

What Immigrants Owe Society¹

In recent years, there has been extensive debate on the rights of minority groups in political philosophy and in popular debate. It is less common, at least in political philosophy, to instead ask what obligations immigrants have toward their new society. In popular discussion, though, these questions are hotly contested. Nyamko Sabuni, Swedish minister for integration and gender equality, voices a common view in Europe:

“A lot of people misread their rights,” she said recently. “They think that freedom of religion means they can do anything in the name of religion, or that human rights mean that they can act however they want against others.” Not true, she said. “If they want to live here, have kids, have grandchildren, they must make an effort to adapt to the society where they live.”²

Though views similar to Ms. Sabuni’s are often expressed, it is not clear what *adapting* to the society where they live involves. Has someone who works full time, obeys the law, and speaks the language adapted? What about someone who understands the dominant belief system, but rejects it in her personal life – has she failed to adapt? Is successful adaptation measured in terms of subjective attitudes – e.g., “I feel part of the larger society” – or objective indicators like language ability or employment outside of one’s ethnic community? At one extreme, adaptation will approach assimilation and take place across generations. At the other extreme, it requires relatively little.

Most pertinent, for our purposes, are the *moral* reasons why immigrants might have an obligation to adapt. Obviously, there are prudential reasons for integration. Costs accompany failure to conform. People who dress or act differently will experience

¹ I would like to thank the participants at the 2008 Canadian Philosophical Association Congress, especially Sandra Tomsons for her valuable commentary, Phillip Constantineau for his remark about the centrality of citizenship to the topic, and Ann Levey invaluable discussion and for encouraging me not to abandon the paper. Many others have provided very helpful comments, including Dale Dorsey, who acted as a reviewer for the CPA, Kai Nielsen, Travis Dumsday, and Gillman Payette.

² New York Times, January 13, 2007.

prejudice, at least from some individuals. Those who don't speak the language of majority fluently, besides suffering the daily obstacles and humiliations accompanying the inability to communicate effectively, are unlikely to find decent employment. It is not hard to provide arguments for why it is in the self-interest of immigrants (and their children) to take steps toward integration.

It is more difficult to find moral arguments, especially keeping in mind that integrating into a new society is a considerable burden. It involves a great deal of time and effort to understand a new culture, become fluent in a language and modify one's behavior accordingly. Beyond this, integration challenges one's self-conception, identity, and life plan (unless one's life plan is to integrate!). Liberalism places considerable weight on our right to develop our own identities and follow our own life plan (assuming, of course, that it doesn't harm others). It is hard to see how immigrants could be morally obligated to abandon their self-conceptions.

In what follows I will discuss one ground for a moral obligation to integrate – the notion of an implicit contract. I will argue that this provides moderate grounds for a moral obligation to integrate, most notably the obligation to learn the official language. However, as I will show, these obligations don't extend to lifestyle choice or family.

Three Assumptions and a Puzzle

This paper makes three assumptions. First, it focuses on so-called “economic migrants,” those who choose to immigrate in search of a better or perhaps different life. What is said does not apply in a straightforward manner to refugees who flee persecution or to migrants in dire need. In practice, the line between forced and voluntary migration is

unclear: economic hardship, domestic insecurity and family ties motivate many, if not most migrants. I ignore these complications.

Second, debate around multiculturalism often concerns government coercion. Can the government ban the hijab from schools and other public places? Are certain laws discriminatory toward some groups? Individuals are under legal coercion to conform or are prevented from accessing opportunities that others enjoy. These questions are important and urgent, but do not concern us here. Instead, this paper limits itself to the moral obligations of immigrants. Immigrants do not, for the most part, have special legal obligations that ordinary citizens do not possess.³ If anything, immigrants may be exempt from some laws which unjustly prejudice them. Those who have chosen not to become citizens may not be entitled to the full set of political rights, but this stems from their choice not to become full members. Unlike legal obligations, moral obligations exist even if they are not enforced – perhaps even if they *shouldn't* be enforced. For example, it is often argued that immigrants have a moral obligation to learn the language of majority. It would be more problematic to claim that they ought to have a legal obligation to learn the language.

Third, I am interested in the obligations that immigrants have who come to *liberal* societies. Liberalism guarantees individual autonomy through constitutional rights and freedoms such as freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of association and the like. In so far as non-liberal forms of government are legitimate – I have my doubts to what extent they are – my arguments do not apply.

³ In fact, as Robert Goodin stresses, immigrants, insofar as they have not yet naturalized, may have *fewer* legal obligations. Robert Goodin, “What is so special about our fellow countrymen?” *Ethics*. July 1998: 663-686.

Part of the challenge of determining the moral obligations immigrants have to society is that we don't have an uncontroversial idea what citizens in general owe their society. This difficulty can be somewhat avoided with the assumption that new members will tend to have similar obligations as citizens born in a given territory. This allows us to concentrate on the exceptions: are there any respects in which new members have different or stronger obligations?

