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Peoples and nations: cultural and political collective self-identification

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ABSTRACT
This article presents and defends a distinction between cultural and political sources of social identities. The term peoples will be used to refer to cultural collective entities; nations will be understood as groups whose primary source of self-identification is derived from their common democratic political aim. The distinction allows us to recognise cultural pluralism in modern democratic states without losing sight of the need for common democratic political self-awareness – a common national identity. It is able to avoid the problem of 'nation-building' through cultural assimilation of smaller groups, as well as to foster common political belonging without the pressure of cultural uniformity. In practical terms, moreover, separating between cultural and political social identities can provide a solid platform which will enable a democratic state to survive its own socio-cultural diversity and the perpetual movement of peoples throughout geographical space.

KEYWORDS
Cultural groups; peoples; nations; collective self-identification; political identity

1. Introduction

The United *Nations* as the most encompassing intergovernmental organisation supports the right of all *peoples* to political self-determination. Human rights instruments make references to peoples and nations and their rights but they do not aspire to define what these collectives are (e.g. OAU, 1986; UN GA, 1948a, 1966a, 1966b). At times, it seems that peoples and nations are used interchangeably. For example, the Preamble of UDHR (UN GA, 1948a) states that 'it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations', and it continues that 'the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights (…)'. At other places, a mention of nations is not followed by a mention of peoples; i.e. there are no peoples in the equality of 'rights of men and women and of nations large and small' (UN, 1945, Preamble), and there are no nations in the right of self-determination for all peoples (UN GA, 1966b, Art. 1). Perhaps it is just a terminological preference to have nation-states and not people-states. For all that, it is true that the etymological meaning of a nation corresponds to what in many languages is considered a people.[1] Assuming that this reading is correct and that nations and peoples are one and the same, it is somewhat confusing that the UN GA proclaimed the UDHR as 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples *and* all

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nations' [italics mine]. The conjugation of peoples and nations can be found throughout other human rights documents, which leads one to conclude that there is in fact an implicit distinction between these two collectives, although international law has consistently refused to define them separately or explain how they differ (see UN GA, 1993, 2000, Para. 3).

From a political standpoint, the reticence to define what peoples and nations are can be explained easily: it could subsequently legitimise various secessionist groups that exist within many contemporary states (see Buchanan, 1991, 1997; Moore, 1998; Norman, 2006). As both the political self-determination of peoples (Art. 1) and the territorial integrity of states (Art. 2) are codified as rights in the *UN Charter* (1945), there is little motivation to provide a clearer definition of the terms used therein. Since some societies have 'become' nations or peoples from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, and some are still asking for recognition, the issue of properly specifying peoples and nations is not merely theoretical; it has serious, direct political consequences. As opposed to international law, academic circles and other interested parties have made many attempts to define what nations are (see Delanty & Kumar, 2006). The same cannot be said for the concept of peoples; that is, not from the side of political philosophers and theorists. At least implicitly, the term peoples is often used as an umbrella term for all kinds of self-identifying collectives such as ethnic groups, religious groups, language groups, tribal groups, and others. Each of these groups have their own source of common identity which is additionally characterised by their own peculiar (in Rawls' words) comprehensive doctrine. It is hence unsurprisingly difficult to precisely establish what qualifies a group as an entity that can legitimately claim the right to self-governance – a people. From another standpoint, it is also unreasonable to reduce collective self-identification to a set of empirical facts. Self-identification is necessarily reflexive and, as such, it can neither be forced nor prevented from taking place (see Young, 1990).[2]

There is, however, one thing that connects most of the aforementioned groups that are jointly and conveniently categorised as peoples: they are not necessarily considered as self-identifying *political* collective entities. Notwithstanding many disagreements with respect to what nations are, there is widespread recognition that the idea of nationhood and the existence of nations can be situated in a specific political (i.e. democratic) space and time. Looking back at history, peoples understood as self-identifying groups do not necessarily have a political character. They can of course develop one but ultimately their source of collective identity is not tied to their common political aim but rather their common *culture*.[3] Thus, the history of ethnic, language, religious, indigenous and other groups generally categorised as peoples originally starts with cultural self-awareness. Nations' histories seem to immediately start with democratic political self-awareness.[4] In other words, peoples knew they were peoples long before the idea of public governance and political emancipation. This knowledge, however, was apparently neither necessary nor sufficient to form a uniform political identity. That is, until the idea of nationhood took hold and then peoples increasingly entered the process of democratisation. The phenomenon by which members of culturally self-identifying groups became self-conscious as participants in political governance definitely contributes to a confusion between differentiating peoples and nations.

In order to address the problem of the conflation of peoples and nations, it is helpful to bring about the distinction between two fundamental sources of social identities: the

cultural and the political. Thus, throughout this discussion, I will distinguish between peoples and nations on the basis of their primary source of collective self-identification. I will use the term peoples to denote any kind of self-identifying group that is first and foremost maintained on the basis of a common *cultural* identity. Accordingly, nations will be understood as groups whose primary source of self-identification is derived from their common *democratic political* aim (which will be covered in more detail in section 4 of the paper). In this context, separation between peoples and nations is a conceptual concern, and not an etymological one. Different languages use different ways of expressing kinds of cultural and political identity groups. Peoples and nations are to be thought of as terminological umbrella terms that should be properly understood (translated) by taking into account socio-linguistic and historical context.

