

Multiple democracies: political cultures and democratic variety in post-enlargement Europe

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Democratization studies endorses a liberal view of democracy and political culture. Insufficient notice is taken of alternative models of democracy. I argue that a ‘multiple democracies’ approach that takes potential variety in democratic political cultures into account has three advantages over the conventional approach: it is sensitive to the historical and contextual nature of democratic regimes, it takes a dual imaginary into account, and it is able to conceptualize the emergence of innovative forms of political culture. Instead of a ‘model approach’, I suggest a multiple democracies approach that identifies political cultures by means of available patterns of cultural repertoires or ethics of democracy.

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The empirical study of democratic systems in comparative politics is concerned predominantly with the identification of stable democratic orders. In this, it is commonplace that democratic political regimes cannot be identified merely by reference to a set of ‘hard’ institutions (the constitution, separation of powers, the rule of law), but also need to take into account ‘soft’ institutions in the form of what is variably referred to as a ‘background culture’, ‘political culture’, ‘civic’ or ‘public culture’. A simple ‘transfer of institutions’ to emerging democracies is deemed insufficient to construct functioning and viable democracies, as democratic systems need a wider societal legitimation as well as habituation to democratic practice.

In this, however, there is a rather astonishing absence of debate on how such cultural underpinnings of democracy might develop differently between (and within) societies, to what extent they depend on the specific cultural contexts in which democracies emerge, and how contextual differences might relate to different normative models. Since the 1960s, the predominant focus in comparative political research is on a one-dimensional, Schumpeterian account of democracy, in which the necessity of a supportive democratic political culture is presupposed, but whose nature is widely understood in an aprioristic sense (Huntington 1991, Linz and Stepan 1996).

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So far, very little systematic attention has been paid to existing and potential substantive diversity in perceptions, attitudes, and understandings of democracy qua *democratic* understandings of both political elites and in wider society. In this, the possibility that differing perceptions of democracy might underpin (a variety of) democratic regimes is not considered. A case in point is the recent democratic transformations in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. Comparative politics has mostly engaged in the assessment of the rapprochement of the former communist countries to a 'rule-of-law' model of democracy, derived largely from liberalism and Western experiences with democracy. Political culture re-emerged in these studies as a highly normative concept, partially also to explain the drawbacks and failures of democratization in post-authoritarian societies, allegedly related to incompatible collective identities (ethnic nationalism) and cultural predispositions (paternalism, clientelism). In this, liberal political culture has been contrasted with illiberal discourses, but possible variety in political discourse qua democratic discourse has been largely overlooked.

The understanding of political culture is then predominantly an affirmative one and follows the classical liberal understanding as defined in Almond and Verba's classical work on civic culture (Almond and Verba 1963). Empirical studies of democracy have not taken notice of the widespread contestation of the liberal model of democracy in political theory regarding, for instance, its proceduralist, individualist, and 'conservative' nature. What is more, and in contrast to the consensus on the impartial 'rule-of-law' model in empirical studies, in political theory it can hardly be said that there is a normative consensus on the relation between culture and politics in modern democracy. Instead, political theory has produced a variety of competing understandings of democratic political culture that are mostly not reducible to the strong distinction between culture and politics in liberalism.

The paradox informing this essay is that while a supportive political culture is considered indispensable in the empirical analysis, its actual meaning and substantive content remain insufficiently reflected upon. Political culture predominantly takes the form of a 'background consensus', as a shared, universal, and mostly liberal culture providing social and political stability, derived from interpretations of the 'historical democracies', without being historicized and without the display of any structural interest in how the cultural context of democracy shapes understandings of democracy itself. The wide variety in the conceptualization of political culture that is displayed in political theory is hardly considered in democratization studies (but see Dryzek and Holmes 2002, Fuchs and Klingemann 2006), even if such a consideration would imply, in my view, an important deepening of our understanding of the meaning of democracy (in terms of both its variety and complexity) in new and emerging democracies, including the post-communist societies.

I argue, therefore, that the analysis of existing and emerging democracies – I will focus particularly on the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe here – would gain significantly if a potential variety of democratic political cultures were to be considered, and suggest a 'multiple democracies' approach. The essay proceeds by reviewing the conceptualization of political culture in democratization theory, and concludes that its understanding is ultimately an impoverished one, based on a minimal, liberal political culture. To contrast this minimal understanding of political culture with alternative understandings, a short review of various political theories of democracy is provided, from which it emerges that the relation between culture and politics can be understood in a variety of ways, while it can be argued that democracy's nature is always contextual and ultimately indeterminate. In the final section, I propose the idea of 'multiple democracies' or varieties of democracy, but instead of arguing for an approach departing from different models of democratic political culture, as arguably emerges from the review of political theory, I outline an alternative approach based on what I call different 'ethics of democracy'. In my view, such an approach avoids the potential essentialization and

homogenization of national cultures inherent in an approach based on pre-defined models, and allows for the possibility of innovation in political culture. I suggest that such a variegated understanding of political culture is more appropriate for empirical research than the conventional, minimal understanding of political culture in that it enables research of the historical and contextual embedding of political cultures, the existing variety between and within societies, and allows for the conflict, creativity, and change that is immanent in the essentially contestable nature of modern democracy.

