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Liberal ideals, national identities and closed borders

Assessing the persuasiveness of the liberal nationalist argument in favor of immigration restriction

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Matters of migration and border control have been topics of political and societal controversy already from the time that today's nation-states came into existence. Currently, however, the issue of immigration appears to have become more contentious than ever. Due to a variety of circumstances – war, destitution, societal unrest – hundreds of thousands of migrants from the Middle East, Africa and Asia are trying to reach the borders of the European Union, hoping for the opportunity to settle in one of the safe and affluent states that are part of it. Just like most modern nation-states, the EU as a whole seeks to limit the number of newcomers by practicing restrictive immigration policies.

As the number of immigrants at the European border continues to rise, the public debate about these policies is heating. On the one hand, it is argued that Europe cannot close its borders to those in need. On this view, such a practice constitutes an unfair protection of the wealth of those at the one side of the border, at the expense of the well-being of those at the other side. People who flee their home country should be enabled to live decent lives just as people born in safer and more affluent states, so it is contended. On the other hand, it is suggested that Europe has to take measures to restrict immigration in order to preserve the way of living that is valued so highly by its residents. From this perspective, large numbers of immigrants entering the EU could have detrimental consequences for the economy and public order throughout the Union. On the national level, it is feared that the flow of immigrants will endanger each member state's distinctive cultural identity, as well as the values of solidarity and democracy that come along with it.

The discussion about immigration has figured prominently in the field of political theory as well. Positions on the issue have been developed from various philosophical perspectives, but here we focus on two opposing views, grounded in two distinct theoretical doctrines. First, we consider the position that offers an argument against policies of immigration restriction and that is associated with the philosophy of liberalism. Central to the liberal doctrine is the idea that all human beings are of equal moral worth. The state should thus treat them as such. The act of distinguishing between those persons inside the borders and those outside, that inevitably accompanies restrictive immigration practices, is therefore hard to justify from a liberal point of view (Kymlicka, 2001b). A further idea that is at the core of liberal thought, is the belief that the arbitrary circumstances that a person is born into should not determine the chances he has in life. Given the fact that the location of existing state borders has largely been determined by historical processes that were not subject to the

free choice of all those affected by them, these boundaries can be seen to establish one of those arbitrary contingencies (ibid.). Following this thought, the extensive consequences of the positioning of borders for the lives of individuals, sustained by the practice of immigration restriction, cannot be justified from a liberal perspective. As Joseph Carens (1987) puts it: "[c]itizenship in Western liberal democracies is the modern equivalent of feudal privilege – an inherited status that greatly enhances one's life chances. Like feudal birthright privileges, restrictive citizenship is hard to justify when one thinks about it closely." (p. 252)

The second position, on the contrary, provides an argument in favor of immigration restriction and springs from the philosophy of nationalism. The central thesis advanced by this doctrine is that national identities are not arbitrary contingencies, but in fact possess a special kind of moral value (Miller, 1995). They constitute "the collective identities that matter most to us; and it is essential to the stability of the state that these identities should be protected against subversion and transmitted to new generations of citizens" (p. 120). From a nationalist perspective, it is therefore argued that a state may indeed be justified in preventing outsiders from entering in an attempt to protect the national identity that the community of insiders prefers to preserve.

From the brief sketch of these two opposing theoretical positions and the philosophical traditions that underlie them, there appears to be a tension between liberalism and nationalism when it concerns restrictive immigration policies. This tension seems to stem from a fundamental point of divergence between both doctrines. Whereas state borders appear to have no moral value within liberal thought, they tend to be constitutive of the national identities that occupy a central role within nationalist philosophy. Therefore, privileging a national culture, identity or community forms a practice that has no place in the doctrine of liberalism at first glance, but may in fact be morally required by the principles of nationalism.

However elementary this disparity may sound, it has not stopped philosophers from attempting to combine liberal and nationalist viewpoints. These attempts have resulted in the development of a theory that has become known as *liberal nationalism*, a philosophical rationale that is mainly associated with the works of David Miller and Will Kymlicka. At the core of liberal nationalist thought lies the idea that national identities are crucial to the fulfillment of the most fundamental ideals of liberalism. Both the autonomous life and well-being of the individual and the functioning of some basic liberal egalitarian institutions – most notably the institutions of social justice and deliberative democracy – are said to rely upon the existence of a solid national identity (Miller, 1995; Kymlicka, 2001b). Ultimately, this argument is employed to justify restrictive immigration policies for the sake of the

preservation of a nation-state's distinctive identity. In this sense, liberal nationalism presents us with a potential solution to the alleged discordance between liberal and nationalist principles, as well as the asserted incompatibility of liberal values and immigration restriction.

However, liberal nationalism's standpoint on immigration has not remained without criticism. A first category of critique concerns the liberal nationalist argument that individuals have an interest in the preservation of their national identity. Ryan Pevnick (2008) attempts to demonstrate that the function of national identity as a background against which individuals can make meaningful life choices may just as well be preserved without restrictive immigration policies. Besides, so he argues, the desire for cultural stability of the individual member of the national community is generally overridden by the interests of potential immigrants. A second pile of criticism is directed at the argument that the institutions of democracy and social justice are dependent upon the presence of a shared national identity. Together with Pevnick (2007), Arash Abizadeh (2002; 2006) challenges this claim from an empirical viewpoint. In addition, Pevnick (2007) argues that such an identity might just as well be revised so that immigrants are included in the national community as well. Furthermore, both authors contend that the conclusion that immigration should be restricted relies upon a dubious normative claim, favoring those already residing inside the state (Abizadeh, 2006; Pevnick, 2007). Lastly, Pevnick (2007) has tried to demonstrate that limiting immigration is not necessary if states allow for a "residence only" form of citizenship, that is less demanding than the all-encompassing kind of citizenship that Miller (2000) supports.

At the same time, liberal nationalists have not been sleeping and have provided a number of counterarguments to defend their theory against these and other objections. The past two decades have thus witnessed a vehement academic discussion on the force of the liberal nationalist logic and the corresponding position on immigration. The aim of the present research is to assess whether liberal nationalism ultimately succeeds in resolving the tension between the doctrines of liberalism and nationalism when it concerns the issue of immigration. This will be done by critical scrutiny of both the liberal nationalist line of reasoning and the arguments that have been put forward to disprove it. This exercise should eventually lead to an answer to the question whether the practice of privileging a national culture, identity or community in political decisions about immigration policies can be justified in a way that is consistent with liberal principles.