For the sake of brevity, common culture can be said to reflect similarities in norms, beliefs, and practices that are sufficiently strong to give rise to collective self-identification; i.e. the existence of a cultural group. The term peoples is a convenient device used to encompass these cultural groups, such are, for example, ethnic groups, language groups, religious groups, indigenous groups of various kinds, etc.; namely, groups whose existence as self-identifying cultural collectives does not depend on the existence of a common political identity or unifying political entity.[5] I will not evaluate the respective differences in the formative dynamics of cultural or political identities, nor will I make an attempt to identify the empirical factors that give rise to collective cultural or political self-consciousness (see Connor, 1990). All these groups have their own unique socio-historical ways by which their members form, internalise, experience, and express their common cultural or political belonging. These instances of collective self-awareness, however, are principally different; namely, the cultural type is able to survive various political transformations, memberships, and even enmities, while the political instance of social identity can be culturally homogenous or heterogeneous to non-specific and differing degrees.

2. Peoples as self-identifying cultural groups

Promotion of cultural pluralism and the protection of national minorities and indigenous peoples invites us to re-examine whether there is a conceptual and moral separation between cultural and political collective identities. Namely, the moral importance of cultural identity and by extension cultural groups has been acknowledged only relatively recently in philosophical literature and public policy. From an academic perspective, the recognition of culture as a moral category can be associated with the rise of the communitarian school of thought[6] and its critique of liberalism (MacIntyre, 1984; Sandel, 1982; Taylor, 1979; Walzer, 1983). Indeed, it was communitarian thinkers who first explicitly drew attention to the conceptual negligence of liberal thinkers in addressing the social embeddedness of the self and the socio-culturally conditioned personhood. They protested against the liberal 'atomistic' worldview which positions the individual as ontologically and morally prior to community; in particular, the most recent incarnation of this as exemplified by Rawls' (1999) model of the Original Position as a starting point for a theory of justice. Communitarians challenged the very possibility of thinking seriously about justice in a non-contextual and non-collectivist manner by pointing out that the democratic (liberal) community is also a distinctive cultural community. Among their other

valuable insights, they noted that every political context is innately characterised by some version of value collectivism. Namely, some version of embeddedness in norms, beliefs, and practices or some culture that makes our individual choices meaningful.

In a certain sense, the communitarian critique of liberalism expresses the idea that a cultural framework fundamentally shapes our thoughts into particular kinds of thoughts (Taylor, 1997, p. 132). Nonetheless, this line of reasoning (assuming it is correct) does not in itself provide an answer to why one background of meanings should not be replaced by another. In spite of its wicked undertone, it is not necessary to perform genocide in order to perform culturicide[7]; thus, some account is needed to show why our moral interest is tied to the existence of multiple cultures. Throughout history, the political responses of dominant cultural groups have often involved either total negation or assimilation of the divergent and smaller cultural groups (Addis, 1991, p. 1223). It may well be argued that the democratic principle of individual equality is conceptually incompatible with the 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such' (UN GA, 1948b, Art. 2). But the policy of assimilation might not be so self-evidently undemocratic, if we keep in mind that for the longest period it was the official way of dealing with (minority) cultural groups. Only in the period after World War II have democratic states started to genuinely acknowledge the value of cultural groups and protect them from more hidden causes of their assimilation and disappearance. Their acknowledgement has been generally referred to as the policy of cultural pluralism whilst their protection has been institutionally addressed through a set of preferential collective rights. In their own peculiar ways, both cultural pluralism and collective rights are alleged to be not only compatible with but also complementary to democratic theory and practise.[8]

The benefit of promoting cultural pluralism can be derived from both its instrumental and intrinsic value (Gill, 2001, p. 185). Namely, the existence of multiple cultures enriches human understanding because it provides a greater variety of contexts within which individuals (can) make meaningful decisions. To borrow Mill's (2001, p. 19) expression from his famous defence of the liberty of thought, the destruction of cultural groups robs both existing and future generations of the opportunity to experience, question and learn. A democratic society should not only offer means to individuals to make choices regarding the conception of a good life, but it should allow them to have the genuine opportunity to choose between various comprehensive moral and philosophical doctrines. Secondly, the moral justification for the protection of non-dominant cultural groups can also be derived from the recognition that no comprehensive self-identifying cultural collective is of greater moral importance than another. These groups have an intrinsic moral value for their members because they are vehicles through which they can realise their full moral capacities and 'establish institutions and manage their communal life in ways that reflect their communal values, traditions, and history – in short, their culture' (Tamir, 1993, p. 70).[9]