Democracy and political culture

Even if a good part of democratization studies focuses predominantly on the formal institutionalization of democracy in terms of a constitution, regular elections, and the formation of a party system and a judiciary, there is a widespread recognition that cultural matters, i.e. questions of the popular legitimacy of democratic institutions and the normative commitment of the public and elites to democracy, cannot be excluded from analysis. In the case of the post-communist countries, formal institution-building has been understood as having been accomplished relatively quickly, while the emergence of a matching political culture is deemed more problematic. Indeed, Kaldor and Vejvoda argued at the end of the 1990s that

[w]hile it is generally argued that the institutional, formal prerequisites for democracy have broadly been fulfilled in the ten CEECs under consideration [the former communist countries now part of the European Union], it is more difficult to assess in such a clear manner the level of consolidation of democratic behaviour, or of the fledgling democratic political culture, that has been attained. (Kaldor and Vejvoda 1999, p. 2)

The upshot of most studies of political culture in the former communist countries is the assessment of the level of internalization and stabilization of a shared liberal culture, which sustains a formally consolidated democratic order. Most studies understand political culture as a widely held, shared, and coherent set of attitudes and values regarding the political system, held by individual citizens and elites (Pollack *et al.* 2003, Whitefield 2005). Substantively, political culture comprises values and orientations that eschew sharp conflict, and endorse cooperation, moderation or self-restraint, trust, and lawful behaviour. Such normative orientations are normally transmitted through forms of socialization (family, education, the workplace). A 'genuine democratic political culture' (Agh 1998, p. 22), according to democratization theorists, 'embodies high levels of interpersonal trust, a readiness to deal with political conflict through compromise rather than coercion or violence, and acceptance of the legitimacy of democratic institutions' (Parrott 1997, p. 21). The argument is usually that the absence of (the development of) a democratic political culture severely prohibits the development of persistent democratic structures as such, as in the case of (some of) the post-communist countries, where it is assumed that the lack of consolidation of democratic institutions is at least partly the result of the endurance of orientations stemming from the authoritarian, communist past (such as non-participation, apathy, apolitical behaviour; see Sztompka 2004). There is a strong binary or dichotomous element to this conventional understanding of political culture, i.e. the counter-position of a democratic culture to non-democratic, authoritarian or totalitarian political cultures (Alexander 2000).

This conception of political culture in the study of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe draws predominantly on the classical understanding of 'civic culture' or political culture as it emerged from the classical work of Almond and Verba, and those that have been working in this vein. In the words of Almond and Verba:

The term political culture thus refers to the specifically political orientations – attitudes towards the political system and its various parts, and attitudes towards the role of the self in the system . . . When we speak of the political culture of a society, we refer to the political system as internalized in the

cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of its population . . . The political culture of a nation is the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation. (Almond and Verba 1963, pp. 13–15)

According to Almond and Verba, a ‘civic culture’ – a democratic political culture functionally congruent with a democratic political structure – is based on a specific mix or ‘right’ balance between traditional (‘parochial’), passive (‘subject’), and participatory (‘participant’) orientations. In a somewhat similar vein, Linz and Stepan argue that

a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as theirs and when the support for antisystem alternatives is quite small or more or less isolated from the pro-democratic forces. (Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 6)

Or, as Pridham argues:

[t]he outcome [of democratic consolidation] is a system that should meet certain *procedural requirements*, such as the provision of regular elections and institutional mechanisms that check executive power, as well as the guarantee of human rights and evolution towards a remaking of political culture that is *supportive* of democratic political life. (Pridham 1995, p. xii, emphasis added)

The two main foci in Almond and Verba’s approach, and in that of many that follow its assumptions, are, firstly, the stability and continuity of democratic regimes, and, secondly, the congruence between the attitudes towards politics as held by the popular masses and the regime type. The emphasis is on a neutral, value-free approach towards the comparative study of political cultures, in order to assess the degree of attachment of individuals to a democratic regime. As a result, differences consist in greater or lesser manifestations of ‘civic culture’, which appears close to a representative, liberal-democratic or Anglo-Saxon idea of democracy in its emphasis on limited participation. It can be argued that by and large such a definition is still widespread in most of the approaches to political culture. Richard Rose, for instance, argues for an understanding of democracy as ‘the rule of law as well as free elections and the enjoyment of political rights and civil liberties’ (Rose 2001, p. 95), while Guillermo O’Donnell, even if acknowledging the nature of democracy as an ‘essentially contested concept’ and as possibly holding a variety of meanings, settles for a definition of democracy as comprising fair elections and a set of rights, while different democracies are evaluated according to a logic of higher and lower ‘quality’ (O’Donnell 2007, pp. 5–11).

Despite widespread adherence to its assumptions, the Almond and Verba model has been exposed to strong critique throughout the years. Recently, it has been particularly criticized by largely two strands: rational-choice theory and culturalist approaches. While the former doubts the usefulness of an emphasis on culture altogether (contra the overall approach in this article that argues that democracy is necessarily embedded in cultural understandings), the second, culturalist critique usefully points out the limits of the definition of culture in Almond and Verba’s approach, and the importance of taking into account culture structures and democratic discourses. The culturalist critique often presents an alternative in a hermeneutic, interpretative approach that goes quite some way in elaborating a more convincing and variegated understanding of democratic political cultures (I will build on aspects of it in the alternative approach outlined at the end of the article) (see Lichterman and Cefai 2006, pp. 392–414). It can be argued, however, that it is not widely followed in comparative democratization studies.

Rather, recent political culture research in the ambiance of the study of democratization and transformation continues largely along the lines of the Almond and Verba model. While a number of innovations can be observed, these do not add up to a significant change in the overall – problematic – outlook of the model. Regarding the critique of endorsing a singular

and minimalist model of democracy, a more variegated approach has been developed that distinguishes between different regime types. The debate is, however, focused on 'hybrid regimes', i.e. variations between liberal democracy, electoral democracy, and authoritarianism (see, in particular, *Journal of Democracy* 2002). No structural attempt is made to research different substantive meanings and perceptions of democracy. An additional shift in focus is the increased attention on the quality of democracy, clearly going beyond more limited concerns of consolidation. Quality assessment seems, however, in itself to reproduce a conventional and singular understanding of democracy by arguing that higher quality is related to a wider extension of rights (political, social, cultural), without considering the possibility of significantly different understandings and institutionalization of such rights.

In sum, the emphasis in much of current democratization studies seems to be on proceduralism, institutional arrangements, and regime stability, and political culture is understood as a set of supportive individual attitudes or predispositions vis-à-vis the political system or what could be designated *la politique*, i.e. the delimited sphere of politics, rather than as understandings of the political or *le politique*, i.e. the political framework of social life (for this distinction, see Lefort 1988). While an emphasis on the formal political sphere tends to lapse into a singular understanding and static analysis of democracy, an emphasis on the wider notion of the political would favour a move towards a more reflexive, critical, and dynamic understanding of a variety of democratic political cultures, in that it would include the meaningful contestation of dominant definitions and different, alternative understandings of democracy.

