

# National Self-Determination and Justice in Multinational States

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## Chapter 4

# Potential Political Cultures

In the previous chapter, I defined a nation as a group of people whose members self-identify with a political culture of a certain kind. This political culture is related to the group's shared goal of maintaining or acquiring collective agency that would enable it to control its political future. I also established that nations have the capacity of being free in relation to other similar agents and thus of holding a primary moral right. The self-identification component in my definition of nationhood is designed to exclude vacuous political cultures in transitional or oppressive societies, but it is these societies that most need claims to self-determination on their territory to be regulated.

Political culture is a set of beliefs about and attitudes toward politics shared by group members. The beliefs concern the locus, origin, and character of political authority. Political culture has different features in a democracy than it does in an oppressive political regime. Its scope ranges from political cultures that have corresponding public spheres and institutionalized structures to express them to political cultures that have neither. At one end of this continuum is a perfect democracy that provides ideal conditions for a collective agent's deliberations, goal setting, and the realization of what John Rawls would call "the ideal of public reason." A government conforms to this ideal when it governs a group on the basis of reasons that apply to the group members' situation and when the set of beliefs that motivates individuals' actions as members of the collective agent is the set of beliefs expressed in the public sphere. On the other end of the continuum is the political culture of a people living in a totalitarian society. Whether the people is a national minority without the structures of self-government or a majority with formal access to the institutions of self-government, they cannot call the government their own if they do not identify with the set of beliefs expressed in public sphere. They possess what I called a "potential political culture."

The introduction of the notion of potential political culture raises several points of concern. In an environment in which a group cannot express its beliefs and attitudes, the detection of both the group and its political culture can be problematic. What attests to the existence of the kind of political culture that characterizes a nation in an oppressive society? The problem of detecting national groups in oppressive societies is in fact a problem for all accounts of nationhood except those that ignore substate national groups altogether. In response, we might either limit the range of

situations to which our account of nationhood applies or treat vacuous cultures as expressing national identities, but neither option is satisfactory. Applying the notion of nationhood to only a limited group of agents does not help to address the self-determination claims of groups in transitional societies, and considering vacuous cultures to characterize national groups undermines a principled application of the right to self-determination and ignores the “real” national make-up of states. Estimating the degree of “reality” of various expressions of nationhood in oppressive societies helps specify the subjects of the right to self-determination with more precision. Thus, we need to take a closer look at national identities in oppressive societies.

In Chapter 3, I indicated how an oppressed group’s political culture might be expressed. This chapter considers three problems related to the notion of potential political culture that need to be resolved to bolster my argument. The first problem concerns the determination of the entitlements of substate groups when they cannot properly express their political cultures. We can often detect the existence of a group that is being oppressed, but the changeability of identities and the limitations on expression may hinder the application of normative principles regulating the group’s status even if such principles are formulated, because we may not be able to determine with sufficient certainty what the group is entitled to—whether it is a cultural group, a national group, or something else. The second problem has to do with the application of the cautious approach to nondemocratic societies with only one nation on their territory. By asserting that vacuous political cultures do not characterize national identities, the “cautious approach,” which I introduced in the previous chapter, may hold back the application of the normative framework even for relatively obvious cases of national identity (for example, nondemocratic states with one national group where state boundaries are the same for vacuous and for potential cultures). The seemingly excessive strictness of the approach requires us to clarify the distinctions between vacuous and potential political cultures in cases where a set of beliefs exists that appears to belong to both vacuous and potential cultures. The third problem is the seeming unreality of nationhood for all but democratic societies implied by the idea of potential political culture. The idea of potential political culture may seem to suggest that only democratic countries can be treated as real nations, while all other communities are faced with some degree of potentiality, because only in democratic societies can the beliefs of the political culture associated with nationhood be fully expressed and acted upon by the members of the nation. This, too, may seem to make the notion of political culture too restrictive.

I begin by elaborating on the meaning of political culture in general in order to explain which of its elements are associated with nationhood and how they are expressed. I then offer solutions to the three problems that constitute the central focus of this chapter.