Before this can be established, a number of more specific sub-questions should be answered. To begin with, we should ask what exact arguments have been developed by the

liberal nationalist camp in its effort to justify restrictive immigration policies. Then, we have to examine the counterarguments built up in order to expose the liberal nationalist line of reasoning as internally inconsistent. Next, we are to compare both positions and critically reflect on them: given the persuasiveness of all arguments in the debate, to what extent can the liberal nationalist position on immigration be qualified as cogent and coherent? In the end, we will conclude that liberal nationalists manage to provide a convincing account of the importance of national identity for the fulfillment of some basic liberal ideals, but that immigration only impedes these vital functions of nationality under specific circumstances. Therefore, a state's desire to protect the national identity does not justify a general policy of immigration restriction after all.

Both the research question and aim as formulated above indicate that the scope of this research is limited in a number of ways. To start with, only liberal nationalism will be investigated as a doctrine presenting a theoretical argument in favor of restrictive immigration policies. Philosophical doctrines that offer arguments leading to a similar conclusion but are not part of the liberal framework, such as communitarianism, are left out of the discussion. A similar approach is adopted towards the counterarguments in the debate. These will only be considered as far as they attack the liberal nationalist argument from a liberal perspective. Lastly, the discussion of liberal nationalist theory will not be general in character, but concentrate primarily on its merit and demerit when it concerns the question of immigration policies.

CHAPTER 2: THE LIBERAL NATIONALIST POSITION

If we want to establish the persuasiveness of the liberal nationalist argument in favor of limiting immigration, we should first of all have a closer look at the exact line of reasoning that it involves. In order to sketch the background against which the argument is developed, this chapter starts with an explanation of the core principle of liberal nationalist thought, as it was defined by Miller. Secondly, it is investigated how exactly the philosophies of liberalism and nationalism are combined in this view. We will see that the form of nationalism that Miller advocates requires liberal practices, and that his ideal of liberalism in turn calls for the protection of nationality. This will help us understand, thirdly, the two arguments that liberal nationalists employ in order to justify restrictive immigration policies.

2.1 – Miller's principle of nationality

Although Miller was not the first political philosopher to use the term "liberal nationalism" (see for example Tamir, 1993) his *On Nationality* (1995) is generally seen as one of the groundworks of liberal nationalist theory. In this book, Miller spells out what he calls the "principle of nationality" (p. 19). This principle, which he believes to offer rational guidance when we are confronted with actual questions of nationality, consists of three interconnected propositions.

First of all, the fact that someone belongs to a certain national grouping may very well be a part of his identity (Miller, 1995, p. 10). It is important to note that national communities are constituted by belief: "nations exist when their members recognize one another as compatriots, and believe that they share characteristics of the relevant kind" (p. 22). Media of mass communication play a crucial role in transmitting this belief to everyone who belongs. Therefore, nationality does not depend on anything concrete that exists in the real world: it is rather a mythical construct (pp. 32-33). It is not irrational, however, if someone makes his nationality a constitutive part of his personal identity. Miller explains: "[w]e always begin from values that have been incalculated in us by the communities and institutions to which we belong; family, school, church and so forth." (p. 44) Throughout our lives, we work out who we are by constantly reflecting on these values and revising our identity – and "[t]here is no reason why nationality should be excluded from this process" (p. 45).

The second proposition makes clear why we should not think of nationality as a contingency that is irrelevant from a moral point of view: nations are, in fact, ethical communities (Miller, 1995, p. 11). This entails that individuals owe special obligations to

fellow members of their nation, which they do not owe to other human beings. Miller himself acknowledges that this proposition may be a contentious one, as it conflicts with the compelling conviction that every human being should matter equally to us. He then appeals to the idea of ethical particularism to clarify his position. On the ethical particularist view, "relations between persons are part of the basic subject-matter of ethics, so that fundamental principles may be attached directly to these relations" (p. 50). Someone who sees himself as a member of a certain group may thus justifiably express this identification by giving special weight to the interests of fellow-members. We already learned that Miller regards the nation as a group that an individual can rightly identify himself with. Therefore, the bonds of nationality can be seen to constitute one type of relations that is accompanied by special moral responsibilities from an ethical particularist perspective. As the specific content of these ethical demands is established through public debate within the national context, moral obligations between members of the national community may vary from nation to nation (pp. 68-69).

The third and last component of the principle of nationality is constituted by the belief that people who form a national community in a particular territory have a good claim to political self-determination (Miller, 1995, p. 11). From the list of reasons that Miller provides in defense of this view, two stand out. The first concerns the importance of national culture. Since a nation's culture is constitutive of the national identity that is incorporated in individuals' perception of themselves, a national community should have the political means to protect its culture (pp. 85-86). The second reason concerns the demands of justice that accompany the bonds of nationality. The enforcement of these special moral obligations between co-nationals requires a set of well-functioning state institutions (p. 83). Arguments related to these two contentions will be examined at greater length in the next section. Within the context of the principle of nationality, it suffices to say that they lead Miller to conclude that "each nation should have its own set of political institutions which allow it to decide collectively those matters that are the primary concern of its members" (p. 81).

2.2 – Nationalism and liberalism combined

We now have an idea of the core premises of the liberal nationalist doctrine. It is not yet clear, however, in what exact ways this theory integrates liberalism and nationalism into one coherent philosophy. A closer study of liberal nationalist literature reveals that the forms of liberalism and nationalism that are advocated by this doctrine stand in a mutually dependent

relationship to each other. As with all symbiotic associations, there are two sides to this liaison.

(A) Why nationalism calls for liberalism. Liberal nationalist philosophy distinguishes itself from conservative nationalism by letting go of the view that national identities are "cast in stone" (Miller, 1995, p. 127). The meaning of membership in a nation changes with time. This process of change should ideally consist in a collective conversation in which many voices may join. Crucially, "liberal freedoms play a vital role in providing the conditions under which the conversation can continue" (pp. 127-128). In this sense, liberal rights are valued as means whereby individuals can develop and express their ethnic and other group identities on the one hand, and take part in an ongoing collective debate about what it means to be a member of this nation on the other hand (p. 153). This is what makes Miller's idea of nationality a liberal one.

The same goes for the concept of nationalism that was developed by Kymlicka (2001b). He points out a number of ways in which nation building can have a distinctively liberal character (pp. 258-259). First of all, states should use only a limited degree of coercion to promote a common national identity. Furthermore, forms of speech or political mobilization that challenge the privileging of a national identity ought not to be prohibited. In addition, membership in the nation should not be restricted: in principle it is open to anyone who wants to join. All of these elements demonstrate that the kind nationalism that Kymlicka promotes requires a liberal framework.