What is perplexing about a moral obligation to integrate is that it is often argued that some minorities do not have an obligation to integrate. First, many people argue aboriginal groups not only have no a duty to integrate to a larger society, but there are strong obligations to help them retain their traditional culture. Part of this is grounded on the conviction that aboriginal groups have a right to sovereignty and self-determination which distinguish them from ethnic minorities. Still, something similar is sometimes thought about the Amish, Hutterites or Mennonites, though it is less common to hear that governments should promote their cultures. Second, a significant part of the population adopts an alternative lifestyle such as religious fundamentalism, simple living or "non-traditional" family arrangements. Though it is controversial to claim that the state has an obligation to actively support these lifestyles, liberals generally agree that people are for the most part free to choose how they care to live their lives. In all of these cases, it is rarely said that there is a moral obligation to integrate.

Admittedly, liberal tolerance itself is controversial, but this need not concern us. Immigrant groups often appeal to liberal principles such as rights to defend themselves from discrimination. Without recourse to these liberal assumptions, they will have difficulty defending any right to remain distinct. Conservatives, communitarians and

authoritarians, insofar as they appeal to moral principles, have a much easier task. The challenge is to make a case for an obligation to integrate which respects autonomy, tolerance and a robust set of basic rights. Even people who support aboriginal rights to self-determination and respect most alternative lifestyles may still feel that the situation of immigrants is somehow different. In fact, many immigrants are proud of their ability to speak fluently and blend in, learn the etiquette of the dominant group and make friends outside of their ethnic community. It is not uncommon to hear them criticize people in their ethnic community who are unable or unwilling to take these steps.

What is puzzling is why people who are born in a particular region are entitled to rights and freed from obligations that others have. Place of birth is morally arbitrary and many of the reasons for why aboriginal and other traditional cultures have value also apply to established ethnic groups. Aboriginal groups preserve a way of life that has intrinsic value, but so do ethnic groups.⁴ Liberal multiculturalists argue that aboriginal cultures provide their members with a context for meaningful choice. Ethnic cultures do the same. Except for the fact that the aboriginal groups' migration took place before the modern state was established, it is hard to pinpoint what distinguishes them.

In fact, recognition of the rights of aboriginal peoples to retain and enjoy their culture and toleration of alternative lifestyles has only been achieved recently, if at all.⁵ Arguably, political morality has progressed in recent years and more people have come to appreciate the value of other ways of life. If the situation of immigrant groups turns out to

⁴ It does not do to claim that ethnic groups' way of life is preserved in their country of origin. Diasporas transform aspects of the culture they came from and, on occasion, retain ancestral traditions that others who share their ethnicity have lost.

⁵ Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US recently rejected the non-binding United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted 13 September 2007). Among their objections was the reference to indigenous groups' right to self-determination.

be symmetrical to that of aboriginal groups, it might turn out that the more radical proponents of the politics of difference are correct: immigrants should not only retain but proclaim their unique cultural identity.

On the other hand, some of the most compelling reasons for some degree of integration are consequentialist. The modern state engages in nation-building to ensure a common public culture. Fundamental disagreement about basic institutions threatens stability. The provision of public goods is much easier when there is a common set of assumptions; their administration is facilitated if there are a small number of official languages. The guiding claim behind these concerns is that diversity has costs as well as benefits. But if these claims made for a common culture are right, then they apply just as much to aboriginal groups as to immigrants.

If there is indeed an asymmetry, what explains it? The obvious response is that the choice of immigrants to migrate must give rise to a moral obligation. If this is true, what is it about this choice that could generate moral obligations? What obligations are acquired?

Integration and Assimilation

Before discussing new members' moral obligations, it is necessary to distinguish assimilation and integration. Assimilation demands that immigrants renounce their identity. This will have to take place over a few generations, but the goal is for them to eventually become indistinguishable from the rest of the population. Integration is less demanding. It permits and respects cultural differences, but requires adaptation to public

life. Immigrants and their descendents become part of the broader society, though a distinct part that maintains central traditions and practices.

An extreme demand would be that immigrants assimilate and, insofar as possible, adopt the practices of the dominant culture. This requirement is instructively wrong. First, it is morally repugnant, requiring people to sacrifice their deepest commitments. Today, few, if any, within the liberal tradition will argue that people have an obligation to abandon their religion, change their diet, or speak the language of majority in their private lives. This would cause considerable harm and violate various basic rights, including freedom of religion, expression and conscience. It is difficult to see what, other than racism or aversion to other cultures, could motivate this demand.

Second, assimilation is likely impossible and probably incoherent. It is impossible – or at least very difficult – because it assumes that we can abandon our past. Whatever efforts immigrants make, they are unable to simply erase the web of beliefs, practices and values that give their lives meaning. This is true even in the case of many grandchildren and great grandchildren, who still retain elements of their cultural heritage, sometimes unbeknown to themselves.