## **Political Culture: Overview of the Continuum**

With respect to the scope of political culture, the most minimalist notion characterizes it as a set of attitudes, beliefs, and values that together establish a general

orientation toward political action. A more inclusive notion adds social practices to attitudes and beliefs, and the most encompassing idea of political culture includes political structures, as well.<sup>1</sup>

Should we consider social practices to be part of political culture?<sup>2</sup> Estonians who participated in elections for the USSR Supreme Council did not, for the most part, perceive these elections as a social practice that embodied their group identity. If this social practice was made meaningful by them, it was not in a way that was at all straightforward: their shared motivation for voting was perhaps based not on the belief that by doing so they expressed the will of the people but rather on the belief that refusing to vote would have undesirable consequences. It is clear that the motivation behind the performance of an action matters in identifying what political culture is present and whether there is more than one. The action of voting cannot be understood to characterize a political culture unless it is placed in the context of individuals' attitudes toward this practice. Behavior can therefore be included in the notion of political culture only with some reservations, and if we are to include it we first need to determine what moves individuals to act. To uncover individual dispositions to behave, we will have to pay attention to what normative beliefs about practices individuals endorse, and because patterns of behavior in oppressive societies are not directly related to these normative beliefs, I do not include social practices in my notion of political culture: we can learn all we need to know to identify a political culture with which individuals self-identify by considering their beliefs and attitudes.

Should the notion of political culture include political structures? Political structures do not have direct relation to political culture, as evidenced by the formation of Polish national identity, which Stephen Welch describes as a negative response to the political structures imposed on the Poles at the time when their national identity was emerging. Since the Polish nation was characterized in opposition to existing political structures, these structures could hardly be considered a part of the Polish nation's political culture, although they helped it emerge. Nor do all already formed political cultures have a clear set of corresponding political structures. I define political culture, then, solely as a set of beliefs about and attitudes toward politics.<sup>3</sup>

Individual beliefs about politics can be presented as descriptive beliefs, while their attitudes toward politics can be presented as a set of normative beliefs. For example, "I believe that Quebec is a nation" is a descriptive statement, whereas "I believe it is wrong that Quebec is not given national status" is a normative statement. Hence, we can impose a more uniform description on what constitutes a political culture: a political culture is a set of descriptive and normative beliefs about politics. Below, when it is not important for my presentation to separate beliefs and attitudes, I will use "beliefs" to refer to both descriptive and normative beliefs. For a political culture to characterize a nation, individuals need to self-identify with the set of beliefs characterizing the corresponding political culture. To self-identify with a set of beliefs, individuals have to both be capable of forming dispositions to behave based directly on these beliefs and to approve the beliefs' propositional content. I will deal more with the notion of self-identification in the next section. When an individual is motivated to act directly in relation to a certain belief, this individual develops a disposition to behave.

In different contexts, different beliefs and attitudes have to be shared to characterize a political culture. If we try to identify what political culture is shared by individuals in relation to a democratic process, the beliefs under consideration do not necessarily have to reflect particular national allegiances. But if political culture is employed as a category for the purpose of defining nationhood, the relevant beliefs are different from those considered with respect to the democratic process. Citizens of a multinational federal state share the culture of democratic participation but have different national cultures. Differences in democracy or values, for example, do not adequately describe the relationships of different national groups, because the same nation can encompass different sets of values, while different nations can have similar value systems and cultures. Norwegians and Swedes have similar attitudes toward and beliefs about the principles of social and political justice, the relationship of citizens to the state, and so forth. The political cultures their individual citizens share are similar in many respects, but the beliefs of members concerning the bounds of membership in their political communities and the corresponding collective agents differ.