My contention is that the conventional understanding of political culture is problematic in that it favours a narrow rather than a wider reading of democratic political cultures. Conventional analyses ignore three interrelated aspects that, if considered, would induce a much stronger sensibility to multiple forms of democratic political culture and the different forms that the institutionalization of *le politique* can take, i.e. the historical and contextual nature of 'really existing' political cultures; the dual rather than singular imaginary of democracy on which democratic political cultures are based (i.e. a rights-based, constitutional imaginary on the one hand, and a substantive, participatory, or emancipatory imaginary on the other); and, the inherent indeterminacy and contestability of modern democracy.

With regard to the first aspect, the distinct historical, particularist premises of liberal political culture are not reflected upon, even if the concept is derived *grosso modo* from a distinct reading that abstracts from the Western modern experience. In this, the universal value of the rights-based, constitutionalist perception for democracy elsewhere is presupposed rather than evidenced or problematized. The portrayal of liberal political culture as a universally valid underpinning of democracy avoids the question of the self-constitution of democracy and the related question of the democratic subject. This might be formulated differently in that it can be argued that democratic political cultures always emerge in, and constitute a reflection of, a specific historical context, are endorsed within a historically formed cultural field, and need to relate to the distinct experiences of real people.

With regard to the second aspect, the assumption is that the liberal-constitutionalist perception exhausts democracy and its supportive political culture as such. But, in this, it reflects a one-dimensional vision of democracy, while participatory or emancipatory interpretations of democracy (grounded in republican ideas) are mostly ignored. But the Schumpeterian vision of democracy as constitutionally based elite competition over political power needs to be contrasted to the aspirational or emancipatory dimension of the democratic imaginary that points to the gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. A one-dimensional, constitutionalist vision of democracy is partly the result of the above-mentioned focus on politics as confined to the formal political system (as an autonomous political sphere) rather than the political framework of society and the *problématique* of the political constitution of democracy. The attention in

democratization studies on the pre-defined preconditions of procedural democracy and its consolidation is a contemporary instance of this bias.

A third aspect follows directly from the observation that democracy is grounded in a dual rather than a singular imaginary. The impossibility of structurally reducing democracy to either one of the imaginaries and the continuous tension between its 'pragmatic' and 'redemptive' sides (Canovan 1999) means that modern democracy is inherently indeterminate and always open to new interpretations. The rather strong insistence in studies of political culture on the order-creating nature of modern democracy disregards the possibility of the emergence of potentially innovative or radically new forms of democracy and political culture.

The consequence of an ahistorical, universalized, and one-dimensional perception of democracy is the neglect of questions of significant variety *between* democratic political cultures based on specific combinations of the dual dimension. It also tends to equate democratic political culture with a *national* liberal culture and to disregard divergent perceptions of democracy *within* democracies, as these might emanate in both the public sphere and political society. In contrast to the confinement of democracy to its orderly, constitutional imaginary, I argue below that democracy should be seen as multi-interpretable and 'essentially contestable'. The suggestion is here that the analysis of democratic political culture needs to go beyond a conceptualization that understands political culture as the (passive) internalization of the political system in individual attitudes, and should be understood rather as involving the continuous (active) construction of a variety of democratic discourses. Paul Lichterman and Daniel Cefai provide a definition that indeed transcends a limited focus on the political system to include a variety of wider political claims. In their view, political culture consists of:

the sets of symbols and meanings or styles of action that organize political claims-making and opinion-forming, by individuals or collectivities. By culture, we mean patterns of publicly shared symbols, meanings, or styles of action which enable and constrain what people can say and do. (Lichterman and Cefai 2006, p. 392)

To substantiate the claim that a variety of democratic discourses is indeed possible, and likely to be of importance for the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, I will briefly review various such understandings of the relation between politics and culture as they have emerged in the debate on democracy in political theory. The review will not only bring forth a variety of possible understandings of democracy but will also further emphasize the points made above regarding the necessary contextual nature of democracy, its grounding in a dual rather than a singular imaginary, and the always existing potential for innovation and change.

Multiple political cultures

While the comparative, empirical study of democracy builds on a one-dimensional understanding of democracy, pretends a universal validity of this model, and, in this, tends to conflate democratic national cultures with liberal political culture while not allowing for substantive variety in democratic discourse, political theory has in the last four decades or so witnessed the emergence of decisive attention on alternative understandings of democracy. In the normative debate on democracy, one of the most important points of contention is the relation between culture and politics. The multiplicity of conceptions of this relation confirms my argument that various understandings of democracy are indeed available, and that the constitutional, rights-based understanding with its 'impartial', abstract reading of political culture is only one among various readings.

As discussed in the preceding section, a liberal vision, in particular in a procedural vein, is dominant in studies of political culture in emerging democracies. The definitions of political

culture largely follow Schumpeter's elitist-institutional characterization of democracy, where the emphasis is on an understanding of individual freedom as the 'existence of a sphere of individual self-government' (Schumpeter 1974, p. 271), the democratic method is seen as based on elite competition for popular votes, and civic participation is limited to voting for leadership or representatives. The reading of such a vision of democracy as universal can, however, be problematized in the light of alternative readings of democracy (see, for instance, Taylor 1994, Dryzek 2000, Benhabib 2002). As suggested above, it cannot be denied that modern democracy not only hinges merely on a procedural understanding of democracy but also involves two 'social imaginaries': an instituted or procedural and an instituting or emancipatory imaginary (see, for this insight, Cohen and Arato 1992, pp. 4–8, Castoriadis 1997, Eisenstadt 1998, pp. 218–219, Canovan 1999, Blokker 2005, Alexander 2006). While the former perception of democracy is grounded in the Schumpeterian idea of democracy based on 'neutral' procedures and elite competition, and is based on the limitation of power and the creation of stability, the latter perception rests upon the distinctly modern idea of autonomy or self-determination. The two dimensions are in tension, in that the former finds the essence of democracy in its creation of order and 'negative freedom', whereas the latter is related to substantive aims and the realization of autonomy or 'positive freedom'.