It is also incoherent given that even fairly homogenous cultures contain considerable internal heterogeneity. This raises the question: assimilate to what? Pluralism is rampant, across individuals, groups and generations. The assertion of a “national culture” is a myth, as is the “average citizen”. No doubt there are some aspects of the “national culture” that are widespread, but they are far from universal, even among people whose families have lived in the same region for generations. At best we can point out a few central tendencies that virtually all citizens share – language or a commitment

to political and social institutions, for example. But this takes us from assimilation to integration.

Third, assimilation is usually undesirable. Besides the harm it often does, arguably all cultures have something of value. A multicultural society expands people's opportunities and freedom – compare the options open to somebody in a large multicultural city as opposed to a more homogenous urban center. This doesn't mean that diversity has no costs, but that there are grounds for thinking that, in many cases, many types of diversity are desirable.

Though we ought to reject a demand to assimilate, many people, including many immigrants, would agree that new members have an obligation to integrate into the mainstream society. Integration doesn't require renouncing one's cultural identity or traditions (though these will change over time), but it does involve considerable effort and compromise. Besides entering the workforce and (especially for children) schools, it includes attempting to become fluent in the majority language, learning about the culture and history of their new state and entering into dialogue with the majority. Integration will often, though not necessarily always, involve taking steps to become a citizen and participate in the political process. Even if we support bilingual education and multicultural content in schools, most people agree that a major function of primary and secondary education is to socialize students and provide them with tools to flourish in the dominant society.⁶

⁶ Indeed, a common criticism of the more radical proposals for multicultural education is that it may actually disadvantage students if it interferes with their acquiring the tools necessary to enter the workforce and negotiate the norms of the dominant society. Some of these criticisms strike me as strident. For example, there's no reason why students can't become proficient in more than one language. Similarly, multicultural content may very well prepare them for the world they're living in. This doesn't refute the point that part of the function of schools is socialization and, to some extent, to enforce (at least outwardly) conformity to society's norms.

Similarly, many people believe it is regrettable if groups segregate themselves. We need to be careful with this claim, keeping in mind that discrimination and intolerance often cause segregation. The presence of strong, relatively insulated Chinese neighborhoods in North America, for example, almost certainly has its roots in historical and present racism. As well, ethnic neighborhoods provide a support network for new members and help retain traditions that are an important source of many people's identities and well-being. It is likely, in fact, that they can facilitate integration, providing jobs for newcomers, teaching them about their new society and helping them access public services. Furthermore, ethnic neighborhoods usually have porous borders and are open to people from other communities, enriching the society as a whole.

It is important to stress that many complaints about immigrants not integrating are based on racism, prejudice and ignorance.⁷ The fact that someone dresses differently

⁷ A particularly appalling example of this was reported in a January 31, 2007 Globe and Mail article (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070130.wxtown31/EmailBNStory/National/>). The town council of Hérouxville issued a list of rules for would be immigrants (currently they have one immigrant family in a town of 1300). These rules included bans on beating or burning women alive, using a veil or carrying a kirpan. While the kirpan is a controversial issue, Canadian law is clear on beating and burning women; it's illegal and, to the best of my knowledge, no representative of any ethnic group has argued that exceptions should be made. It's hard to imagine what, besides xenophobia and ignorance, motivated the town council.

Susan Moller Okin refers to "cultural defense" in her controversial essay "Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?": "Thus, the four types of case in which cultural defenses have been used most successfully are: kidnap and rape by Hmong men who claim that their actions are part of their cultural practice of *zij poj niam* or 'marriage by capture'; wife-murder by immigrants from Asian and Middle Eastern countries whose wives have either committed adultery or treated their husbands in a servile way; mothers who have killed their children but failed to kill themselves, and claim that because of their Japanese or Chinese backgrounds the shame of their husbands' infidelity drove them to the culturally condoned practice of mother-child suicide; and—in France, though not yet in the United States, in part because the practice was criminalized only in 1996—clitoridectomy. In a number of such cases, expert testimony about the accused's or defendant's cultural background has resulted in dropped or reduced charges, culturally-based assessments of *mens rea*, or significantly reduced sentences." *Boston Review of Books*, October/November 1997. <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR22.5/okin.html>

Unfortunately, Okin did not provide references to the cases to which she refers. Perhaps these practices are condoned in some cultures at least by some of their members, though I would question to what extent they reflect the views of the majority (and whether court testimony of the defence team of someone convicted of a felon is a reliable guide to cultural practice). Regardless, I believe my claim stands: no one who can fairly say to represent an ethnic group in Canada has seriously put forward the view that the assault or murder of women should be tolerated for cultural reasons.

outside of work,⁸ eats food from her region, or speaks her native tongue with her friends and family says little about her level of integration. She might do all of these things and be fluently bilingual or multilingual, work as a government official, and have friends from many sectors of society.