(B) Why liberalism calls for nationalism. The reasons that liberalism in turn may demand for nationalist principles are twofold. The first of these reasons regards the interests of the individual human being, who constitutes the ultimate unit of moral concern within liberal theory. Liberal nationalists contend that national identity is of such significant value to the individual person, that it should be protected. Some liberal philosophers insist that national identity is important because it provides individuals with a background against which they can make choices about how to live. This argument is developed most extensively by Kymlicka (2001a). "People make choices about the social practices around them, based on their beliefs about the value of these practices. And to have a belief about the value of a practice is, in the first instance, a matter of understanding the meanings attached to it by our culture." (pp. 209-210) Therefore, meaningful individual choice is only possible if individuals have access to a national culture. National identity – or, more specifically, the national culture that is constitutive of this identity – thus equips the individual with a "context of choice" (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 83) and can therefore be seen as essential to *individual autonomy*. A

similar argument is developed by Margalit & Raz (1990), who regard national culture as vital to *individual well-being*. "Individual well-being depends on the successful pursuit of worthwhile goals and relationships. Goals and relationships are culturally determined." (p. 448) Whether national identity is interpreted as the key to autonomy or well-being – either way individuals can be understood to have an important interest in the prosperity of their national culture. Protecting it by means of nationalist policies may thus be necessary. This line of reasoning could be summarized under the name of the "context of choice claim".

Some liberal philosophers go one step further. Not only do they endorse the view that individuals have an interest in possessing a certain national identity that provides them with a context of choice, they also claim that individuals have an interest in "controlling the shape of cultural change in their country"; in "tying *future* generations to a cultural shape they valued" (Pevnick, 2008, pp. 110-111). Miller is one of these philosophers. According to him, national identity should not only be protected as a background against which individuals can make decisions, but also as "something that people have an interest in controlling: they want to be able to shape the way that their nation develops, including the values that are contained in the public culture" (Miller, 2005, p. 200). In this view, individuals may have good reason to try "to maintain cultural continuity over time, so that they can see themselves as the bearers of an identifiable cultural tradition that stretches backward historically" (ibid.). Let us call this supplementary argument the "control claim".

A second reason why liberalism may require the protection of nationality, lies with the role that national identity can play by providing the conditions under which the institutions of the liberal state will succeed. A general point is made by Miller (1995): "[m]uch state activity involves the furthering of goals which cannot be achieved without the voluntary co-operation of citizens. For this activity to be successful, the citizens must trust the state, and they must trust one another to comply with what the state demands of them." (p. 91) Crucially, this social trust "requires solidarity not merely within groups but across them, and this in turn depends upon a common identification of the kind that nationality alone can provide" (p. 140). On this view, it is national identity that enables individuals to cooperate as citizens (Miller, 2000, p. 88).

Kymlicka (2001b) makes clear that this applies specifically to cooperation in schemes that serve basic liberal egalitarian values (p. 265). Two institutions stand out in particular. The first is constituted by arrangements of social justice, for example in the form of the welfare state. Such arrangements require people to make sacrifices for the benefit of others whom they, in general, do not know personally. According to Kymlicka (2001a), we are only willing

to do so if we have the feeling that the sacrifices are being made for "one of us", and – equally important – if we are trustful that others would do the same for us if circumstances were to change (p. 225). These feelings of solidarity and trust, in turn, are generated by the bonds of nationality. The second institution to which this line of reasoning applies is democracy. As with arrangements of social justice, a high level of trust is an essential precondition for democracy to succeed: "[p]eople must trust that others are genuinely willing to consider one's interest and opinions" (p. 226). Furthermore, Kymlicka adds, "collective political deliberation is only feasible if participants understand one another, and this seems to require a common language" (ibid.). Again, the social trust and common language that are needed for realizing deliberative democracy can best be guaranteed if all participants share the same national background. Thus we have established the case for protection of national identity, a practice rooted in the principles of nationalism, by appealing to liberal values.

2.3 – Liberal nationalism and immigration

The interweaving of liberalism and nationalism in this way immediately presents us with considerations that are relevant with regard to the issue of immigration. What are the exact implications of the liberal nationalist line of reasoning when it concerns border policies? Two arguments stand out.

The first argument starts from the premise that the arrival of immigrants in the nation will change the public culture that is constitutive of the political identity of its original members (Miller, 2005, pp. 199-202). For one thing, newcomers tend to bring distinct cultural values with them. For another thing, the population growth that accompanies the flow of immigration will affect the range of possibilities regarding the way of living within the territory of the nation. As we saw above, the liberal nationalist is convinced that individuals have an important interest in the preservation of their culture – both because it molds the national identity that equips them with a context of choice (the context of choice claim), and because they want to control the development of their national culture (the control claim). This argument – which we can name the "individual interest argument" – thus presents us with a first reason why the liberal nationalist position is likely to imply the need for restrictive immigration policies.

The second argument is related, but slightly different. It begins with the observation that the newcomers who enter the state usually do not share the national identity of those already inhabiting it. To see why this is problematic, remember one of the findings in the previous section: the functioning of the fundamental liberal institutions of social justice and

democracy seems to be conditional upon the sharing of a national identity by all those that are part of these schemes. If the bonds of nationality between citizens living in the same state are lacking, the social trust, solidarity and common language that are indispensable to these institutions cannot be guaranteed. Admitting immigrants with a national identity different from that of the people already residing in the state, may therefore lead to a situation in which some citizens – either from the group of immigrants or the original national community – do not feel able or willing to contribute to the schemes of social justice and democracy. This puts these institutions into great danger, as Miller (2000) explains: "[a]nyone who is unable or unwilling to [contribute] is free-riding on those who comply, and no social practice based on reciprocity will survive once free-riding exceeds a certain minimum point" (p. 89). In order to prevent the collapse of the institutions that are valued so highly from a liberal point of view, states may choose not to give citizenship rights freely to all those that arrive at their borders. We call this the "liberal institutions argument".

Clearly, these two arguments point to the conclusion that states have good reasons for restricting immigration. Indeed, the arguments lead liberal nationalists to conclude that nation-states are justified in limiting immigration in an attempt to protect the national identity (Miller, 2005, p. 193). It is not entirely clear, however, what exact restrictive immigration policies the liberal nationalist would prescribe. Interestingly, Miller's standpoint seems to have toughened throughout the years. In *On Nationality* (1995) he states that "immigration need not pose problems, provided only that the immigrants come to share a common national identity, to which they may contribute their own distinctive ingredients" (p. 26). In his later essay (2000) he declares that "citizenship is, and has been seen to be, a valuable status, and states therefore naturally wish to restrict its possession to those who identify themselves with the nation and are carriers of the right cultural identity" (pp. 88-89). An even sharper statement dates from his more recent paper (2005): "nation-states have a strong and legitimate interest in determining who comes in and who does not" (p. 202). For now, we will conclude that liberal nationalist theory generally entails the position that a state may legitimately restrict the number of immigrants who cross its borders in order to protect the national identity.

CHAPTER 3: CHALLENGING THE LIBERAL NATIONALIST POSITION

Now we have investigated the liberal nationalist plea for restrictive immigration policies, it is time to turn to the criticisms that this line of reasoning has faced. The critique has centered around the two basic arguments that were outlined above: the individual interest argument on the one hand and the liberal institutions argument on the other. Therefore, this chapter will deal with each of these categories of criticism respectively. We will see that Pevnick and Abizadeh challenge the logic of both arguments in various ways, thereby trying to demonstrate that the liberal nationalist line of reasoning ultimately fails to provide a justification for immigration restriction that is consistent with liberal principles.