The elements of political culture relevant to defining nationhood, then, are not connected to just any type of political practice that a collective agent is involved in, but only to the elements of the group's internal constitution that allow it to relate to other similar groups. Moreover, these elements are not selected merely to compare political systems of different nations (for example, limited monarchy versus presidency). Their purpose, in other words, is not to explain how the political cultures of different nations are different or similar, but rather to provide a meaningful description of the fact that there are different nations. The beliefs found in a political culture characterizing a nation are of a kind that both can be universally found across national cultures and can account for the plurality of national groups. The political culture of nationhood includes, therefore, a set of constitutive beliefs that also allow all national groups to relate to one another. Such a set is relatively narrow and includes the beliefs shared by the members of a national group about the essential elements of their group's organization, about the ideal status that the members envision for the group's authority (presently always in the context of its relation to other groups and thus about the standing and the limits of collective agency in its relation to other similar agents), and about the outreach of this authority—about which people are considered fellow nationals. Thus, a political culture of nationhood is limited to the beliefs individuals hold about themselves as members of a collective agent that include (1) criteria for membership and (2) the shared goals of the national group tied to the realization of its self-determination.<sup>4</sup> The political culture associated with nationhood is enhanced by the proper actualization of group agency, which includes the expression and regeneration of the beliefs shared by the members of the political culture.

Defining nationhood in terms of political culture captures the properties of nationhood that are most important for the corresponding collective agents' mutual relations. Political culture of this kind, however, permeates different areas of culture and is reflected in other kinds of beliefs about nationhood, such as attitudes toward immigration and immigrants and toward the protection of the national culture.

Allowing foreigners to join or refusing them the privilege are decisions related to the regulation of group membership. The key cultural protection issue relevant to the political culture of nationhood is the belief shared by co-nationals that as self-determining people they have the power to protect their national culture. In Quebec, for example, the issue of cultural protection is considered to be crucial partly because it is presently one of the most important—and politically available—ways of expressing nationhood, which designates the self-determining power of the Quebecois. The issue of the survival of the French language may become less important if Quebec is recognized as a nation within Canada.

I do not consider a national political culture to be equivalent to the political aspects of culture. The notions of culture and political culture designate different, although often overlapping and mutually reinforcing, domains. Generally speaking, there can be several cultures and one national political culture, as in a state with several ethnic groups. It would be wrong to think of a political culture as tied to a culture and inevitably tracking cultural changes. There is no strict correlation between cultural change and changes in political culture. Will Kymlicka uses the example of Quebec in his description of what he characterizes as “societal culture.” He points out that the “culture” of Quebec changed significantly after the Quiet Revolution but that the “societal culture” remained the same.<sup>5</sup> I would prefer to describe this change as a change in the *culture* that was not accompanied by a corresponding change in the *political culture* of self-determination. There is no direct correlation in the other direction, either: a culture may at first have no accompanying political culture of self-determination, as in the case of ethnic minorities, but with time, if the group identity develops into a national identity, a political culture of self-determination can appear while the culture remains basically the same. Political culture, in other words, is relatively autonomous from the culture of a society.

### ***Potential Political Cultures***

“Potential” in “potential political culture” is not equivalent to “unexpressed” or “partially expressed.” Some potential political cultures *are* unexpressed political cultures. This is often the case for occupied nations whose political cultures have been suppressed. There are many other situations, however, where potentiality is not characterized exclusively by lack of expression. I already mentioned the possibility that after a potential political culture is allowed proper expression, it may either turn into an ethnic culture or split into the political cultures of several nations. Thus, potential cultures can be expressed without being “actualized.”

In the previous chapter, I sketched a number of ways in which a potential political culture can be partially expressed. Some are expressed negatively: a set of beliefs constitutive of the minority group agency is not expressed in public sphere, but beliefs and actions of the majority culture are mobilized against what they perceive as the collective agency of the minority. It is usually the case that a “negative poten-

tial political culture” is driven by negative attitudes toward a vacuous political culture, either the group’s own or the majority’s or both, shared by the members of the minority culture.

A potential political culture can be negative “from within” with respect to its vacuous counterpart in several ways. In a majority nation, co-nationals may share a belief that they do not self-identify with the existing official expression of their national identity without having a clear idea of what their national identity should be. In such a case, the system of connections that allows the belief to be a verifiably shared second-order belief is not elaborate and lacks proper expression. Many group members can be sure only of what they collectively do not want or deem false or ridiculous: the system of officially propagated beliefs. If a proper positive expression of the potential political culture is hindered, how are the constitutive beliefs shared? This general question must be clarified for all kinds of potential political cultures.

In the case of the negative expression of a minority’s potential political culture, the minority can mobilize around its rejection of those policies that the majority has aimed against it, even if the policies are aimed at the very elimination of structures of communication among minority citizens. The minority may also try to preserve the group practices that maintain its identity.