Here, I briefly revisit some of the most important contributions to the debate in order to substantiate the critical points I made above. I will review different models of democracy and their understanding of political culture, and will explicate their primary modes of justification (or what I will call 'ethics of democracy'). I will do so by focusing on three main concepts in democratic discourses: the primary democratic subject, the proposed rationale of a democratic polity or its furtherance of the common good, and civic participation. To relate the theoretical discussion to the democratic reality of post-communist societies and to show that not only liberalism is relevant as a democratic discourse, I will indicate the pertinence of each of the democratic discourses.

As is well known, liberal political culture in its classical sense emerged against the backdrop of the hierarchical societal ordering of feudalism, the exclusive dominance of political power in absolutist monarchy, and the other-worldly legitimation of political power by means of religion (Manent 1995). In opposition to such a closed world order, liberalism posited the individual at the centre of its modern political model in the form of the citizen. Rather than as a passive subject caught in the webs of a heteronomous social and political order, the modern individual was understood as an enabled citizen and his/her individual interests were seen as the foundation of liberal political culture. The need for a constitutional-political order ultimately emerges from the need for the protection of the liberties of citizens, and politics reflects civil society and the individual citizen. The role of the individual citizen is both essential (in giving consent to the political order) and minimal (in that the citizen is represented by political institutions, rather than having a direct and continuous political role). The liberal state is then seen as an extension of the individual life plans of its citizens. Rather than being the expression of a shared idea of the common good in any substantive form, the 'impartial' liberal state promotes a common good that consists of endorsing a society in which individual life plans can be realized (Taylor 1995). Liberal political culture is primarily about representation and support rather than active civil participation in political rule. The citizen's identity is not shaped primarily through his/her participation, but rather in the private sphere through private actions. Political participation is limited to the monitoring of government discourse and activity – as a moral duty – while public reason and political decision making are considered the terrain of judges, government officials, and candidates for public office (Rawls 1999, pp. 133–136). Participation in liberal political culture is understood in the context of safeguarding individual interests. Here, I propose to call the principal justificatory mode or 'democratic ethic' in liberalism the *ethic of rights*, i.e. an ethic that puts the protection of the

individual's private realm through a universalistic legal system at the centre of its conception of democracy.

In the post-communist context, a liberal democratic discourse has clearly played a highly significant role in the contestation of communist regimes, in particular in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late communist societies, a liberal view of a multi-party democratic state formed an important aspect of the oppositional discourse against the communist regimes. It was mainly in the name of a free civil society and subjective rights that the grip of the (post-)totalitarian states on societies was contested (Ferry and Renaut 1992, Priban 2007). The dissident movements in Central and Eastern Europe demanded pluralist liberal democracies and supported their demands by referring to lists of rights in existing constitutions and international human rights standards (Isaac 1996). Vaclav Havel, for instance, argued with regard to dissident movements that '[t]heir work, therefore, is based on the principle of legality: they operate publicly and openly, insisting not only that their activity is in line with the law, but that achieving respect for the law is one of their main aims' (Havel 1992, p. 182).

This concern for rights and the protection of citizens from an intrusive state was also present in the Roundtable Talks that formed the beginning of the 1989 revolutions and democratization trajectories in countries such as Poland and Hungary. In the Hungarian negotiated revolution in particular, there was a strong insistence on 'legal continuity' and the rule of law. Bruce Ackerman has, with many others, interpreted these revolutions as 'liberal revolutions', in which the 'challenge for statecraft is to use these fleeting moments to build new and stronger foundations for liberal politics' (Ackerman 1992, p. 27). Also in the post-1989 era, the discourse of individual rights, negative freedom, and the limitation of state power was important as a leading liberal-democratic discourse in the political transformations in the region and constituted the core of the 'return-to-Europe' strategy as well as of the European Union's enlargement project. In a foundational way, the emphasis on constitutionalism and basic human rights was enshrined in constitutional documents throughout the region, and in this way the democratization processes conformed to the emerging dominance of a global normative political culture of rights and the rule of law.

At the same time, it cannot be argued that the liberal discourse was the only discourse that informed the downfall of the communist regimes, and 1989 cannot be reduced to merely a moment that saw the 'triumph of liberalism'. Liberalism was hardly uncontested in many of the emerging democracies in the region. It is important to note that a crucial segment of dissident discourse in societies such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia was indeed about the limitation of state power, the recognition of a civil sphere, and the possibility to 'live in truth'. But a negative, anti-statist politics did not exhaust dissident discourse, and often a liberal model of negative freedom has been criticized as insufficient for a viable democratic order. Thus Havel argued in the same essay as cited above that he saw 'a renewed focus of politics on real people as something far more profound than merely returning to the everyday mechanisms of Western (or, if you like, bourgeois) democracy' (Havel 1992, p. 209). Even if the more radical side of dissident discourse was not widely taken up after 1989, significant limits of a largely negative discourse of rights and the separation of powers have emerged during the post-communist political transformations. In general, liberalism has been criticized for a participatory deficit, i.e. a limited attention for meaningful citizen participation, an emphasis on elitism, and too strong a divide between politics and civil society. Liberalism also suffers from an alleged lack of sensitivity to matters of cultural identity, historical memory, and past traditions. As will become clear below, these issues cannot be completely sidelined in a democratic regime.