3.1 – Challenging the individual interest argument

The first defense of restrictive immigration policies that we saw in the previous chapter, starts from the premise that immigration may change a nation's distinctive culture. According to the liberal nationalist, this is an unacceptable prospect: firstly because culture is constitutive of the national identity that provides the individual human being with a context of choice (the context of choice claim), and secondly because people have an important interest in controlling the way in which their national culture develops (the control claim). Hence, the individual's interest in preserving and controlling the shape of his national identity gives us a reason why a state may justifiably limit immigration. What objections does this line of reasoning face?

To begin with, Pevnick (2008) addresses the context of choice claim by arguing that a national identity need not be entirely constant in order to supply the individual with a context of choice that warrants his autonomy and well-being. "Even if individuals have a claim to a cultural context that follows from a commitment to autonomy, it does not follow that they have a claim to a *certain* cultural context. If nationality gains its significance by making autonomous life possible, individuals have a strong interest in a context that they can make sense of, a context that can fulfill this role, but this does not show that changes to the cultural context (so long as they are manageably gradual) are an important affront to the autonomy of individuals within it." (p. 102) In other words: the evolution of culture will not put the autonomy or well-being of the individual into trouble – in fact, it might even broaden his autonomy – as long as he can digest these changes by recognizing and embracing them as new parts of his context of choice. This process of adaption does require that cultural change, for example as a result of immigration, not be "dislocatingly abrupt" (ibid.). It does not

follow, however, that immigration may be limited in order to prevent *any* form of cultural change.

Yet, the control claim could serve as a counterargument to Pevnick's criticism. We learned that Miller (2005) is convinced that "the public culture of their country is something that individuals have an interest in controlling" (p. 200). If this is true, we can see why indeed even the slightest change of culture harms the interests of the individuals within the nation, in the case that such a variation emanates from forces or actors external to the national community. In this sense, the control claim seems to be a necessary supplement to the context of choice claim, if the goal is to demonstrate that immigration should be restricted.

Pevnick (2008) recognizes this potential objection, but protests that "it does not follow that the interest citizens of destination countries have in a reasonably stable cultural context overrides the interests or claims of potential immigrants" (p. 105). In fact, "[i]t seems unlikely that claims based on cultural context will *ever* outweigh minimally reasonable requests for asylum" (ibid.). Why does Pevnick bestow such little moral significance on the interest that people have in their ability to shape the way their nation develops? He tries to clarify the matter by sketching the historical example of the American quota system, which was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century and restricted immigration by admitting only a certain number of newcomers per category of national origin (pp. 111-113). The policy was designed to ensure the future survival of America's distinctive cultural identity. However, after the system had been abolished in the second half of the twentieth century, it was widely acknowledged that it had been "a policy of deliberate discrimination" that was "inconsistent with our beliefs in the rights of man" (quoted in Daniels, 2004, p. 129). This example shows that "it is a mistake to put much weight on the desire people have (real enough, though it may be) to see the future survival or success of their cultural way of life" (Pevnick, 2008, p. 111).

The claims of potential immigrants, on the other hand, tend to be much more powerful. According to Pevnick (2008), "[p]otential immigrants often have strong reasons based in distributive justice for requesting entry and it is hard to see why one's interest in the future survival of their culture should outweigh such reasons" (p. 115). The liberal value of equality requires us to take seriously both the interests of the members of a nation who wish to control cultural change, and the interests of potential immigrants who desire to lead meaningful lives. Given the unequal distribution of available options for leading meaningful lives across the globe, it is difficult to imagine how the former interests could ever outweigh the latter in decisions about immigration policies – such is the point that Pevnick tries to make.

Again, Miller disagrees. He builds on his idea of ethical particularism by arguing that the moral obligations of distributive justice between compatriots carry considerably more weight than those between inhabitants of different nations (Miller, 2005, p. 198). Nonetheless, Miller does recognize that affluent states cannot simply shut their borders and do nothing if living standards in other countries fall below a certain minimal threshold. However, he suggests that states may best contribute to the relief of global poverty by "improving conditions of life on the ground, as it were, rather than bypassing the problem by allowing (inevitably selective) inward migration" (p. 199).

3.2 – Challenging the liberal institutions argument

The second argument in favor of restrictive immigration policies begins from the observation that potential immigrants usually do not possess the same national identity as the community of people that inhabit the destination country. If these newcomers become part of the state, their membership will undermine the feelings of solidarity, trust and understanding that are conditional upon the functioning of the liberal institutions of democracy and social justice. Therefore, membership in the state must be restricted to those who carry the relevant national identity – and those who do not possess it should not be let in. How has this second line of reasoning been criticized?

Two important counterarguments are related to a principle formulated by Abizadeh (2006). "An associative duty or liberty to close borders would exist only if (1) the fulfilment of genuine special responsibilities somehow requires closed borders and (2) the requirement to fulfill those special responsibilities through closed borders is not overridden by closure's impact on general responsibilities to outsiders." (p. 7) Let us start by considering the first of these conditions. It checks an empirical claim: the special responsibilities between members of the same nation can only be fulfilled if borders are closed. By "special responsibilities", we understand the duties that are generally realized through the institutions of democracy and social justice. If these institutions can just as well function when borders are open, we have no reason to close them – such is Abizadeh's idea.

In fact, the claim that the functioning of the institutions of the liberal state depends on the existence of a shared national identity, has been widely challenged from an empirical point of view. This applies to the institutions of both democracy and social justice. With regard to the former, Abizadeh (2006) states: "liberal democracy and social integration are not dependent on the existence of a single national public culture in any thick sense" (p. 3). Specifically, he challenges Kymlicka's idea that a shared national background and common

language are necessary for the trust and understanding that make democracy possible. In the first place, Abizadeh (2002) denies that the social trust that is necessary for a well-functioning democracy requires a common national culture. He explains: "I would wager that, given the choice, informed Iranian journalists accused of some crime would 'trust' a German judge to grant them a fair trial far more than they would trust an Iranian judge, with whom they presumably share a common culture" (p. 501). In the second place, he challenges the view that a common language is quintessential for meaningful public discussion. "Democratic deliberation at a societal level is often mediated via the media, and multilingual media personnel can and do serve to bridge the communicational gaps at the societal level between individuals who do not speak the same language." (p. 503)