The promotion of cultural pluralism in modern democracies requires institutionally addressing the genuine capability of cultural groups to maintain their existence. A democratic form of governance and its majoritarian decision-making procedures tend to systematically disadvantage numerically non-dominant peoples (Addis, 1991; Gill, 2001). In order to prevent latent cultural assimilation (and effectively the annihilation of various cultural groups), many countries around the world have adopted different models of

collective rights protection and policies of preferential treatment for these groups (see Levy, 2000). Being unable to accommodate the claims of all peoples understood as self-identifying cultural groups, modern democratic states generally treat preferentially only (1) peoples of significantly smaller size (relative to the culturally dominant population) that were incorporated into national states during democratisation – national minorities; and (2) indigenous peoples that originally inhabited certain regions before colonisation and their inclusion into the eventually established democratic states. The protection of cultural groups through the normative and institutional framework of collective rights testifies that the international community is already predisposed to treating the phenomenon of cultural self-identification as an irreplaceable part of human welfare. Without accepting that cultural groups are entities of moral importance (either instrumentally or intrinsically), it is not possible to justify the allocation of additional institutional and socio-economic resources to democratically vulnerable or underprivileged peoples (see Freeman, 1995; Jones, 1999; Jovanović, 2012; Newman, 2004; Van Dyke, 1982).

It may be observed, nevertheless, that the system of democratic governance always brings about and indeed requires the creation of a majority (and minorities) in order to perform its function. As a system that upholds the political equality of all citizens, democracy embodies the principle of decision-making equality of resources, but not equality of welfare as such (Lee, 2001, pp. 126–127). Although individuals have 'an equal a priori probability of influencing any particular legislative choice' (Beitz, 1983, p. 72), this does not mean their interests will be by default accommodated. Thus, upon closer inspection, it is not immediately clear why belonging to an underrepresented group would constitute a pressing issue of moral importance. Extreme far-right movements, anarchists (somewhat paradoxically), and in most of the Anglo-Saxon world, socialist political parties and their voters have been regularly cut-off from public offices and positions. If cultural groups were sufficiently similar to various interest groups unified by a common concern and/or ideology (Lee, 2001), it would be unfair to treat them any differently and thus to extend to them the protection of collective rights. However, membership in cultural groups is importantly different in that it principally allows individuals to 'form and revise their aims and ambitions' (Kymlicka, 1989, p. 135) and because it 'greatly affects one's opportunities, one's ability to engage in the relationships and pursuits marked by the culture' (Margalit & Raz, 1990, p. 449). After all, cultural groups need socio-political resources to cultivate their beliefs and practices; i.e. their collective identities which are recognised by their members to have moral value, in and of themselves. Although the role of the democratic state is not to advance any particular conception of the good, it is expected that the cultural market will often be characterised by unequally positioned cultural groups.

Cultural groups have been deemed to possess a unique value for human beings because they operate as a platform for moral and political reasoning; 'it is only through having access to a societal culture that people have access to a range of meaningful options' (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 84).[10] Because they fundamentally contribute to human well-being, they are perceived as collective entities of moral importance. The good of common membership in cultural groups is made of paradigms of thinking and behavioural norms that provide the very substance of collective self-perception. Such a membership has integral and cohesive force for the successful identification and coexistence of many individuals. This good of common membership is collectively produced and

maintained; i.e. it is collectively owned.[11] To arrive at the conclusion that cultural groups are morally valuable, one does not take the familiar pathway where the individual right to liberty by extension results in a collective political right to (democratic) self-determination. Moral appreciation of cultural membership and peoples as facilitators of cultural identity can be derived from recognising the following: (1) that every individual is equally socio-culturally embedded, (2) that cultural groups operate as platforms for moral and political reasoning, (3) that no comprehensive self-identifying cultural group is of greater moral importance than another, and (4) from the importance of collective self-identification for authentic human development and co-existence.

The policies of cultural pluralism and the protection of national minorities and indigenous peoples via the mechanism of preferential collective rights rest upon a conceptual and moral separation between cultural and political collective self-identification. Democratically underprivileged peoples made apparent what the majority took for granted; namely, that they also represent a distinctive cultural group. The dominant majority does not need protection because in this context it is generally able to take care of itself, while still being a cultural collective entity. If there were no separation between cultural and political identity, then one quarter of the world's population (i.e. national minorities and indigenous peoples) would be legitimately assimilated into the dominant cultural group of their respective states (UN, 2009). In terms of their cultural distinctiveness, there is no difference between peoples large or small. The only difference exists with respect to how peoples are relatively placed and able to maintain their cultural identities in a majoritarian system of political deliberation. Importantly for a proceeding discussion, allocation of additional socio-institutional resources to smaller and vulnerable peoples does not aim to induce the creation of a separate political identity. Its aim is preserving collective cultural identities while not losing sight of the need for common democratic political self-awareness – a common national identity.