Integration, in a minimal sense, should be understood in terms of adaptation to a society's most central institutional practices. First, integration requires that immigrants identify with and abide by the law; they must recognize its legitimacy when they disagree with it and express disagreement according to established procedures. (Of course, immigrants are in the same position as the rest of us when faced with illegitimate laws which permit or demand civil disobedience or other measures.) Second, immigrants who have integrated are self-supporting within the larger society. They participate in their local economy, usually working beside other members of the community. Third, a certain level of cultural competency is necessary for integration.

These are minimal criteria, but I think reasonable ones. The first two are expectations we have for *all* citizens. We think that if the law is reasonably just, people have an obligation to not simply obey it, but should internalize and support it. This does not require agreeing with every particular law, but it does involve accepting the legal system. Similarly, we expect that, under normal circumstances, all adults make the effort to support themselves. There may be special conditions where the law should accommodate immigrants, but these are exceptions that cohere, rather than conflict, with

I'd like to thank Ann Levey for bringing this passage to my attention.
⁸ The right of an employer to enforce a dress code is questionable, though common. I assume, without argument, that people have a right to wear turbans or headscarves at work, given their importance for individuals' identities. (It's also hard to see what sorts of *genuine* reasons one could have for objecting, outside of safety in certain types of work – and even then compromise is usually possible.) Not all types of traditional dress have this central status to people's identities though. I doubt that requiring employees to dress in a manner that's conventional for their professional and position often poses an unreasonable burden.

liberal concerns. For example, we might think that immigrants, at least when they first arrive, have the right to an interpreter when accessing government services. Native born citizens, on the other hand, cannot decide not to speak a language of majority and demand an interpreter: an Anglophone Brit cannot justifiably demand that her government serve her in Swahili because she has decided not to speak English any more. In the case of the obligation to support one's self, there may be reason to initially provide aid for immigrants until they adapt to their new environment. But this will be a temporary measure, granted because of the special obstacles new members face.⁹

Cultural competency is more ambiguous and demanding. It involves an understanding of the norms and etiquette that most, but not all of us acquire by simply being born into a society. Some aspects, such as knowledge of the official language or languages, are fairly explicit. But in many cases, it is more difficult to measure. Different societies vary in terms of personal space, politeness, appropriate dress and hygiene, as well as on questions such as whether a trip to the supermarket requires bargaining or standing in line. But these practices are often subtle – personal space, for example, is governed by norms of intimacy that are hard to interpret.

People are uncomfortable when confronted by someone who does not follow accepted norms. Clearly, there are prudential reasons for outwardly conforming to dominant norms. But are there also moral obligations? The answer is not obvious. In some cases, people are prejudiced and unreasonable. If people are uneasy when a woman breastfeeds or a gay couple embraces, the problem lies in the eye of the beholder.

⁹ The condition of language competency is somewhat different, since it requires an additional effort from immigrants. I will discuss this below.

Similarly, a society that recoils at the sight of a kippah or turban or sneers when someone speaks Spanish or Arabic in the shopping mall is morally deficient.

Not all cases are like this. In some cultures such as the US it is a norm to express disagreement by screaming insults. The meaning that raising one's voice has depends in part on the cultural context – many American employees shrug off loudmouthed employers – so there is reason to think that this behaviour is especially problematic in some cultural context. But it is morally (and not merely socially inappropriate) if an American manager who lives in Japan verbally berates his subordinates. Another example is physical contact. What some cultures consider a friendly pat on the arm or kiss on the cheek, other cultures interpret as an invasion of private space or a sexual advance.

Cultural competency can have moral implications and it is not unreasonable to think that people who are new to the group have some obligations to adapt. Still, cultural competency is a matter of degree, tempered by the heterogeneity of most societies. And it remains a question whether they have obligations to adapt that are not shared by longstanding minority cultures. Is there a moral obligation to achieve cultural competency and adjust one's behavior that immigrants possess but longstanding minority groups do not? If so, what aspects of cultural competency are required?

The Social Contract and Obligations

One reason to believe that there may be special obligations is the possibility of an implicit contract. The notion of a contract probably plays a role in many people's view that immigrants have an obligation to integrate. By accepting admission or entering a

community, new residents incur special obligations. Besides obeying the law and entering the job market, they agree that they will do their best not to disrupt the social fabric. Could a society require these sorts of moral obligations as a condition for immigration?

Critics from Hume onwards have cast doubt on the use of social contract theory to establish binding obligations on people already under the dominion of the state. Entry into society is not voluntary and the institutions are already fixed. The framework of choice is predetermined. Agents are socialized to accept the dominant norms; those who refuse to consent to its laws and practices are not exempt, but rather punished. Thus, citizens neither have consented nor can genuinely consent to their government. Nor is it clear that if they withhold consent, their government loses its legitimacy and authority over them.

