likely to turn toward the racial and national traits favored by the quota system” (Pevnick 2014, 139).
Recall that Rawls assigns ethical and cultural beliefs of citizens in the category of comprehensive doctrines and keeps civic engagements limited to the political arena where justice as fairness serves as the mediating principle in the interaction of citizens. So from a strict Rawlsian point of view, it would seem that Miller goes a bit far with his theory of integration and that the social and cultural integrations would always be open to misinterpretation in public life\textsuperscript{13}. I think that this may be true; but it does not capture the whole picture. Rawls’s reduction of public life to political sphere alone is found unsatisfactory not only by Miller but also by some other commentators who are much more sympathetic to the Rawlsian theoretical framework. Surely, we can find many citizens in the liberal democratic states engaging in a more robust justification of their cultural values, and making a plea for the inclusion of such values in their political lives. In his book \textit{Multicultural Citizenship}, Will Kymlicka has argued “that freedom is intimately linked with and dependent on culture” (Kymlicka 1995, 75) and that “…practices and institutions of [societal culture] cover the full range of human activities, encompassing both public and private life” (Kymlicka 1995, 75). In other words, Rawls’s contention that political freedom can be completely divested from cultural elements is probably a bit narrow in that it does not cover the role of culture in an individual’s citizenship\textsuperscript{14}.

In my own research, I have felt divided over the questions regarding the cultural and ethical interpretation of a citizenship. Among other things, such interpretations

\textsuperscript{13} Following Joseph H. Carens, David Miller makes a distinction among three types of integration in the context of immigration: integration as a requirement, as an expectation, and an aspiration. He remarks: “At most, then, cultural integration might be an aspiration, and possibly an expectation, to use Carens’ distinction (Miller 2016, 149).

\textsuperscript{14} Will Kymlicka suggests that right to culture as manifested in multiculturalism should be viewed as “ a precondition for individual autonomy” (Banting and Kymlicka 2006, 9).
assume that most members of a community or culture share similar cultural values, and that they want to advance them in their political lives. It is also argued that liberal political institutions should recognize and accommodate such values within their political frameworks (Kymlicka 2011, 51-57). Empirically, these contentions turn out to be partially correct and partially incorrect and therein resides the difference and the conundrum. In other words, some citizens in liberal democracies are culturally conscious in the sense of treating culture as a political priority or a part of their identity, others are not. Rawls thinks that this can lead to clash of “irreconcilable differences” among citizens and removes culture from the considerations of justice as fairness, placing it in the category of comprehensive doctrines. By placing cultural and ethical values in the category of comprehensive doctrines, or more precisely, reasonable comprehensive doctrines, Rawls may have avoided the problems associated with perfectionism but has opened the doors for additional objections: 1) that he ignores practical and cultural aspects of citizens’ identity and that his views are “too cerebral” (Miller 2005, 46) and 2) that Rawlsian comprehensive doctrines can take the forms of ethical and cultural absolutism, and spill over in the political sphere too, certainly not a great alternative to perfectionism. Rawls acknowledges this problem: “Of course, a society may also contain unreasonable and irrational, even mad, comprehensive doctrines. In their case the problem is to contain them so that they do not undermine the unity and justice of society” (Rawls 1999, xvii).

Given that culture seems an important constituent of citizenship and its rival expositions seem to be problematic in Rawls and Miller, I wonder if it is even possible to theorize about it in consistent terms. When we look at the cultural values and practices of
different societies, we find that many of them can be helpful in understanding the notions of citizenship that inform those societies or their corresponding states. We also notice that some cultural practices do not stand the test of time and need to be modified or jettisoned completely. This is particularly true of traditional cultures that still view the role of women in a subordinate way and accord minimum rights to women and children. So a migrant coming from such cultures may be totally out of place in the Western democratic countries and their cultural contexts. Furthermore, additional problems are posed when cultural practices are defended on an *intrinsic ground*, constituting an integral part of citizens’ identity. In addition, we must bear in mind that a culture tends to have many sub-cultures and not all of them tend to champion the same cultural values.

So it seems to me that rather than engaging in an across-the-board intrinsic justification of a culture (as Miller proposes) or its principled separation from the political (as found in Rawls), we may want to adopt a more measured approach on this issue. To that end, I suggest that the role of culture in the liberal societies can be probably adjudicated in relation to democratic ideals and values, on a case-by-case basis. To have a preference for one’s own culture, social and political culture in particular, cannot be regarded as a bias unless such preferences are pressed in a thoughtless and obviously prejudiced manner. In other words, if a cultural principle or practice runs, explicitly or implicitly, contrary to the rights of women and children or the equality of citizens, supporting discriminatory methods as the metric of moral and political assessments, it should be rejected. More explicitly, it may be possible to disallow some cultural practices without invoking the minorities’ fears of perfectionism or majorities’ fears regarding their culture being weakened. I am not totally sure how this has to be done within the
framework of democratic citizenship and equality; but one way to proceed could be to recognize and reinforce the importance of some sort of public reasoning pertaining to culture and cultural practices, such that cultural practices can be vetted in the social domain with reference to democratic practices and ideals.

IV. Conclusion

Global migration of people seems to constitute a new political reality and challenge as well. I do not think that the migration trend can be reversed or stopped in near future as hoped under some ideal types. The solution then has to come from the nation states capability to adopt and manage migration in an effective way, respecting the human rights of migrants and the political culture and beliefs of the recipient states. Accordingly, I have argued that a political emphasis on openness to culture and cultural openness can make up for the distance between Rawls and Miller, in that this alternative approach adopts a positive attitude towards the role of culture in the political life and citizenship, without taking an ideological posture. To that end, I suggest that many migrants can surely benefit from the Western culture’s insistence on reason and criticism, equality of citizens, and justice and fairness, and some critics of migration too may want to refine their perceptions once confronted with an open attitude towards all cultures.

References