3. What is a nation?

Political communities in general came into being as a response to the need of individuals to live in integrated societies, to protect them from external threats and prevent and resolve internal conflicts (Service, 1978). However, the idea of nationhood carries a distinctive answer to the questions of origin and justification of a political authority. In pre-modern times, governance of political entities was intimately linked with the religious-based order of things; that is, the religious experience was immanent to how societies thought of themselves, and therefore, how they organised themselves politically. Even when the separation between the spiritual and the temporal power came about (e.g. the Church and the Monarch), in one form or another the legitimacy of the temporal power laid in its acceptance by the religious authority (see Kantorowicz, 1957). This paradigm shifted in Europe between the 17th and eighteenth century as the ruling aristocratic dynasties sought to legitimise their sovereignty outside of religious law and establishment. The medieval monarchy transformed itself into an absolute monarchy and an alternative political order had to seek support for its 'artificial existence' from the general community. As rulers strived to create feelings of political unity that would transcend old regional loyalties they also started taking notice of *public opinion*. Community support legitimised the monarch's governance, and eventually the populous became aware of itself in a *political*

sense. The people began identifying as self-conscious political groups, nations were born, claiming self-legislative power and the right to self-determination (Van de Putte, 1994, 1997).[12]

Ernest Renan somewhat poetically referred to a nation as a soul that consists of two parts: one being in the past and the other being in the present. One part of this spiritual principle 'is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form' (Renan, 1990, p. 19). In a different light, Benedict Anderson (2006) famously described nations as imagined communities. According to him, a nation as a new kind of social relation was made possible in a particular socio-historical context characterised by major scientific and economic developments (reaching its peak in the form of print capitalism[13]). Recognising the wide array of approaches to the topic at hand, it is generally accepted that the idea of nationhood in its politico-historical sense involved liberation from an oppressor which existed in some form of a privileged domestic or foreign political class (or imaginably any other). Liberation in this context involved the introduction of democratic governance. It was primarily conceived as a fight against the form of governance and only consequently against actual historical individuals who were upholding it. It was a unique kind of emancipation whose goal was to institutionalise the political participation of those who made up the political community but never governed over themselves. The people ceased to be only the subjects of law and became a self-conscious group who claimed the right to self-governance – a nation.

To express their will to self-determination, the people form a state which serves as a political and socio-institutional facilitator of democratic governance; i.e. a nation-state. Surely nations and their states are conceptually two different entities because, as David Miller notes, 'nation must refer to a community of people with an aspiration to be politically self-determining, and state must refer to the set of political institutions that they may aspire to possess for themselves' (1995, p. 19).[14] However, since the idea of nationhood (vs. hereditary (aristocratic) rule) first and foremost designated a politically self-identifying and governing group, during the first half of the nineteenth century it did not seem possible that nations could form any other state but a democratic one. The nation-state is a democratic state because democracy cannot exist without the political identification of those who govern over themselves – a nation. Accordingly, this is why intellectuals of the time generally thought that the nation-state was the only legitimate state, and even that national self-determination/political participation would eventually bring about the end of intra-state wars and conflicts.[15]

It was unfortunately not anticipated that very soon the nation-state would gradually forfeit the ideal of emancipation and political self-governance. Moreover, that it would transform itself into an aggressive, non-tolerant (both domestically and internationally), highly militarised political community (Mommsen, 1990, p. 212). This transformation was fuelled both externally and internally, i.e. externally as the rise of nation-state coincided with the last stage of (high) European imperialism (circa 1880–1918), and internally as the strength of one political community (now nation-state) was measured by the national cohesion of its citizens (Arendt, 1958, pp. 123–158). Thus, although in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a number of European countries and the U.S.A. showed signs of progress in their internal policies and in their mutual external relations[16], their treatment of other countries and societies did not follow this trend. The colonisation

and exploitation of the Americas, the African continent and parts of Oceania intensified, culminating in numerous armed conflicts with native peoples, killings and enslavement of the defeated. Apart from having clear economic benefits, imperialism came to be seen as an instrument of 'national' expansion. Empires competed over international influence, and perceived the administration of foreign territories beneficial to the motherland and to the 'non-national peoples' under their rule. Thus, imperialism demonstrated the strength of a nation, fuelling national pride in the homeland while its military conquests were morally justified by identifying imperialism with the spread of *cultural* values and the civilizational achievements of the nation.[17] So how did the people become peoples; how did a nation understood as a self-identifying political group that governs over itself become a self-identifying cultural group?

Although originally the question of national identity did not contain any cultural reference points, pressure quickly rose to take a population's socio-cultural homogeneity as a necessary condition for political stability. The European nationalists appealed to the already-existing shared cultural identities (e.g. common language, ethnicity, etc.) to strengthen their claims to nationhood and self-determination (Arendt, 1958, pp. 222–243). The requirement of social uniformity and the disregard for the democratic principles upon which nationhood as such is based resulted in either the latent or forceful transformation of various cultural groups into a dominant (now classified) 'national' culture. Thus, ever since the idea of nationhood took hold, there has been a tendency to 'nationalise' a great number of self-identifying cultural groups; i.e. to attach political identities (the people) to cultural identities (peoples). The most famous theoretical formulation of this trend is captured in the typology originally popularised by Friedrich Meinecke who differentiated between cultural and political nations (*Kulturnation* and *Staatsnation*): 'nations that are primarily based on some jointly experienced cultural heritage and nations that are primarily based on the unifying force of a common political history and constitution' (1970, p. 10). The distinction between two types of nations (and consequently two types of nationalism) was also taken up Hans Kohn (2005) although he never used the terms political and cultural nation explicitly. Rather, he distinguished between Western and sometimes Central/Eastern European or Asian nationalism,[18] essentially between 'the West and the Rest' (Hall, 1992). Anthony Smith (2010, p. 39) referred to 'voluntarist' and 'organic' kinds of nationalism, and John Plamenatz (1973) reaffirmed the Western and Eastern type of nationalism.