Hume himself explicitly addresses immigration in “On the Social Contract”:

The truest *tacit* consent of this kind that is ever observed, is when a foreigner settles in any country, and is beforehand acquainted with the prince, and government, and laws, to which he must submit: yet is his allegiance, though more voluntary, much less expected or depended on, than that of a natural born subject. On the contrary, his native prince still asserts a claim on him.¹⁰

Hume believes that even if people do migrate, their prince would retain authority over them. His conviction rests on the “common opinion of mankind” which is to some extent still shared – “ex-patriots” may retain some obligations toward their country of origin. This may sometimes be the case, but it does not always apply. Without this qualification,

¹⁰ Travis Dumsday brought to my attention the recent controversy surrounding Canadian Liberal leader Stéphane Dion’s dual (Canadian and French) citizenship. This raises interesting questions about the claims that a foreign sovereign can make on its citizens abroad, especially those who are citizens of another country.

Hume opens the possibility that immigrants may be in a position to incur contractual obligations.

Does this occur when people freely decide to emigrate? I have in mind middle-class economic migrants from the developing world who live reasonably well in their countries of birth. Could the state impose certain obligations as a condition of admission? Particularly, could it require as a condition of admission that these new members integrate to society?

How might these obligations be acquired? Consider the case of somebody moving to a new neighborhood. We agree to certain obligations when we choose to reside in our new neighborhood. These include legal obligations – e.g., we agree to pay school taxes – as well as moral obligations. For example, simply by moving in, it might be argued that I have a moral obligation to volunteer for spring cleanup, contribute to the neighborhood BBQ or decorate my house during the holidays. *Choosing* to move may entail implicitly *agreeing* to be a good neighbor. Of course, there are limits to the obligations incurred. I don't have to attend my local neo-conservative discussion group or lend my neighbor large sums of cash. It is debatable how wide-ranging and strong these moral obligations are, but they do exist.

Does this notion of contract extend to immigration? There are a number of reasons to think so. First, the fact that societies expect integration is evident in citizenship requirements. These often go beyond a period of residency and require language competence and knowledge of the state's history and/or culture. These requirements are often not particularly onerous – it would be unfair if they required a level of language proficiency that the average immigrant is unable to reach or knowledge that goes

significantly beyond what the average citizen ought to know. (It is debatable how much the average native born citizen in many states actually knows about her history and possibly even culture.) Still, these requirements for full membership don't appear particularly problematic in most cases, especially if resources are provided to help new members meet them (e.g., citizenship classes).

Second, the majority of immigrants consider adapting to the culture at least a part of their life plan. This point is reinforced by the absence of a political movement against *reasonable* citizenship requirements. As Will Kymlicka is fond of pointing out, immigrant groups rarely, if ever, demand self-government rights (unlike national minorities).¹¹ Rather, the special rights they do demand usually *enable* their integration. A good example of this is the right for Sikhs in Canada to wear the turban as officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Immigration always involves a process of mutual adjustment, but they do not want to radically transform the RCMP, but become part of it. Similarly, most immigrants send their children to public schools and eventually learn the language of majority.

Third, many states select immigrants according to certain criteria. For example, the concentration on "economic class immigrants" – relatively young people with significant education, language ability and work experience – in some countries attests to this. This point is even stronger in the case of states that give preference to immigrants with ethnic, religious or historical ties to the larger community. The hope is that immigrants with these characteristics will integrate more readily. Even more importantly, "countries of immigration" often provide resources that enable integration. This shouldn't be construed as altruism, but rather in the interests of society as a whole – immigrants

¹¹ See for example, Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, "Return of the Citizen", *Ethics* v.104/2 (1994).

who understand the culture and speak the language are more likely to contribute and less likely to cause tensions. Still, the existence of these resources points to an expectation that this is the path most immigrants will take.

Unlike the first two points, this raises the issue of reasonable admissions requirements. One worry is that moral obligations to integrate presuppose that the state has the right to set admission requirements and reject those who refuse to accept them. But if advocates of open borders are correct, states might not have a right to impose obligations. It is true that the extent of the requirements may determine the type of obligations that can be imposed: for example, if states are free to impose a language requirement as a condition of admission, they can deny residence to people who fail to meet this requirement. Be this as it may, open borders do not entail that the state cannot impose obligations once people choose to migrate. Even under open borders, immigrants are subject to the laws of the country in which they reside. Furthermore, we are concerned with moral, not legal obligations. Even if the state rarely has the right to refuse residence and has limited power to compel people to integrate, immigrants may still have moral obligations.

It is clear, then, that there is some expectation that immigrants integrate, both from the dominant society and on the part of many immigrants. While this line of argument is initially appealing, it runs up against a serious objection: an expectation doesn't necessarily entail a moral obligation. A parent might expect that her daughter enroll in medical school, but it's hard to see how the daughter is morally obligated to do so. An agreement only exists with the consent of both parties. While many immigrants

feel they have an obligation to make efforts to integrate, it is by no means clear that they all do.

Consider an immigrant who says: “I agree to obey your laws, work and do my best not to interfere with anyone else. I do not see, though, any reason to learn your language or compromise my culture. My children will continue, as far as they are willing and able, to carry on our traditions. There is no reason why I am morally obligated to integrate. Among other things, I don’t see how this affects you.”