With regard to system of social welfare, it is again Pevnick (2007) who challenges the empirical claim that the institution can only function appropriately when borders are closed. His arguments are twofold. The first one follows Abizadeh in denying the necessity of a shared national identity as a basis for the institutions of the liberal state altogether. These institutions can generate their own support, it is claimed: "[a]gainst the view that diversity necessarily undermines the provision of public goods, many analysts argue that the trust on which the welfare state relies depends more on the shape of the institutions than on the identity of the population that they serve" (p. 3). Thus if welfare programs manage to incorporate immigrants in a way that current citizens see as fair, they will maintain their support. Pevnick's second argument, on the other hand, starts from the supposition that a shared national identity is indeed necessary as a foundation for the institutions of the liberal state. However, such an identity does not constitute a pre-political given beyond human control: "scholars of nationality regularly argue that identification with such communities is socially constructed; it is (at least partly) the result of institutionally created shared experiences, stories and myths" (p. 4.). If a shared identity can be engineered through a public mythology, states could therefore just as well refrain from restrictive immigration policies, and focus instead on the construction and communication of a public mythology that is to convince the masses that the newcomers belong to the nation too. Both these two arguments – henceforth: the "institutional view" and "social construct view" respectively – suggest that Abizadeh's first condition is not met: the fulfilment of special responsibilities between co-nationals does not require closed borders.

The second of Abizadeh's conditions involves a normative question: does the moral requirement to fulfill special responsibilities between insiders by closing borders override closure's impact on general responsibilities to outsiders? Now leave aside the empirical

objections of the institutional view and the social construct view expressed above. In other words, suppose that members of the same nation could only fulfil the special responsibilities that they owe to each other by blocking the entry of immigrants. Does this provide us with a *justification* to close the state's borders? Pevnick (2007) thinks it does not. Rather than a moral justification, it gives a pragmatic reason for this decision – one that "masks an undefended normative assumption" (p. 6).

What does this normative assumption boil down to? Pevnick (2007) explains: "Even if increased immigration and the crumbling of the welfare state would have bad consequences for current citizens, it is likely that the *overall* consequences of such a scenario (including and weighing equally the needs and interests of foreigners) would be better than the overall consequences of the *status quo* (because those from poor countries have a tremendous amount to gain by accessing productive economies). In the absence of an explanation for why we should prioritize the needs and interests of compatriots, the appeal to consequences is therefore erroneous." (p. 6) Abizadeh (2006) shares Pevnick's position: "given current levels of [global] inequality, such a justification of borders, grounded in special responsibilities and capable of overcoming the distributive objection, is not forthcoming" (p. 8).

This line of reasoning is similar to the objection against the control claim that was described in the previous section: the interests of citizens currently inhabiting a state can never constitute a justification for limiting immigration *in their own right*: they have to be weighed against the interests of potential immigrants. As we already saw, Miller could rebut this argument by referring to the moral demands of his form of ethical particularism. Nonetheless, Abizadeh and Pevnick draw the attention to an important concern regarding the liberal nationalist position: limiting immigration cannot be justified by merely pointing to the consequences for those within the boundaries of the state – the interests of those outside should be taken into account as well.

One last objection against the liberal institutions argument remains. Suppose that we accept both the empirical claim that the institutions of the liberal state require the existence of a common nationality, and the normative idea that the interests of insiders override those of outsiders. Even if this argument is successful, so Pevnick (2007) contends, it only provides reason to prevent immigrants from joining the community that these institutions apply to – it does *not* provide reason to prevent immigrants from entering the state's territory (pp. 11-12). According to Pevnick, liberal nationalists wrongly depict citizenship in the destination country as an "all or nothing bundle" (p. 10). In fact, the privileges and burdens of citizenship can be disaggregated into "claims of residence" and "claims of membership". Whereas claims

of residence only include the most basic entitlements such as the right to live and to work in a certain territory, claims of membership also comprise privileges such as the right to vote and to receive social insurance benefits.

Distinguishing between these two forms of citizenship enables us to find a potential solution to the putative incompatibility of unrestricted immigration and well-functioning institutions in the liberal state. This solution is constituted by the possibility to grant immigrants claims of residence, thereby allowing them to enter the state – without granting them claims of membership, thereby preserving the closed community of citizens who partake in the institutions of democracy and social justice (Pevnick, 2007, p. 12). Liberal nationalists tend to ignore this possibility, even though many migrants in fact seek for residence instead of membership in the state. The reluctance to allow for different kinds of citizenship is clearly present in Miller's (2000) plea for a republican conception of citizenship, in which the various privileges and burdens of membership in the state are presented as one integral package (pp. 82-89). According to Pevnick (2007), liberal nationalists thus present us with a false choice between restricting immigration and preserving our democracy and welfare state on the one hand, and allowing for unlimited immigration and abandoning these institutions on the other. This leads him to conclude that the liberal institutions argument in favor of immigration restrictions, like the individual interest argument, does not hold.

CHAPTER 4: FINAL EVALUATION

The previous chapters have provided an extensive overview of the most important arguments that have been put forward in the debate about the liberal nationalist position on immigration. This chapter starts by briefly summarizing these arguments. This will enable us, as a next step, to weigh all of the considerations against each other in an attempt to develop a final judgment on the force of the liberal nationalist line of reasoning. This exercise will be structured along the same lines as the discussion above: first we will evaluate the individual interest argument and the objections it faces; then the liberal institutions argument and the protests against it. The chapter will be concluded by an eventual verdict on the crucial question: does liberal nationalism ultimately succeed in showing that a state may be justified in privileging a national culture, identity or community in political decisions about immigration policies in a way that is consistent with liberal principles?

4.1 – Summarizing the arguments

Before we proceed to the evaluation of the positions that we encountered, let us briefly look back at our traces. Chapter 2 started out with an explanation of the basic principle of liberal nationalism. Then, two distinct arguments in favor of restricting immigration were abstracted from it. According to the individual interest argument, limiting immigration is necessary in order to protect the national culture, since it is crucial to the autonomy and well-being of the individual (the context of choice claim), and since individuals have an interest in shaping the cultural development of their nation (the control claim). According to the liberal institutions argument, immigration restrictions are needed since freely allowing any potential immigrant to enter would undermine the social trust, solidarity and understanding, generated by ties of nationality, that make democracy and social justice possible.

In chapter 3, we saw that both of these arguments face a number of objections. Against the individual interest argument, it was first of all asserted that national identities need not be entirely constant in order to provide individuals with a context of choice. Secondly, it was disputed that the interest that individuals might have in controlling cultural change within their nation would ever outweigh the interests of potential immigrants. Against the liberal institutions argument, it was first of all claimed that a national identity may not even be necessary as a foundation for democracy and social justice: these institutions could generate their own support (the institutional view). Secondly, it was argued that, even if we accepted the necessity of national identity, such an identity could be actively created by means of a

public mythology (the social construct view). Thirdly, the liberal institutions argument was also faced with the objection that the insiders' interests regarding democracy and social justice are likely to be outweighed by the claims of outsiders. Fourthly and lastly, we were presented with the option of distinguishing between citizens partaking in the institutions of the liberal state, and resident-aliens who may only live and work within its boundaries. With these arguments fresh in our memories, we can now turn to the evaluation of the positions within the debate.