The political (civic) idea of nation takes the nation as a purely political and voluntary collective: 'as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values' (Ignatieff, 1993, pp. 3–4). What defines individuals as co-nationals is 'a bond of mutual recognition of one another as legal subjects and fellow citizens' (Van de Putte, 1997, p. 164). Just like in the hypothetical state of nature, individuals do not possess any 'natural' ties (race, ethnicity, religion etc.). To use John Rawls' (1999) expression, they are abstract individuals behind the 'veil of ignorance' who aspire to form a political community. 'What is a nation? A body of associates living under *common* laws and represented by the same legislative assembly' (Sieyès, 1963, p. 156). In a national collective, cultural or other communal memberships are not prohibited but simply considered *politically* irrelevant because they do not have a justificatory role in the broader socio-political context. Once the group of individuals hypothetically forms a political community, they self-legislate only what is at their individual and

collective advantage. Participation in public institutions and the collective governance of the community entails a certain responsibility towards others, and in this sense, the fact that every human community necessitates a degree of special commitment is not seen as controversial. In recent literature, the idea of a political nation has been expressed in the language of constitutional patriotism, that is, as a revival of eighteenth century republicanism (Kant, 1991b, p. 75). Popularised by Jürgen Habermas (2001), the viewpoint of constitutional patriotism reaffirms that national membership can (and ought to be) rational and acultural, grounded on democratic norms and values (Müller, 2012, p. 1927).[19]

The cultural (ethnic)[20] idea of nation is said to draw its roots from a conscious politicisation of traditional moral values, a 'natural bond' of the ethnicities and peculiarities of these identities, be that language, religion, customs, etc. Here,

> the principle is not: Whoever wants to be a nation is a nation. It is just the opposite: A nation simply *is*, whether the who compose it want to belong to that nation or not. A nation is not based on self-determination but on pre-determination. (Meinecke, 1970, p. 205)

It is 'a natural entity that can only reach full self-determination through the acquisition of political statehood, a quintessentially cultural imposition of order on chaos' (Herzfeld, 1997, p. 39). Because a cultural nation emphasises natural membership, blood ties, cultural authenticity etc., it is not in theory predisposed to those 'foreign' members who are willing to join the nation as *political* members. The emergence of this interpretation of nationhood is believed to be related to those regions where a limited or complete political sovereignty was connected to ethno-cultural belonging during imperial times. Thus, when the moment came to claim nationhood and self-governance, cultural membership provided the defining reference point in the establishment of nationhood. This interpretation of national identity indeed corresponds to a rather widespread opinion which takes a nation to represent a people who identify themselves as a distinct group with a characteristic history and culture; these two often accompanied by other socio-natural traits such as a common ethnicity, language, race, religion, customs etc (see also Geary, 2003).

4. Nations as self-identifying political groups

The separation between these two types of nations has been criticised on a number of grounds. The political idea of nationhood appears to be more 'enlightened', progressive, rational and liberal, and in its promotion of ethical universalism, more cosmopolitan. A cultural nation seems to correspond to a more conservative, closed type of community, with a tendency to transform itself into a totalitarian and exclusive collective (see Ignatieff, 1994, pp. 3–7). It can be contested that the first political nations did not in fact reflect their own ideology and that perhaps only recent socio-political developments in certain nation-states deserve to be associated with the political version of nationhood. An objection can be raised against the practical tenability of a voluntary/contractarian (political) interpretation of nationhood; that is, with providing citizenship to all those who comply with the requirements of one nation-state and revoking it from all those who do not (Tamir, 1993, p. 90). A similar argument can be made against the cultural nation regarding those members who do not, strictly speaking, share relevant cultural features and hence the problematic status of their membership. A cultural interpretation of nationhood also does not fit well with examples of nations where ethnicity, race, religion, etc. play a

minor role (if any), or nation-states that are multilingual, so not bound by a unifying tongue.[21] Ultimately, it can be easily disputed whether cultural homogeneity has ever existed in any human collective of large proportions, including the national one (see Larsen, 2017; Schnapper, 1997; Tamir, 2019).