This latter 'identitary deficit' of liberalism and the apparent failure to recognize the historical and cultural context of democracy is taken up in the communitarian critique of liberalism. It is argued that democracy cannot be defined merely by a rights-based,

constitutional reading, and that the standard liberal version of a modern democratic political culture largely foregoes the question of collective identity in its understanding of the individual as a bearer of rights. The communitarian or identitarian critique has been raised forcefully by communitarian thinkers such as Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, and points to an essential problem of the liberal notion of the individual, or, in other words, its understanding of the primary subject of modern democracy as the rational, autonomous, and largely self-supporting individual. Rather than being a 'monad' or 'unencumbered self', the modern individual is situated, i.e. imbued and formed in various social relations, and derives his/her capacities for meaning-giving and choice, as well as his/her identity, from the interaction with others in a community based largely on a shared language and common traditions. The universalistic understanding of the liberal individual is strongly qualified by the notion of a *culturally embedded* individual and the particular nature of democracy (Walzer 1994). The communitarian perception of the individual has important implications for its ideation of a meaningful democratic order and clearly goes beyond the liberal-constitutionalist idea by invoking a substantive, participatory imaginary. In communitarian political cultures, a strong bond between the citizen and the state is presupposed. It is the democratic polity that ultimately gives expression to the common good embedded in shared values and traditions. What underpins the democratic order is the expression of what people have in common, and its preservation and development forms the rationale of the polity. This is linked to a strong sense of participation, which in turn is linked to individual liberty. Communitarian political cultures play on the second, participatory imaginary of democracy, as the emphasis is on participation in which the self-rule of the citizens is defined through participation in common matters (enjoying 'positive liberties'). In other words, citizens can only realize their freedom and form a full identity by means of political participation. The primary ethic in communitarianism might then be called the *ethic of identity*, in that the preservation and prosperity of a shared, particular identity, and a related understanding of the common good, is at the centre of its conception of democracy.

The relevance of a communitarian understanding of democracy for the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe is corroborated by the work in the vein of 'liberal nationalism', such as that of Stefan Auer and Will Kymlicka. In Auer's view, it is necessary to identify various types of nationalism, some of which are evidently illiberal, but others largely compatible with liberal democracy. In the case of at least some of the post-communist transformations, these have contributed to democracy's relative success (Auer 2004). Similarly, Kymlicka has argued that in conventional liberalism the issue of identity is ignored, rendering its relevance in Central and Eastern Europe problematic given the high prominence of ethnocultural diversity in the region. Also in Kymlicka's view, liberalism ignores questions of identity and cultural diversity, because of its 'myth of ethnocultural neutrality'. As a consequence, it does not acknowledge the fundamental role of a shared historical identity, language, and culture for the efficacy of modern democracy and the sustenance of a cohesive political community (Kymlicka and Opalski 2001).

The relevance of identity for democracy is further attested by the roles of nationalism and religion in some of the emancipatory movements in the region. As has been suggested, among others, by Michael Walzer, 'tribalism' (forms of collective identities) not merely played a destructive role in the wake of 1989 but also contributed positively to the overthrowing of the totalitarian regimes and constituted a crucial factor in 'tying' the people to the new democratic regimes. In this regard, the role of religion, as exemplified by the role of the Catholic Church in the Polish liberation movement, should be equally acknowledged as a cohesive force (at least in the run-up to 1989). It can be argued that the 'ethic of rights' of a liberal democratic model has not been sufficient for creating viable democratic societies. In Walzer's reading, democracy can

work only if citizens regard each other as ‘fellow members’ of a ‘community of character’, in which they find ‘identity, self-respect, and sentimental connections’ (Walzer 1994, p. 69). Rather than proposing a neutral or ‘thinly’ integrated state without any particular cultural character (as proposed in liberalism) to replace the internationalist communist regimes, which would imply the ‘detribalization’ of particular societies (the removal of any manifestation of majority culture from public life), it seems warranted to argue for some level of ‘particularization’ of democracy in order to render it meaningful to its citizens.

A further instantiation of the relevance of identity for democracy becomes visible in many of the constitution-making processes in the region, in which a purely rights-based idea of the rule of law has been countered by proponents of forms of ‘communitarian constitutionalism’ or ‘constitutional nationalism’. While in some cases this can be said to have led to illiberal forms of constitutionalism, in others it has played a less clear-cut anti-democratic role and can be said to have contributed to the construction of identity for specific political communities, without necessarily undermining basic rights. It can in this regard be argued that any constitution involves an integrative dimension that consists in part of the definition of a distinct political community and its basic beliefs, values, and aspirations. As Jiri Priban remarks with regard to the codification of political identities in constitutional documents: ‘the liberal procedural model of democracy turned out to be an insufficient stabilizer and the political community looked for its substantive supplement’, which was found in ‘historically and culturally shared sentiments of national identity and ethnic unity’ (Priban 2007, p. 79).

But perhaps the clearest case of where the acknowledgement of identity can play a role in increasing justice and contribute to a fairer representation of different ethnocultural groups – and thus the objective of democratic pluralism – is in the case of collective or group rights. Such rights aim at the correction of the ‘tyranny of the majority’ in democratic regimes and can be said to have played an essential role in the democratic transformations of the post-communist societies. Even if their democratic nature is contested both by political theorists and political elites in the region, in many cases (including Romania and Slovakia), the granting of rights based on some identity marker can be said to have contributed to integration and democratic interaction.

Republican political culture also departs from a collective, social understanding of the subject of democracy. In contrast to communitarian thinking, republicanism is not based on the idea of a political community grounded in a pre-political, cultural community, but rather endorses a civic community or civil society. The citizen is seen as a member of a political community that is engaged in a constant civic quest for the realization of the common good. Also here the participatory imaginary of democracy, i.e. democracy as becoming, rather than the constitutionalist imaginary or democracy as order, is invoked. It is civic bonds or civil togetherness that forms the essence of a republican notion of political culture (Habermas 1998), or the citizen as ‘public individual’, rather than the priority of the ‘private individual’ in liberalism, or of the ‘community’ in communitarianism. In republicanism, the liberal idea of a neutral state is unthinkable as civil society is deemed the locus of the articulation of the common good that ties the collective together and that is ultimately expressed by the state. The political community is the direct expression of the common good that is ‘discovered’ in civil society. Thus, in a republican perception of politics, ‘a community’s objective, the common good substantially consists in the success of its political endeavor to define, establish, effectuate and sustain the set of rights . . . best suited to the conditions and *mores* of that community’ (Michelman 1989, p. 446). The republican idea of a political community is thus not merely and only based on the citizens’ rights and duties, or the guarantee of individuals’ negative liberty by means of the rule of law, but is also importantly grounded in the idea of positive freedom and of the significance of civic participation for the individual citizen. The essence is the ideal of a self-governing community