Someone might appeal to this immigrant by pointing out that she chose to come, but she will reply that her choice only requires a very minimal level of integration. Perhaps she has acquired some contractual obligations by joining a new society. But it still remains open what these obligations are. What requirements can immigrants be reasonably thought to agree to? Clearly, some requirements are unreasonable: immigrants cannot have an obligation to convert to the religion of the majority, for example. This immigrant might claim that it is unreasonable that she compromise her culture, except insofar as it conflicts with the law. Her culture is central to who she is, whereas any inconvenience she causes people outside of her ethnic group is at best minor and, at worst, mere prejudice.

More insistently, it might be suggested that her refusal *does* affect the larger society. Writers under the spell of nationalism and or communitarian doctrines often suggest that some degree of cultural harmony is necessary for a well-functioning society. Without a common identity, political and social institutions are unlikely to function properly. A feeling of civic duty and willingness to collaborate in the interest of the common good requires the belief that co-citizens are, in relevant ways, similar to us. In a

highly pluralistic society with little patriotism or fellow-feeling, political life is impoverished.

The claim would be, then, that we are all morally obligated to work at being patriots. This might include studying our history and teaching it to our children, celebrating national holidays and taking part (or at least pride) in national pastimes. This is not as implausible as it sounds to some liberals, since it describes a great deal of what goes on in most educational systems. Many French take pride in their knowledge of the prescriptive intricacies of their language. The Chinese are usually eager to expound their extraordinary history. In fact, we find parallels in most groups and could elaborate, arguing that the “good citizen” is a thick notion, understood through group practices, and something that members should aim at.

There are two problems with this line of defense. First, communitarian claims about the importance of shared identity are controversial. It’s not clear what role a shared culture plays in civic engagement or if the alleged decline in community spirit causes a supposed indifference to the well-being of co-citizens.¹² This considerably weakens the force of the claim that we have a moral obligation to shape our identity, since it is not obvious what good it would do.

Even if the strong claims some communitarians make for the importance of shared identity are justified, there is a second problem: native born members of society don’t appear to have these sorts of moral obligations. Consider the case of lifestyle choices. I might decide to join a punk band and reject the system – after all, I never

¹² Shared identity is definitely not sufficient for achieving the desired social goods. Furthermore, it’s arguably not necessary, judging from global social movements that cut across cultures. With regard to, for example, the decline in social services, there are many factors involved and it’s hard to say which ones are causal.

agreed to be a part of it. Or my friends and I might decide that we admire popular Japanese culture and try to align our behavior and values towards Tokyo. While there might be grounds for criticizing my decision, I have a *right* to make eccentric lifestyle choices. Perhaps if they severely disrupt the social fabric there is a moral obligation not to pursue them – at least not openly. However, I remain highly dubious that their impact is as great as some commentators suggest.

There is little reason to believe that immigrants' lifestyle choices are any different or that the fact that they weren't born in a particular culture leads to their forfeiting this right. If anything, their case is stronger in many respects. My attempt to adopt (what I perceive as) Japanese culture is probably superficial and fleeting; immigrants' desire to carry on with their way of life resonates to the core of their being. If this is correct, are there any spheres in which immigrants do have special obligations?

One domain in which special obligations could arise is family education and enculturation, a particularly sensitive and problematic issue. Children growing up in ethnic groups are often torn between two worlds, with differing norms and expectations. This places strains on families. Communication between generations is even more difficult than usual. Whereas there are limits to how far many first generation immigrants will be able to fit into their new culture, the situation is different with their children. If they are not victims of racism and prejudice – by no means a straightforward assumption – they will have the opportunity to further integrate and perhaps assimilate into the crowd.

A common complaint is that some ethnic groups have deeply sexist views which they inflict on their daughters. Some in the West might argue, then, that families have an

obligation to educate their daughters with notions of gender equality in mind. This complaint is misplaced, if it is primarily meant to be an obligation that immigrants have to the wider society. To say that families have an obligation not to be sexist *because this goes against the norms of the dominant society* is to fall prey to crude moral relativism. Beyond neglecting the fact that developed North American and Western European countries are still rife with sexism, it misses the point. The reason people should not be sexist is because it is wrong – it harms women, fails to respect them as persons and robs them of their potential and opportunities.

A better question is whether parents should encourage their children to assimilate (or at not interfere with their efforts). In Gurinder Chadha's film, *Bend It Like Beckham*, all Jesminder wants to do is play soccer, while her mother is appalled by the fact that she doesn't know how to make Aloo Gobi.¹³ While this example may seem trivial (and by the time the movie ends, Jesminder is able to do both), it illustrates the many potential tensions.