Perhaps philosophically the strongest argument against both political and cultural types of nations is the one which in fact challenges the *principal possibility* of political nationhood without the cultural particularities that distinctively characterise a community of people. As one of the key figures in contemporary liberal nationalist theory, Will Kymlicka (1989, 1995) argues that in fact all nations i.e. all types of nationalism are based on a shared cultural feeling of belonging that is further institutionalised through a shared language and shared customs. The liberal and non-liberal (political and cultural) forms of nationalism do not differ in that respect, although they vary in the intensity and content of the culture that is being promoted. A liberal state promotes a 'thin' national culture, which is characterised by a shared language, a set of public and social institutions, education and law. As opposed to this, a 'thick' ethno-culture more intensively promotes family customs and values and religious lifestyle, among others (Tan, 2004, p. 90). Being mindful of this critique, most contemporary definitions of nationhood generally combine elements from both the political and cultural concepts of the nation. Anthony Smith's definition explains 'a *nation* as a named community possessing an historic territory, shared myths and memories, a common public culture and common laws and customs' (2002, p. 15).[22] In a slightly different tone, Yael Tamir claims that

> A nation, then, may be defined as a community whose members share feelings of fraternity, substantial distinctiveness, and exclusivity, as well as beliefs in a common ancestry and a continuous genealogy. Members of such a community are aware not only that they share these feelings and beliefs but that they have an active interest in the preservation and well-being of their community. They thus seek to secure for themselves a public sphere where they can express their identity, practice their culture, and educate their young. (1995, p. 425)

The contemporary theoretical understanding of nationhood is correct to point out that nations are not only political but also cultural communities. However, making a distinction between cultural and political collective self-identification proposed in this paper allows us to think of nations as cultural communities by way of taking nations to consist of cultural groups and not by way of merging cultural and political identity. Within this theoretical framework, nations are understood as collectives that are *made of* cultural groups and not as entities that *are* cultural groups. Namely, the phenomenon by which individuals identify by shared cultural collective-psychological elements represents a morally valuable self-reflexive communal creation. This phenomenon, however, is an entirely different form of social construct and collective self-understanding compared to how one society thinks of itself politically. The idea of nationhood came about as a claim of the people to institutionalise democracy which arguably as a form of governance cannot exist without political identification of those who govern. Thus, in its authentic sense, nationhood requires the existence of a common *political* aim, along with the means and the willingness of individuals to *democratically* participate in its realisation. If nationhood as a form of democratic political self-identification was conditioned by prior cultural self-identification, then presumably peoples would become nations the moment they became peoples; i.e. the moment they became aware of

their common cultural membership. In a similar fashion, we would witness an unfluctuating process of nation building on the basis of shared cultural belonging and disintegration of self-identifying political groups due to recognisable cross-cultural differences in norms, beliefs and practises among their constitutive peoples.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is fair to point out that the conflation of cultural and political identification may very well be motivated by the conviction that a certain level of cultural homogeneity is necessary to provide a well-balanced and integrated political identity. In non-democratic states, the presence of cultural homogeneity is more recognisable because of the structural absence of those social institutions where individuals are permitted to challenge the existing socio-cultural and political order. However, in democratic societies, the standing connection between the cultural and the political is more latent because, as Claude Lefort notes, political competition and the competition of ideas in general is constitutive of the society itself: 'the legitimation of purely political conflict contains within it the principle of a legitimation of social conflict in all its forms' (1988a, p. 18). Such a principle makes democratic societies appear *politically* 'acultural'; but somewhat paradoxically, the same democratic principle that legitimises the political (and hence socio-cultural) conflict requires an elementary social agreement about its own legitimacy, i.e. a form of 'democratic culture'. Thus, although nations join together various cultural groups into one political identity, their existence rests upon a latent agreement of all peoples to the democratic deliberative procedures. In turn, such a decision-making process presupposes cultural (moral) norms that are consistent with the idea of political equality of all participating members in a nation.[23]

This underlying normative compatibility of basic norms, beliefs and practices across cultural groups in a democratic state does put constraints to feasibility of genuine national identity. However, a normative agreement of this sort represents a separate matter from the conflation of cultural and political self-identification in the academic and political discussion on national identity. On the one hand, it is at least telling that the presence of common basic moral norms or cultural traits between peoples often fails to produce a common political identity (and sometimes even goes hand in hand with the greatest political enmities). On the other, as a matter of both historical experience and current political practice, it is surely possible to purposely use cultural self-identification to create a self-identifying political group. Many cases have testified that a national programme by which cultural identity is *transformed* into political identity can have dire consequences. Presently, the translation of cultural membership into political membership in modern democratic states is morally problematic because it inevitably leads to either a politics of assimilation or politics of exclusion.[24] In the first case it results in a forceful conversion of 'divergent' cultural groups into a dominant 'national' cultural identity, while in the second it prevents the members of 'non-national' cultural groups from developing a sense of political belonging and retains them as citizens only in a legal but disenfranchised sense.

Distinguishing between cultural and political identification makes it possible to avoid the aforementioned problem of assimilation or exclusion; namely, it is able to explain nations as conceptually and morally separate entities (i.e. identities) from their constitutive peoples. Cultural groups remain cultural groups once they join a nation and form a state, just the same these cultural identities are capable of surviving various political transformations and even breaking apart of their formed nation-state. In this sense, the survival of

cultural groups is not bound by the existence of their states, whereas the state serves a nation as a vehicle to express its identity, because a nation, properly speaking, cannot exist without the means to assert its common political aim through democratic institutions – its state. National identity is in this particular way intrinsically linked with the existence of a state.[25] While preserving their self-cognition as distinctive cultural entities, all peoples join a nation, and as a matter of political designation, they create a nation of their named state.[26]