and an associational ideal of citizenship (Skinner 1990, Delanty 2000). This means that republican political culture needs a participative civic morality or, in other words, a strong commitment to the public good. This has often been referred to as civic 'virtue', and can be seen as a primary distinction between liberalism and republicanism. Where liberalism seems to thrive best in the absence of too strong a civic duty and underlines 'self-limitation' in the light of a confidence in proceduralism and the rule of law, republicanism endorses a strong commitment to the public good, and continuous and – in some versions – direct participation, and through this, realization of the self. I propose to call the main ethic in republicanism the *ethic of self-rule*, i.e. the self-discovery of the political community through the participation of public-minded citizens in the formulation of common laws.

It can be argued that republican visions of democracy – even if often unacknowledged – were a significant factor in the revolutions of 1989 and have an important resonance in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. Republican visions, next to invocations of an 'ethic of rights', were the basis of the dissident movements that endorsed distinct forms of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The notions of 'parallel polis' (Benda), 'anti-politics' (Konrad), and 'self-organization' (Kuron) reflected the theorization of a civil sphere distinct from the all-pervasive post- or late totalitarian state. Such a civil sphere was to be characterized by civic solidarity, a shared notion of the common good (even if consisting mostly of a negative position vis-à-vis the communist state), and civic virtues (including a public awareness and civic participation) (Falk 2003, p. 314, Zolkos 2004, pp. 69–70). The republican element in dissident thought had much to do with the endorsement of civic self-rule or autonomy, and the right to self-organization of civil society. Thus, Havel argued that '[e]very society, of course, requires some degree of organization. Yet if that organization is to serve the people, and not the other way around, then people will have to be liberated and space created so that they may organize themselves in meaningful ways' (Havel 1992, p. 181). Also in Solidarity, republican notions formed an intrinsic part of dissident thought, such as in the understandings of political community and self-organization of Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron.

Even if it has been widely acknowledged that this 'language of civil society' disappeared from the scene after 1989, it can be argued that it has been taken up by a number of civil movements in other Central and Eastern European societies. This was, for instance, the case with the *Alianța Civică* in post-Ceaușescu Romania, which constituted a significant non-political civic force in the democratic transformation. The continuing relevance of republicanism in popular democratic discourses in the region is also attested by Dryzek and Holmes' study of political cultures in the region, in which they find that in Poland and the Czech Republic 'substantial reservoirs of civic engagement' can be detected (Dryzek and Holmes 2002). And in a more foundational sense, it has been argued that elements of dissident thought regarding self-organization and civic engagement have found their way into constitutional documents. Here, the most convincing case seems to be the Polish Constitution(s), in which an important emphasis exists regarding notions of local government and subsidiarity (Poplawska 2002). The emphasis in the latter is on self-rule, decentralization, and genuine participation of the citizenry.

But democratic imagination is clearly not limited to the well-established liberal, communitarian, and republican traditions, which, indeed, all display important shortcomings. In recent years, a number of innovative understandings of democracy have emerged, of which the most well known is probably the communication-based perception of 'deliberative', 'post-national' democracy, which questions some of the key tenets of all three democratic traditions mentioned. Most famously articulated in Jürgen Habermas' work, this understanding of democracy criticizes the one-sided focus on subjective, negative rights and privatism in liberalism as insufficient or too limited for a modern democracy, while, at the same time, the understanding of

participation in republicanism is deemed too strong (Habermas 1999, pp. 277–292). Instead, ‘constitutional patriotism’ understands the modern citizen as enjoying both negative rights and positive, participatory rights, which are seen as complementary or ‘equiprimordial’, rather than as in strong tension (as in liberalism), or as of unequal importance (as in communitarianism and republicanism) (Habermas 1992). Habermas seeks here to balance the constitutional and participatory imaginaries of democracy in an innovative way. In constitutional patriotism, the main rationale of the state is neither to protect individual citizens’ interests nor that of giving expression to the moral community or the common good, but rather to create and uphold those conditions under which citizens can effectively participate in the rule making of the polity. This means that the state needs, before anything else, to guarantee the existence and functioning of the public sphere. In this, the state procedurally institutionalizes the democratic process of rational will formation (Habermas 1999, p. 287).

In deliberative democracy, authentic democratic politics consists of free, equal, and rational deliberation by citizens in an autonomous public sphere, and needs not be confined to a pre-political community.

Deliberative democracy can be understood as a ‘two-track’ model in that it gives neither priority to civil society alone nor to the state, but underlines the importance of the embeddedness of institutions in civil society through the public sphere (Bohman 1994, p. 907). In deliberative democracy, authentic democratic politics consists of free, equal, and rational deliberation by citizens in an autonomous public sphere (Habermas 1992, p. 636), and need not be confined to a pre-national community. Deliberation is about the open and rational discussion of matters of common interest. The modes of justification of constitutional patriotism clearly include the ‘ethic of rights’ as well as the ‘ethic of self-rule’, but its main justification might perhaps be best characterized as the ‘ethic of deliberation’ in its primary focus on the communicative grounding of democracy.

The deliberative idea of democracy, in particular in its post-national version – i.e. a democracy that is not limited to the nation-state and which is based on an inclusive form of deliberation – is of clear relevance for the democratic trajectories of the post-communist societies. Deliberative, post-national democracy poses a significant alternative for exclusivist, nationalist understandings of democracy, which risk excluding distinct groups from specific democratic rights and meaningful participation in the polity. It might be argued, in a cautious way, that endorsements of the inclusion of minorities in democratic politics by – among others – the European Union, and political dialogue among minorities and the majority, have led to less conflictual situations in at least some post-communist societies (Harris 2005). In addition, the accession process of 10 of the former communist states to the European Union has underpinned the emergence of post-national, Europeanist discourses of democracy that do not necessarily endorse democracy at the European level but mostly do explicitly include a European point of reference in understandings of democracy.