4.2 – The individual interest argument: the weakness of the control claim

Liberal nationalism's context of choice claim, establishing the importance of national identity to the autonomy and well-being of individuals, is a powerful one. We could follow Raz (1986) in understanding autonomy as the capacity to make choices about how to live from a range of meaningful options. Well-being, in turn, results from the successful pursuit of those life purposes that someone chooses for himself (pp. 369-372). Making sense of the range of options that is available and deciding which goals to strive for in life, requires the ability to attach meaning to these options and to assess their value. Crucially, an individual can only make such judgments about the meaning and value of different options within a framework of language and culture that is determined by his national background. Whether to marry or not, which occupation to pursue, what color to paint our house – we can only make such decisions within the frame of reference that we developed within our specific national context. Therefore it seems that liberal nationalists are right to observe that individuals have an important interest in the preservation of their national identity, or the distinctive culture that is constitutive of it.

However, there are strong reasons to assume that someone's national identity may very well evolve over time, while still serving the vital function of providing him with a context of choice. To see why this is true, think of the continuous process of experience that shapes each person's frame of reference throughout his life. As an individual grows older, he is confronted with an ever increasing number of words from his national language and aspects of his national culture. Each time he encounters such a new element, his context of choice is slightly altered. A twelve-year-old may choose to paint his room red because it is his favorite color; the same person may at a later age decide not to paint the front of his house red as he has come to be aware that this color is generally associated with the Communist movement in his country, which he is not affiliated with. Is it a bad thing if someone's context of choice changes as he comes across new aspects of language and culture? Presumably, it is not. As

long as he can still employ his national background as a frame of reference for making meaningful choices, it is hard to see how slight adjustments of its content would hamper his autonomy or well-being. Nonetheless, it takes time to incorporate newly discovered elements into one's framework of choice: one has to recognize these elements, make sense of them, accept them as new points of reference and practice in using them as such. But if individuals are allowed the time to go through this process, there is no reason to assume that their autonomy or well-being is hindered as their national identity evolves with time.

If this is true for the individual who encounters new aspects of his nationality as he grows older, it might as well be true for the person that is faced with unfamiliar elements within his nation as these are introduced by newcomers. Provided that the original inhabitants are not faced with too many different novelties within too short a period of time, they could reasonably be expected to incorporate these new elements into their context of choice without experiencing damage to their autonomy or well-being. All in all, Pevnick's (2008) conclusion regarding the context of choice claim turns out to be right: "[a] slowly evolving culture or a culture different in important ways from some traditional ideal is capable of providing the necessary cultural context and consistent with individuals being at home within it" (p. 103).

This notion of national identity as ever transforming, rather than set in stone, seems to be in accord with the liberal nationalist view of nationality in its initial formulation. In *On Nationality* (1995), Miller stresses that national identities are "above all 'imagined' identities, where the content of the imagining changes with time" (p. 127). Ideally, this process of change "should consist in a collective conversation in which many voices can join. No voice has a privileged status: those who seek to defend traditional interpretations enter the conversation on an equal footing with those who want to propose changes." (ibid.) On a similar note, Kymlicka (2001b) points out that "in a liberal nation, the societal culture is an open and pluralistic one, which borrows whatever it finds worthwhile in other cultures, integrates it into its own practices, and passes it on to subsequent generations" (p. 260). If these quotations accurately capture the essence of the liberal nationalist view of national identity, then how could immigration possibly be regarded as problematic in character?

This is where the control claim comes in. In his essay *Immigration: The Case for Limits* (2005) Miller states that "the public culture of their country is something that people have an interest in controlling: they want to be able to shape the way that their nation develops, including the values that are contained in the public culture" (p. 200). Specifically, he argues that people may have good reasons to "try to maintain cultural continuity over time, so that they can see themselves as the bearers of an identifiable cultural tradition that stretches

backward historically" (ibid.). From this perspective, closed borders do not seem so unreasonable after all.

However, this line of reasoning appears to be inconsistent with the liberal nationalist notion of national identity. This becomes clear if we ask the question: what does it mean for someone to control the way in which his national identity develops? A first possibility is that the control claim constitutes a statement about the group of people that should have the power to determine how the national identity will evolve. In this sense, an individual could be understood as having control over the cultural change within his nation, if public deliberation about the matter is restricted to those who are already member of the nation. Should we thus interpret Miller's (1995) idea of "a collective conversation in which many voices can join" (p. 127) as one in which actually only those who have always been part of the nation are heard? I believe the answer is no. To see why, consider the next passage from *On Nationality*: "[a]ll [nationality] needs to ask of immigrants is a willingness to accept current political structures and to engage in dialogue with the host community so that a new common identity can be forged" (pp. 129-130). Apparently, immigrants are indeed qualified as participants in the debate.

Then what does the control claim establish? A second possibility is that it is a substantive claim regarding the nature of cultural change. Whoever may join the collective conversation regarding the development of the national culture, the right to cultural continuity of the original members of the national community should always be reflected in the outcome. However, this interpretation is at odds with Miller's (1995) view that "those who seek to defend traditional interpretations enter the conversation on an equal footing with those who want to propose changes" (p. 127.) Thus, both readings of Miller's control claim run counter to previous statements that he has made.

Underlying the control claim seems to be the thought that the individual has an interest in not having to adapt himself to a change in the national identity that has been brought about by the newcomers to his nation. It is important to see that Miller does not regard the necessity to adapt *in general* as harmful to the interest of the individual. After all, we learned that national identities are always subject to a process of change that is steered by a public debate on the question what it means to be part of the nation. We can assume that this public dialogue will always be characterized by a variety of opinions. This is true even if all those who join in the conversation were born within the nation-state's boundaries. Therefore, no individual can ever reasonably expect that the process of cultural change exactly matches his particular wishes. However, Miller only seems to find it problematic if an individual has to

adjust to some cultural change that does not entirely conform to his desires, if the necessity to adapt results from the input of outsiders to the nation. What he fails to do, is to provide a reason why it is not problematic if someone has to adjust to a certain development that results from the contributions of his fellow nationals to the public debate, whereas it does harm his interest if he has to adapt to some change that is introduced by newcomers to the nation.

Interestingly, Miller (2005) appears to be aware of this ambivalence in his own theory when he states that "the most valuable cultures are those that can develop and adapt to new circumstances, including the presence of new subcultures associated with immigrants" (p. 200). Nonetheless, he holds onto his position that the interest of individuals in controlling the way that their national culture develops can justify the restriction of immigration. All in all, we can conclude that he does not manage to ground this control claim on a line of reasoning that is both convincing and coherent. On the other hand, we saw that the context of choice claim is indeed backed by a persuasive line of argument. This observation is important for our conclusions regarding the liberal nationalist position on immigration.