Ultimately, a nation can be said then to refer to a politically self-identifying group of people who democratically governs over themselves and their state. Their exercise of freedom is contained in their wish to subject themselves 'only to the laws that they have enacted for themselves through a democratic process' (Habermas, 2015, p. 34) and their 'assertion of right which has the effect of challenging the omnipotence of power' (Lefort, 1988b, p. 31); i.e. omnipotence of the general will over the individual. What makes a particular group of people self-identify as a nation is an empirical question that can be investigated accordingly. The whys and wherefores of nations are many, but the question why a social phenomenon comes about is not the same as asking what makes it conceptually and morally distinctive from other similar phenomena. Nations are politically self-identifying groups whose moral value is derived from their commitment to democratically govern over themselves. Peoples are culturally self-identifying groups that are morally important 'because it is only through having access to a societal culture that people have access to a range of meaningful options' (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 84). Both peoples and nations represent instances of fundamental forms of social identities and collective self-identification indispensable for authentic human development and co-existence – the first is cultural and the second is political.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to investigate the relationship between the conceptual categories of political and cultural identities and whether these two concepts can concurrently and comfortably coexist in a modern democratic state. The general approach throughout this brief analysis was not to describe the characteristics that peoples and nations exhibit in their specific socio-historical and cultural context. Rather, the idea of nationhood presented here sees it as a phenomenon whereby a democratic political identity involves a collection of cultural entities without trying to merge one into the other. Differentiating between the cultural and the political as two different modes of collective self-identification does not negate but rather legitimises the existence of cultural groups and their interests, by which it also eases the pressure of treating national identity as a cultural category. Through the institutional framework of preferential collective rights, modern democratic states are able to sustain the promotion of cultural pluralism, respect the right of all peoples to self-determination and potentially avoid the problem of political secession. As a matter of both conceptual and moral authenticity, separation between two fundamental sources of social identity is able to envisage nations only as politically self-identifying and self-governing groups. In practical terms, moreover, this understanding of nationhood can provide a solid platform which will enable a democratic state to survive its own socio-cultural diversity and the perpetual movement of peoples throughout geographical space.[27]

Notes

1. Namely, the etymological meaning of the word nation refers to that which has been born and it is originally derived from Latin *nationem* (and subsequently Old French *nacion* – birth, origin). In this regard, for example, it should correspond to the variation of the term *narod* or *narodnost* in Slavic languages; i.e. something that comes into existence through *birth*. However, in Slavic languages, *narod* or *narodnost* is commonly used to denote a people understood as an ethnic group in English (see Shanin, 1990). The word nation (*nacija, natsiia*) is sometimes used interchangeably with people (narod), but normally as a political identity group with its independent state (or a group striving to have one). Unlike in the English language, the term nationality is not used interchangeably with citizenship (and the usage of these two terms as synonymous in many languages complicates the matter additionally).
2. Although there is an overlap of categories at times between this article and the politics of identity literature, this work is not aiming to engage overmuch with the latter. See Connoly (2002), Tully (2003), Appiah (2005), and Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Mohanty, and Moya (2006) for fruitful discussion on the politics of identity.
3. Tribal groups seem to be a good example of this since their membership is often characterised by an interconnected association of both cultural and political elements. Nevertheless, the very survival of various indigenous tribal groups after colonisation and incorporation into larger states lends to the conclusion that their collective identity is primarily cultural and only consequently political.
4. So as to avoid confusion, although the term nations (the USA) or First Nations (Canada) is nowadays used to refer to indigenous groups of North America, these will be treated as cultural groups throughout this paper because of their ability to maintain their identities even after the aforementioned effective loss of political sovereignty.
5. The classical definition of culture is well captured in Tylor's words as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (1871, Vol I, p. 1). It can be said that a cultural group (i.e. its identity) consists of these elements and that it emerges when shared participation in this complex socio-psychological whole compels us to recognise others in ourselves and vice versa in this relevant sense.
6. It is worth noting that these authors never directly associated themselves with this label and that they should not be confused with the new communitarian wave that developed during 1990's (see Etzioni, 1998).
7. Or 'ethnocide' as Anthony Smith (1986, p. 96) refers to it.
8. See also Berlin (1969; 1991) and Crowder (2002) for a related discussion on value pluralism.
9. This position possibly echoes a UDHR claim that 'Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible' (UN GA, 1948a, Art. 29, Para. 1).
10. Although I did not pursue that argument here, it is worth noting that membership in self-identifying cultural groups also contributes to individuals in another manner. Namely, as Stewart (2005, p. 188) notes, a person's well-being can be affected by how well the group they identify with is doing. For example, family members take pride in the achievements of children and co-nationals feel dignified for the prosperity of their political collectives. Correspondingly, the substandard standing of self-identifying collectives prevents individuals from developing their capabilities, while also leading to their psychological desolation due to the intricate identifying relationship with the (poor performing) collective. Stewart gives an example of African-Americans in the USA and their high level of depression that is associated with the standing of the groups as a whole. See also Brown et al. (2000).
11. For example, Denise Réaume identifies cultured society as a complex set of goods which involves 'activities that not only require many in order to produce the good but are valuable only because of the joint involvement of many. The publicity of production itself is part of what is valued – the good *is* the participation' (1988, p. 10).