What is more, important aspects of negotiation, deliberation, mutual recognition, and intercultural dialogue were available in the region before 1989. Such aspects were proposed, firstly, in a number of ways in dissident thought, and, secondly, emerged as a learning experience in the Roundtable Talks in some, if not all, of the countries in the region. Regarding dissident thought, a number of examples drawn from the works of the more prominent dissidents should suffice here. An ongoing theme in Gyorgy Konrad’s ‘Anti-Politics’ related to a transnational civil society that transcended the ‘provincialism’ of the modern nation-state and induced mutual understanding amongst various cultures. Vaclav Havel strongly emphasized a worldly responsibility of individual citizens that went beyond the immediate community:

any point of departure in an individual’s life usually has an element of universality about it . . . it must be potentially accessible to everyone; it must foreshadow a general solution, and, thus, it is not just

the expression of an introverted, self-contained responsibility that individuals have to and for themselves alone, but responsibility to and for the world. (Havel 1992, p. 194)

A dialogical, deliberative spirit can also be detected in the notion of 'Central Europe', where in some of its readings there was a strong emphasis on co-habitation and intercultural interaction. The emphasis on self-limitation, the rejection of ideological dogmatism (evident in, for instance, Havel's and Konrad's work), and the tendency towards deliberation in dissident thought were corroborated by the experiences of the Roundtable Talks that involved a spirit of deliberation, compromise, and communicative rationality.

This is not to say, of course, that deliberative and cosmopolitan understandings of democracy are now dominant in the new democracies. In contrast, it can be argued that in post-1989 democratization it was elitist understandings of democracy and nationalist interpretations that dominated the political scene. At the same time, however, it can be argued that the process of Europeanization has put in place a number of important preconditions for more deliberative and cosmopolitan forms of politics to emerge. More importantly, it seems that the discontent with democracy in the region can be at least partially understood as a rejection of elitist politics rather than of democracy per se.

This concise, general overview of various models of democracy is clearly not aiming at critically contributing to debates in political theory, but rather underlines the existing variety in the ideation of democratic political cultures, and confirms the arguments made above in favour of the diversification of political culture in the comparative study of democracy. I will suggest below that democratic ethics can be understood as analytical ideal types of modes of justification that need not be confined to the formal theoretical models. I propose, therefore, and will elaborate on this briefly in the conclusion, that the 'models of democracy' approach that is implicit in the normative debate in political theory is not sufficient for a 'diversity-sensitive' empirical approach, and that a focus on 'ethics of democracy' might serve this purpose better.

A multiple democracies approach

Carole Pateman has stated with regard to Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* that 'the meaning of democracy itself is never discussed' (Pateman 1980, p. 61). Qua successors of classical studies on civic culture, present-day democratization studies can be criticized in similar terms. As argued in this essay, the assumption in these approaches is that democracy can be in essence narrowed down to a Schumpeterian, classical liberal theory of constitutional, representative democracy on the one hand, and an Anglo-Saxon empirical model of democracy on the other. Such a one-dimensional and minimal understanding of democracy is well conveyed in the notion of 'waves of democratization' as introduced by Samuel Huntington, who indeed reads the history of 'The Meaning of Democracy' (see the title of the section in Chapter 1, Huntington 1991, pp. 5–13) as the victory of the procedural, Schumpeterian model.

Democratic political cultures, as becomes evident from even a cursory review of the current debate on democracy in political theory, can, however, be conceptualized in different and sometimes mutually exclusive ways. In addition, on a normative point, participatory and deliberative forms have critical potential, i.e. they offer propositions to counter the erosion of liberal democracy that results from civic passivity, the fragmentation of modern society, and diminished state capacities. Regarding the political reality of the new democracies, not only can one find a range of perceptions of democracy and primary justifications among both elites and masses but institutionalized democracies are also continuously open to normative critique. As, early in the 1990s, Michael Walzer has argued with regard to a dual widespread commitment to both democratic government and to the politics of difference in the region:

[t]heir simultaneous success is bound to pluralize democracy in a radical way. It will produce a number of different 'roads to democracy' and a variety of 'democracies' at the end of the road – a prospect difficult to accept for those who believe that democracy is the single best form of government. (Walzer 1994, pp. ix–x; cf. Taylor 2007)

An *a priori* confinement of democracy to the minimal, procedural definition and its ethic of rights – or, its understanding of 'politics as fabrication' (Wagner 2001, p. 512) – does not do justice to such variety, and risks mistaking alternative, participatory understandings for non-democratic discourses.

In analogy to Eisenstadt's designation of modernity as consisting of 'multiple modernities', it therefore makes sense – in the specific context of political modernity – to speak of 'multiple democracies' or varieties of democracy, in that democratization is not only about the institutionalization of a procedural democracy but also involves and produces various cultural, emancipatory orientations that can be related to specific civilizational-religious backgrounds and routes to modernity. Democracy perceived in this way implies that the creation and institutionalization of democracy is always bound to a specific historical and societal context, is the outcome of distinct local struggles, is always particularist in some sense, but at the same time is informed by the major liberal and republican traditions of democracy. It is useful to refer once again to Michael Walzer's work and his notion of 'minimal morality'. It can be argued that there is indeed a pervasive commitment to liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (as, significantly, came through in the rights-based focus of the dissident critique of the communist regimes), but also that the idea and understanding of democracy cannot be reduced to this 'minimal' commitment. A minimal morality is what provided a good part of the critical thrust against totalitarianism, and has also importantly informed the institutional design of democracy after 1989. But the abstract ideas that are attributed to a minimal consensus on democracy (including rights, popular sovereignty, and equality) are in reality embedded in 'thick' democratic political cultures that all interpret a similar (note: not the *same*) set of ultimate values of democracy in their own particularist ways. Elsewhere, Walzer has made this point clearly, by arguing that one can indeed identify a minimal and universal morality, but this morality cannot be seen as providing a clear-cut basis for any moral and legal system in its particularity (Walzer 1987, p. 25). In the Central and Eastern European context, we could translate this as follows. It might be argued that the minimal, universal 'moral code' consists of a contemporary – more or less global – consensus on a liberal set of moral values, which form the basis of constitutional systems. In our times, the translation from this minimal morality to a set of legal rights is understood in a fairly fixed and universal way, but that does not mean that the further particularistic translations of this 'thin' liberal code into 'thick' local political cultures and democratic institutions is likely to be the same everywhere. On the contrary, a rich variety and pluralism is more likely to have emerged.