Suppose that we accept the hypothesis that immigration is likely to change a nation's culture – as I think we should. The context of choice claim presents us with a strong reason to limit immigration from the point that it starts to transcend the capacity of individuals to incorporate the cultural elements that are introduced by newcomers into their context of choice. But the control claim does not succeed in giving us a reason for restricting immigration in general, in an effort to give individuals the power to control the development of "their" national identity. In fact, we can agree with Miller's position as it was formulated in *On Nationality* (1995): "this points, however, not towards preventing immigration, but to limiting its rate according to the absorptive capacities of the society in question" (p. 129). But we should reject the conclusion of his later *Immigration: The Case for Limits* (2005): "a political judgment needs to be made about the scale and type of immigration that will enrich rather than dislocate the existing public culture" (p. 201).

4.3 – The liberal institutions argument: the power of the social construct view

Liberal nationalists do not only succeed in giving a convincing account of the importance of national identity for the autonomy and well-being of the individual, they also construct a powerful logic regarding the use of national identity for the institutions of social justice and democracy. Generally, such institutions apply to large numbers of individuals who, for the most part, do not know each other personally. It seems unlikely that these individuals would be willing to make sacrifices for one another; trustful that such favors would be returned;

understanding of one another's interests and concerns; and confident that others would take theirs into account – if the state institutions claiming their allegiance were the only things connecting them. Indeed, it seems plausible that the bonds of nationality, which give people the idea that they belong to the same group, account for the feelings of mutual solidarity, trust and understanding that permit individuals to cooperate in systems of social justice and democracy.

In the previous chapter, we learned that the empirical accuracy of this part of the liberal institutions argument has been attacked by the institutional view. From this perspective, the functioning of the institutions of democracy and social justice is in no sense dependent upon the existence of a shared nationality. If these institutions are just, they generate their own support – so it is argued. Some, though not all, empirical studies confirm this thesis (Pevnick, 2007, p. 3). Nonetheless, the institutional view does not seem to be a forceful challenge of the liberal institutions argument. This becomes clear if we look at the example of the European Union.

Let us start from the observation that the EU moved both the institutions of democracy and social justice, in some form, to a supranational level. After all, the citizens of member states now get to vote for the European Parliament and, as a result of the EU's budgetary politics, experience the consequences of a certain degree of redistribution of resources between these states (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011). However, this way of realizing democracy and some degree of social justice at the European level has not been an easy undertaking. After the rise of several anti-EU parties in various countries throughout the Union, the British call for a referendum regarding a so-called "Brexit", and the recent Dutch popular vote against the Association Treaty between the EU and Ukraine, it has become difficult to deny that the European integration encounters substantial opposition from large parts of the European population.

If we assume that the institutions of the EU are just, then the gap in public support for the European schemes of democracy and social justice presents the institutional view with an inexplicable case: apparently, just institutions do not always generate their own support. From a liberal nationalist point of view, the current resistance against European integration is hardly surprising. The EU lacks a common national identity that makes British citizens willing to make sacrifices for Romanians; that makes the Dutch trustful that their favor as one of the biggest net contributors will ever be returned; that makes the Greek confident that their interests are taken into account by the other European voters; and that makes democratic deliberation in a single language that everyone understands possible. The example of the EU

thus suggests that we should recognize the importance of national identity as a basis for the functioning of liberal institutions, and that the institutional view should be rejected.

However, this does not mean that we should also accept the next step in the liberal institutions argument, stating that the role of national identity in laying the foundation for the institutions of the liberal state justifies closed border policies. Remember that this inference was challenged by the social construct view. On this account, it is indeed assumed that only a national identity can provide people with the feelings of mutual trust, understanding and solidarity, upon which the institutions of the liberal state can build. Yet, it stresses that a national identity can in fact be modified in a way that it includes newcomers to the nation as well. How convincing is this line of argument?

At the beginning of this research, we learned that national identities are not "given" or "fixed", but are constituted by feelings of belonging that are fostered through means of mass communication. Miller (1995) emphasizes that "[w]hat holds nations together are beliefs (…), but these beliefs cannot be transmitted except through cultural artefacts which are available to everyone who belongs – books, newspapers, pamphlets, and more recently the electronic media." (p. 32) If this is true, then Pevnick (2007) has a good point in asking: if a shared national identity is an empirical prerequisite for systems of democracy and social justice, why not *create* the communities of shared identity needed to maintain them? (p. 4) Here we witness the birth of the social construct view. If we follow Miller's understanding of national identity, we can indeed imagine that media of mass communication are employed in order to spread a newly constructed public mythology of which newcomers are part as well, thus including them in the national community to which the institutions of democracy and social justice apply. Hence, we must conclude that the social construct view in fact presents us with a suitable alternative to restricting immigration in order to protect the institutions of the liberal state.

Still, it has to be acknowledged that such a change in national identity should not be too radical or too abrupt. For one thing, a national identity cannot be engineered out of thin air. History shows that national identities may partly be the product of the elites' efforts to unite the inhabitants of their territory behind a common cause, but they are also rooted in pre-existing ethnic identities and shaped by historical figures, deeds and incidents (Miller, 2000, pp. 87-88). An identity that is invented in order to include newcomers in the national community, but does not stretch backward historically in any sense, is therefore unlikely to succeed. The newly constructed national identity should rather build on the foundations of the earlier notion of nationality, while at the same time either incorporating the foreign cultural

elements that were introduced by newcomers, or embracing the acceptance of immigrants as an act of national virtue. For another thing, a change of national identity should always be gradual for reasons that were explained in the previous section. In order to enable the original members of the nation to get used to the new elements within their national culture and to accept them as parts of their context of choice, a national identity cannot be transformed too quickly. As long as these two requirements are met, the creation of a national identity of which newcomers are part constitutes a promising alternative to restricting immigration in an attempt to preserve the institutions of democracy and social justice.

To come back to the example of the EU once more, we could use the insights of the social construct view in order to develop a solution to the problem concerning public support for the European institutions as well. The social construct view suggests that the creation of a unified European identity may provide the EU citizens with a basis of trust, understanding and solidarity upon which the common institutions can then build. In fact, this is what Pevnick (2007) proposes with regard to the erection of European institutions of social justice: "EU leaders may gradually instill a common European identity in members that will eventually support redistribution across member states" (p. 5). Still, the considerations mentioned above indicate that the engineering of such a European identity should not be done in a precipitous or reckless manner.

So far, we can conclude that liberal nationalism presents us with valuable insights regarding the significance of national identity to the autonomy and well-being of the individual and to the functioning of the fundamental institutions of the liberal state – but that its inferences about immigration, at least in some formulations, have not been entirely valid. However, we have not yet evaluated all of the counterarguments that Pevnick and Abizadeh put forward.