12. It can be said that the idea of a social contract represented a theoretical articulation of the profound shift that was taking place in Europe at the time – an attempt to legitimise and explain why individuals ought to subject themselves to the governing authority, without making reference to a religiously constructed higher law. Even Machiavelli's *Prince* can be considered as an inquiry into endowing political power with unquestionable authority without making reference to religious principle (Hénaff, Morhange, & Allen, 1996; Lefort, 2012).
13. Capitalist-based economy established a new kind of market and social classes while the print industry provided means for dissemination of programmes and ideas in vernacular language.
14. In his more comprehensive account, Miller (1995, p. 27) claims that the concept of nation consists of five elements: a nation is a community (1) constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment, (2) extended in history, (3) active in character, (4) connected to a particular territory, and (5) marked off from other communities by its distinct public culture.
15. Kant, for example, argued that the abolishment of monarchical rule, apart from having a moral basis, would also gradually result in the establishment of perpetual peace. He wrote:

    > If, as must be so under this [republican, non-monarchical] constitution, the consent of the subjects is required to determine whether there shall be war or not, nothing is more natural than that they should weigh the matter well, before undertaking such a bad business. For in decreeing war, they would of necessity be resolving to bring down the miseries of war upon their country. (1991a, p. 122)

16. The democratic aspirations of the time were fortified in legal documents which (at least formally) claimed freedom and rights for all men, such as *American Declaration of Independence* (1776) and *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789).
17. This line of reasoning is well presented in the following speech excerpt given by Archibald Philip Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery at the Anniversary Banquet of the Royal Colonial Institute, 1st of March 1893: 'There are two schools who view with some apprehension the growth of our Empire. The first is composed of those nations who, coming somewhat late into the field, find that Great Britain has some of the best plots already marked out. To those nations I will say that they must remember that our colonies were taken – to use a well-known expression – at prairie value, and that we have made them what they are. We may claim that whatever lands other nations may have touched and rejected, and we have cultivated and improved are fairly parts of our Empire, which we may claim to possess by indisputable title. But there is another ground on which the extension of our Empire is greatly attacked … that our Empire is already large enough and does not need extension … We have to consider not what we want now, but what we shall want in the future. We have to consider what countries must be developed either by ourselves or some other nation, and we have to remember that it is part of our responsibility and heritage to take care that the world, as far as it can be moulded by us, shall receive the Anglo-Saxon and not another character … ' (Bennett, 1962, pp. 310–311).
18. 'In the Western world, in England and in France, in the Netherlands and in Switzerland, in the United States and in the British dominions, the rise of nationalism was a predominantly political occurrence; it was preceded by the formation of the future national state … Outside the Western world, in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia, nationalism arose not only later, but also generally at a more backward stage of social and political development: the frontiers of an existing state and of a rising nationality rarely coincided; nationalism, there, grew in protest against and in conflict with the existing state pattern – not primarily it into a people's state, but to redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands' (Kohn, 2005, p. 329).
19. Müller (2012) also argues that constitutional patriotism is not in fact a variation of political/civic nationalism.
20. Throughout this paper, I consider that every ethnic group is a cultural group, but not that every cultural group is an ethnic group (i.e. that every ethnic identity is a cultural identity but not that every cultural identity is an ethnic identity). I here use it interchangeably only to stay faithful to the original texts, since in a European context and the European history

of political ideas, the terms ethnic groups and cultural groups were frequently used synonymously.

21. The ethnic element is almost completely missing in the nation-states of the American continent, Australia and New Zealand. Furthermore, as Anthony Smith points out, ethnic communities do not have to possess political dimension, an attribute that seems indispensable for a nation. For more about this, see his distinction between *Ethnie and nation* (2010, pp. 10–16). Examples of multilingual nation-states are Belgium, Switzerland, and India.
22. This appears to be the latest and somewhat revised version of his standard definition of nation as 'a named human community residing in a perceived homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members' (2010, p. 13).
23. One could also argue that the converse is also true; namely, that a recognition of associative cultural beliefs, practices, or shared endorsement of a comprehensive doctrine is an integral part of the process whereby nationhood is endowed with legitimacy.
24. Perhaps less noticed, it also has some implications. For example, it is unable to explain how a single cultural group can be politically divided and yet preserve its principal (cultural) self-awareness. Or how members of cultural groups without the rights to participate in the governance of their 'home' nation-states can be considered genuine members of their 'original' cultural-political nation (e.g. national minorities in neighbouring states).
25. Hedetoft also makes a related remark by pointing out that while many academics debate about constitutive features of nations, they inaccurately 'regard the state as extraneous to and not as an intrinsic part of the object [national identity]' (2019, p. 366).
26. As an illustration, Serbs, Hungarians, Romani, Bosniaks, Croats, Romanians, Slovaks, etc. remain peoples (i.e. their respective cultural groups – *narodi*) when they create a nation (*nacija*). The aforementioned are not both cultural groups and nations because their cultural identity is not transformed into their political identity. They remain cultural groups in their own right when they create a political self-identifying group with a common democratic aim – the nation of the state of Serbia, in this particular case.
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