Fortunately, a healthy balance between family traditions and active participation in outside groups may often be possible. Still, tensions remain. Wealthy parents might send their children to private schools that emphasize their linguistic, cultural and religious background. Similarly, a condition of marriage in many groups is that the future daughter/son-in-law belongs to the same ethnicity. In part, this is to preserve traditions that will be diluted in the case of interethnic or intercultural marriages. In these cases, would they be reneging on an obligation to the society in which they live if they take action to ensure their children continue their culture in these ways?

¹³ Jesminder's friend Jules has similar problems with her mother, who doesn't consider football a sport appropriate for ladies. Indeed, much of the point of the film is to compare the similarities between Indian and British culture.

Parents have considerable power over their children, especially when they are younger. They can inculcate them with attitudes that in many ways determine their life's opportunities. It is foreseeable that parents who reject the culture in which they live will cause difficulties for their children. Their children will have to learn to cope with their society from other people. Furthermore, they may experience alienation, neither fully belonging to their parents' culture (since they don't live in it), nor coming to terms with the culture they live in. This may not only be a problem for them. It might be a problem for society in general.

There are two sets of obligations that could be in play here. First, parents have moral obligations towards their children. It is arguable that this includes minimizing conflicts children will have in their larger environment. Of course, this depends on the nature of the larger environment – parents may have a duty to teach their children not to conform if their new society is racist, sexist or otherwise noxious. These questions are particularly vexing when parents' deeply held moral convictions are at odds with their broader society. Still, non-conformity has costs, costs that may have long-term consequences for children's success. Parents may have an obligation to their children to find the middle ground for much of their heritage, teaching them about the culture of their family, while allowing them to profit from the culture outside of their home.

More controversially, do parents have an obligation to society as a whole to allow their children to be (at least partly) socialized by the dominant culture? Parents (and not just immigrant parents) do have some obligations to society as a whole. They have an obligation to society to raise children who respect the law, work and assume

responsibility for their lives and actions. Do they have a further responsibility to inculcate cultural norms different from their own?

This is bound to be painful, but it can probably be done by making sure that children participate in common institutions appropriate to their age – public schools, clubs, activities etc. But once again a difficulty arises: native born parents surely don't have an obligation to society that their children participate in clubs or activities that inculcate cultural values. It might be a good thing for their children – this will depend on individual children – and thus there may be an obligation to them. But native born parents are also free to enroll their kids only in organizations that magnify their own idiosyncrasies (e.g., fundamentalist church groups that may very well not reflect dominant cultural values). Something similar could be said regarding schools. Religious schools from congregations that encompass parts of the native population are rarely criticized on these grounds, even if they only reflect the culture and values of a minority (albeit a significant one).

Is there any reason to think that immigrants who come have implicitly agreed to raise their children in a way coherent with mainstream culture? There are two difficulties with this. First, this may not be true given the diversity present in most cultures. There is little reason to suppose that immigrants have reached an agreement *with the dominant culture*. For example, an Orthodox Jew might migrate from Israel to New York in order to take part in its Orthodox Jewish community, not the community of East Coast liberals. Second, the demand that all immigrants integrate to the dominant culture disrespects and possibly threatens states' minority cultures. Again, what would it suggest to the Orthodox Jewish community if immigrants were told that they have a moral obligation not to bring

up their children to follow their way of life? Here we have a puzzling double-standard: minorities who have long ago established their place in society have a right to maintain their cultural practices, whereas those who have arrived recently and wish to adopt the same cultural practices are wrong to do so.

Could it be claimed that the difference is that immigrants don't share the dominant culture – they haven't been socialized in it and so extraordinary measures are necessary to socialize their children? This underplays the differences in immigrant cultures and overplays homogeneity in the dominant culture. Our perception of diversity is often distorted: we tend to either over or underestimate its prevalence. Even if it is true that immigrants do not fully understand the dominant culture, it would still be hard to justify the claim that parents have a moral obligation to the community to make sure their children are socialized the “right way” (meaning according to dominant values). It presumes that the children of immigrants are dangerous monsters and immigrant parents are incompetent deviants, both in need of the reforming influence of the outside culture. There is no evidence that this is true. Parents and children have moral obligations to each other, but it is not clear if parents have a contractual obligation to raise their children according to alien cultural norms.

So far I have discussed culture as a general term encompassing one's whole life. What about what is sometimes called “political culture”? Political culture can be understood as involving a commitment to constitutional principles and various governmental, social and economic institutions that provide social security, public works and other public goods. A commitment to one's political culture does not require that one

agrees with every decision made, but it does involve a commitment to the basic framework, if only to work within it to transform it.

One thing to note is that political culture is less controversial in liberal states. What is remarkable is not the great diversity in most contemporary states, but the fact that it causes relatively few problems – contrast the religious wars that tore apart Europe throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Liberal constitutional government has been extraordinarily successful in taming conflict between people with competing worldviews, in part because it allows people considerable choice. This includes the right to choose a life which is in many respects illiberal. But even those who do live largely illiberal lives usually commit themselves to promoting their ideals within the political framework set out.