A 'multiple democracies' approach has, then, next to its sensitivity regarding a variety of democratic perceptions, three main advantages over the conventional understanding of democratic political culture. Firstly, a multiple democracies approach proposes to bring out the distinct historical and contextual nature of the perception(s) of democracy in a particular society, by conceiving of the universal norms of democracy as always embedded in a specific situation. Secondly, such an approach suggests the 'essentially contestable' nature of democracy, which results from the tension between the two imaginaries of democracy, and proposes to reconstruct the political struggle between different perceptions of democracy within a society and the (temporary) institutionalization of a specific vision. In this, democracy is seen as always open to contestation and, therefore, to possible change. Thirdly, and in particular in the contemporary European situation, a multiple democracies approach has critical potential in that the possibility for innovative perceptions of democracy to emerge is kept open.

Innovative visions might involve the articulation of post-national and Europeanized political cultures. A multiple democracies approach is sensitive to such developments in that it does not take the grounding of culture, identity, and politics in the nation-state for granted.

If we accept such a diversified and historicized view of democracy, the delineation of a 'genuine democratic political culture' indeed becomes a chimera. Democratic political culture can be understood as 'produced' in particular political struggles in distinct historical situations, based on cultural orientations grounded in the dual imaginary dimension of democracy. Political cultures (and their reflection in institutional constellations) rest upon the values and meanings that the relevant social agents invoke, reproduce, as well as modify in the process. This means that any democratic political culture also includes traditional, religious, as well as political-ethical components, and ultimately is not reducible to a 'thin', liberal political culture that is generally supportive of an 'objective' liberal democratic order. Such a variegated understanding of political culture is supported by the concise review of political theory, which implies the necessity of distinguishing between at least a number of democratic political cultures in reality (cf. Fuchs and Klingemann 2006). In this reading, the procedural, rights-based vision is closest to a liberal-constitutional understanding of democracy, while political cultures that invoke some kind of substantive aim, such as civic participation, the common good, or social solidarity can be related to republican, communitarian and social-democratic understandings of democracy, respectively. Although I acknowledge the major advancement of such an approach, I argue here that a 'model approach' to political culture is ultimately not sufficient for the purposes of comparatively researching a variety of 'really existing' political cultures. An approach that is based merely on pre-defined models derived from political theory risks equating democratic realities with existing political theoretical classifications, and to downplay existing variety and unexpected or innovative combinations of democratic ideas. Moreover, as with the more conventional understanding of political culture, a 'model approach' is bound to come up with a national model or 'character', which risks essentializing and homogenizing a macro-social political culture. It is relatively easy to slip from such a characterization by means of models or ideal types into a historical-determinist mode as well as to gloss over intra-societal differences and diversity.

As a final point, therefore, I propose to ground the analysis of democratic political cultures in a variety of ethics of democracy. Rather than to identify distinct democratic models of political culture, it would seem more fruitful to identify political cultures on the basis of patterns of cultural repertoires or ethics of democracy (Dryzek and Holmes 2002, Lamont and Thévenot 2002). The ethics of democracy can be seen as orientating principles in two ways: in a normative sense as a guide to what is to be valued in a democratic regime and in a cognitive sense as a structuring principle of democratic discourse, i.e., defining which political aspects are relevant for realizing a democratic regime. As I have suggested above, at least four democratic ethics seem important for the evaluation or assessment of the 'intrinsic worth' of modern democratic regimes. The ethics are ultimately derived from normative political theory, but should not taken to be exhaustive. A fifth ethic could, for instance, be the 'ethic of distributive justice' based on the priority of substantive, socio-economic equality. The suggestion is that these democratic ethics are analytical ideal-types of modes of justification that will not be found in any pure sense in 'actually existing' democratic discourses, but rather in distinct combinations and hybrid ways, and such ethics will be hierarchized or ordered in distinct ways in particular discourses, and combined with other justificatory ideas.

Let me briefly reformulate the four democratic ethics. The first democratic ethic I propose is the 'ethic of rights'. This ethic is about the priority of rights and the rule of law, and an identification of democracy with the liberal model of constitutional democracy in its emphasis on natural rights, legal procedures, and the equality of citizens before the law. A second ethic is

the 'ethic of identity', based on a priority of identity as a defining identity or group boundaries and a related understanding of the common good. This ethic of identity is invoked when a shared 'thick' identity (i.e. as grounded in language, common traditions, and history, rather than a 'thin' attachment to a form of government), and its continuous preservation and flourishing, is understood as the main aim of a democratic polity. A third ethic is the 'ethic of self-rule', based on a priority of the idea of substantive participation. In the active, substantive conception of participation, popular sovereignty or democratic self-rule does not mean the transfer of sovereignty to an administering state, but, rather, self-rule is grounded in society and seen as an end in itself. Finally, the fourth ethic, the 'ethic of deliberation', understands the open, unrestricted, and rational deliberation over matters of the common good as the essence of a democratic regime.

In other words, a multiple democracies approach allows for cultural patterns that combine elements on which different democratic models are based, but the former are not necessarily pre-defined by the latter. By referring to different, coexisting, and unevenly available ethics or cultural repertoires within national societies, it is possible to establish patterns of repertoires that are more readily available in some societies than in others. In this, instead of contributing to the quest for the ultimate form of democracy, a multiple democracies approach proposes a critical theory of a variety of democratic forms and cultures.

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