First, remember Pevnick's (2007) idea of distinguishing between citizens who enjoy full membership in the state, and resident-aliens who may only live and work in it. At first sight, this suggestion seems to weaken the liberal institutions argument, as it presents us with a possibility of maintaining the institutions of democracy and social justice while at the same time admitting immigrants to enter the state. However, the proposal can be easily rejected if we appeal to the individual interest argument. The individual interest argument points out that the presence of large numbers of newcomers tends to impact upon a nation's culture, because of both the population growth that accompanies immigration and the arrival of new cultural elements that immigrants bring with them. This change of the national culture will occur regardless of the status of the newcomers as either full citizens or resident-aliens. Therefore,

we still have reason to restrict immigration if it exceeds the point where individuals can no longer adapt their context of choice to these cultural changes without experiencing a decline of their autonomy or well-being.

Second, we saw that both Pevnick (2007) and Abizadeh (2006) try to refute the two liberal nationalist arguments in favor of immigration restriction by pointing out that the interests of citizens living in the destination country are normally outweighed by the interests of potential immigrants. However, this probably constitutes one of the less forceful ways to attack the liberal nationalist standpoint. After all, liberal nationalists explicitly endorse a particularist view of ethics, according to which individuals have special obligations towards their fellow nationals that they do not owe towards people in general. Liberal nationalists can thus justify the "unequal" weighing of the interests of outsiders and insiders respectively.

Still, liberal nationalists tend to acknowledge that the interests of potential immigrants should be taken seriously as well. For Miller (1995) this means that states have a prima facie obligation to admit refugees, defined as "people who are being deprived of rights to subsistence, basic healthcare, etc." (p. 202). However, he notes later on, "states have to be given considerable autonomy to decide on how to respond to particular asylum applications" (p. 203). Although this position logically follows from the liberal nationalists concerns regarding the preservation of national identity, this chapter has given us good reasons to believe that the autonomy of states to decide on such matters should not be so "considerable" in the end. After all, we established that states only have reasons for restricting immigration if such policies are needed in order to prevent too abrupt or too radical a change of national identity.

4.4 – The liberal nationalist position: legitimate concerns, invalid inferences

What final verdict on the liberal nationalist position on immigration can we now reach? First of all, it has become clear that liberal nationalists address some important issues that should not be overlooked in considering matters of immigration. National identities do play a significant role in providing individuals with a background against which they make life choices, and in securing the dispositions of solidarity, trust and understanding that make people participate in systems of democracy and social justice. However, we have also seen that it is possible for states to sustain these valuable functions of national identity while allowing immigrants to cross their borders.

There are two situations in which states may justifiably restrict immigration. The first occurs if the arrival of immigrants, bringing with them distinct cultural elements, exceeds the

capacity of current citizens to digest slight changes of culture by adapting their context of choice. In this case, the individual interest argument provides a good reason for limiting the amount of newcomers to the nation. The second situation arises when it is no longer possible for the state to construct and communicate a new national identity of which the immigrants are part, that builds on the earlier national identity in a credible way, and that does not demand too rapid an accommodation by the individuals belonging to the nation. In this case, the liberal institutions argument serves as a ground for restricting immigration.

All in all, liberal nationalism's concerns respecting national identity are legitimate, but its inferences regarding immigration policies are not all equally valid. Specifically, we should reject the view that considerations regarding the preservation of national identity justify states *in general* to decide for themselves whether to accept immigrants or not. After all, we saw that the individual interest and liberal institutions argument only provide reason to limit immigration under specific circumstances that do not apply generally.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Our journey started out with the question whether the practice of privileging a national culture, identity or community in political decisions about immigration policies can be justified in a way that is consistent with liberal principles. An affirmative answer to this question can be found in the theory of liberal nationalism. The arguments are twofold and rely on the importance of national identity for the fulfillment of the fundamental ideals of liberalism. Firstly, it is in the interest of the individual to have a national identity that equips him with a background against which meaningful choices can be made, and to be in control of the development of this national identity. Secondly, the liberal institutions of democracy and social justice depend on feelings of solidarity, trust and understanding that can only be generated by the bonds of nationality. As the arrival of newcomers with different cultural values tends to endanger the national identity of those inhabiting the destination country – so the liberal nationalist argues – the state is justified in limiting immigration. This last conclusion, however, turns out to be too quick.

Two particular considerations regarding the nature of national identities are of special importance in this regard. In the first place, national identities need not be entirely constant in order to provide individuals with a context of choice. Indeed, individuals are perfectly capable of accepting slight changes of their national identity without experiencing a decline in autonomy or well-being, even in the case that these are brought about by the arrival of newcomers to the nation. In the second place, national communities are constituted by a sense of belonging on the part of their members. Crucially, such feelings can be generated by the construction of a public mythology that credibly defines the national identity and is carefully communicated to the masses.

If we take these aspects of national identity into account, we can see that a general restriction of immigration is often not necessary. First, a flow of immigration need not damage the autonomy and well-being of the citizens inhabiting the destination country, as long as they have the time to adapt to the cultural change that accompanies the arrival of newcomers in the nation. Second, the institutions of democracy and social justice can be sustained and extended to include the group of immigrants, if a new national identity of which the newcomers are part is prudently constructed and transmitted to all members of the nation. Only if admitting immigrants is not possible without an overly abrupt transformation of people's contexts of choice, or without resorting to an excessively farfetched public mythology, restrictive immigration policies can be justified.

Naturally, much more can be said on the issue of closed borders within liberal theory. This research has demonstrated for what reasons and in what ways considerations about national identity should be taken into account in the setup of a state's immigration policies. Still, it should be acknowledged that this study is limited in some ways. For one thing, the thesis of ethical particularism, central to liberal nationalist thought, has not been subjected to critical scrutiny here. Presumably, many relevant points can be made about the question whether certain relationships between people do indeed give rise to special moral duties; if the bonds of nationality can be qualified as such a relationship; and to what extent this can justify the exclusion of outsiders to the nation. For another thing, the conclusions of this research regarding the practice of restricting immigration ultimately remain fairly abstract: closing borders is permitted as soon as the change of national identity that immigration causes or requires, is too abrupt or too radical. It remains unclear, however, how it could be established when exactly this tipping point is reached.

Also, more research should be done in order to examine whether some central assumptions of this study are in line with empirical reality. Is it true that people can only process a certain degree of change in their national identity (as we presumed in the context of choice claim)? Can we indeed expect governments to influence this process of change (as was supposed in the social construct view)? If these conjectures were backed by empirical evidence, the conclusions of this research would gain strength. Whether or not future studies will address these particular issues – given current levels of public concern regarding the topic of immigration we may expect that this area of research will keep getting a lot of attention for some time to come.

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