People who choose to immigrate assume the responsibility to uphold these political institutions. Is this simply another way of saying that new residents must respect the law? I don't think so. Citizens and tourists differ in the sense that only the former are authors or representatives of the law. Tourists must obey the law; citizens in liberal democracies need to be aware that the law is imposed in their names. For example, the decision to immigrate to the US morally implicates people in the abuses at Guantanamo Bay in a way that foreigners do not share.

Unlike immigrants, aboriginal groups can respond that they have never chosen this role. At best, this responsibility has been imposed on them or gradually achieved through negotiation with the larger society. More commonly they are often subject to laws that they do not authorize. Something similar can be said of long term residents –

even if their ancestors did make this decision, it can hardly be binding on present generations.

There may be other reasons other than an implicit contract for why we are responsible for a law imposed in our names – indeed, I believe there are. But the fact that people have freely chosen to be a member of a society adds responsibility. When unjust laws are enforced in one's name, there is a moral requirement to speak up. To ensure that one is not perpetrating injustice, there is a need to integrate into the society's political culture. This leads us to the common claim that immigrants have an obligation to learn the language of majority.

A central aspect of integration is language ability, which is also a key element of cultural competency. Is there a moral obligation for immigrants to learn the language of majority? This can involve considerable burdens if classes are expensive and work all-encompassing. But assume that resources are available (and affordable). Is there a moral obligation to take advantage of them, one owed to one's new society? The obligation wouldn't be to achieve an advanced command of the language (this may not be possible for everyone), but to try.

Language acquisition is not as central as abiding by the law, but it is closely related to the obligation to be self-sufficient and not impose unnecessary burdens on the rest of society. People who cannot communicate in the official language(s) need special help accessing basic services. Hospitals, courts and social workers will need to pay interpreters. They are less likely to be self-sufficient, depending heavily on their family or ethnic community. This may filter outside of their ethnic community. If they work, they are more likely to remain in low-paying jobs with little future. They may also place

themselves at risk (e.g., not being able to understand dangerous situations), causing further problems for others.

The responsibility to learn the language of majority does not arise because it reduces aggregate happiness (it may or may not). Rather, there is an obligation because not becoming fluent imposes burdens on the society. Still, its appeal to consequences runs into a number of problems. First, if immigrants decide to isolate themselves from the rest of society, they escape these obligations. If the issue is really the burdens imposed by people who have a limited command of the official language, then these people can presumably discharge any obligations they have by choosing not to accept services. The counterclaim that citizenship imposes moral obligations on everybody to participate in the states' political institutions returns us to the question of why aboriginal and other longstanding groups do not have this obligation. In the case of aboriginal groups, participation is often not to better integrate into the larger society, but to prevent its encroachment on an already fragile way of life. Groups like the Amish or Hutterites would likely be destroyed if every member had obligations to become a good citizen.

In the case of immigrants who have chosen to become members of a political regime, the situation is different. Language ability is necessary to meet the minimal requirements of decent citizenship. It is the fact that the laws are imposed in the name of the new members that gives rise to an obligation to integrate so that it is possible to assume this responsibility. Immigrants can be blamed for joining an unjust political regime. Someone who freely chooses to migrate to Saudi Arabia under the monarchy or Sudan under the National Congress Party is morally culpable.

What should we say about a group that agrees to interact with the larger society, but does not learn the language of the majority? Instead, they have a few of their members act as translators. In this manner, they understand the major issues and engage with the rest of society, but largely keep to themselves (except to send delegates to debate legislation and public policy). Have they met the obligations to uphold the laws that they've implicitly agreed to by immigrating and escaped the obligation to learn the official language or languages?

The difficulty with this scenario is that it falls short of the ideal of public reason – the obligation to engage with the rest of society and jointly author the law in terms that people can generally accept. If most people in an immigrant community rely on translation, their engagement is indirect and very likely distorted. Rather than being a debate between citizens about what is best – or at least acceptable – this scenario instead more closely resembles debate carried out between envoys of sovereign states. It is doubtful that people can fully participate in a society without access to mainstream media and an ability to engage on even terms with long term residents.¹⁴

The upshot is that immigrants do have obligations to integrate, but they are not primarily toward their new society. Rather, the obligations are grounded in claims of justice. On the whole, I have argued that immigrants' obligations to integrate into society are fairly minimal. While immigrants must respect the law and work, it doesn't extend to immigrants' personal or cultural lives nor require immigrant parents to make special efforts to socialize their children in the dominant values. It does, however, include the obligation to learn the dominant language or, more precisely, try, though not for reasons

¹⁴ Travis Dumsday brought this counter-example to my attention and Ann Levey suggested the appeal to public reason.

What Immigrants Owe Society
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that are commonly supposed. Instead, immigrants have implicitly agreed to assume responsibility for the laws and policies of their new society. To meet their obligations, they must integrate to some extent.

To return to Ms. Sabuni's claim that that immigrants must make an effort to adapt to the society where they live, we can agree. But this effort extends only narrowly and falls far short of assimilation.