Minorities with officially established structures of government may have a negative potential political culture of a mixed type. In the former USSR, national and autonomous republics and districts had officially sanctioned political cultures that were supposed to express their peoples’ attitudes toward and beliefs about their nationhood. They had local vacuous political cultures that expressed the official national identity. Their potential political cultures were expressed negatively with regard to their own vacuous political culture and with respect to the political culture of the USSR.

Often the expression of a potential political culture is fragmented. The same idea of group membership may be expressed in various spheres of interaction among group members, but the group members may not communicate across these disparate spheres of expression and may not know about the existence of other venues in which their shared second-order beliefs of membership could be affirmed. Such a culture carries “positive” elements of expression that go beyond the denial of the vacuous culture’s beliefs, but only through a set of isolated or overlapping pockets of horizontal ties among citizens. Although the beliefs of membership shared by individuals in each of these pockets roughly converge upon the same set of members and the basic constitutive features of the group, it is the fact that they are not explicitly shared by all members that gives the political culture its potential status: the whole of the national potential political culture can be described as an imagined framework, because it exists without its members knowingly sharing the beliefs of membership across all of the disparate spheres of expression. A group of citizens may consider another group of citizens with whom they cannot communicate to be co-nationals, but they can only behave within their “pocket” in accordance with beliefs about membership that they cannot verify. In a real political culture that is

actualized properly, members can verify their second-order beliefs of membership in everyday public discourse with all other individuals whom they designate as members, because the expression of these beliefs is available publicly within the domain populated by the group.

Potential political cultures are often supported or expressed, and thus partially turned into political cultures, by co-nationals abroad. The existence of a political culture in exile gives a boost to the internal potential political culture. It is better, however, to treat the “political culture of exile” as a potential political culture for the nation in the homeland, for if the political culture is not expressed in the homeland, it is not clear how the nation in the homeland perceives its own status.

A potential political culture may be expressed but not actualized. Within the spheres in which beliefs about membership can be communicated, the members may be reassured that others share their beliefs, but the culture will still be potential if they are prevented from acting to exercise their group agency. They can act upon their beliefs, that is, but not in ways that would directly correspond to the proper actualization of their beliefs of membership, and thus they cannot function as an effective agent in accordance with the group’s desired entitlements. The group members are more likely to act publicly upon the set of beliefs promoted by the vacuous culture. I will discuss this in detail when I deal with the second problem with the notion of potential political culture. The group members of course can attempt to change the circumstances of their political life, but in doing so they would act upon beliefs about what ought to be done to elevate or restore their group status based on the discrepancy between their real situation and the ideal of group agency they share.

I will now move on to consider the solutions to the three problems I need to address. First, I consider how the introduction of the notion of potential political culture influences the formulation of an approach to nationhood in nondemocratic and transitional societies and the corresponding solution to the problem of minorities’ entitlements in such societies. Then I explore the relations between vacuous and potential political cultures, concentrating especially on the sets of beliefs that appear to belong to both cultures. I conclude that simply because the same beliefs may be attributed to both cultures does not mean the potential and vacuous cultures overlap, because the propositional attitudes individuals hold toward the sets of beliefs clearly demarcate the potential political culture from the vacuous political culture. This conclusion completes my defense of the cautious approach to nationhood and of the dichotomy between vacuous and potential political cultures that I propose. Finally, I show that the idea of potential political cultures does not result in defining only democracies as capable of nationhood, which would result in a drastic reduction of the numbers of groups that qualify as “real” national groups. Although there is a threshold for the degree of expression required to determine whether a group is a nation, groups in non-democratic societies can be considered national groups for the purpose of regulating their relations with respect to self-determination provided the terms of the regulation of claims to self-determination can accommodate changes in the national makeup of a transitional multinational state, which are often inevitable.



## Three Problems

### *Entitlements of Substate Groups*

Let us assume for a moment that new rules for the protection of national minorities are in place, and the international community is ready to act. A national minority oppressed to such an extent that it has only a potential political culture may not benefit from the creation of new arrangements if its entitlement to self-determination cannot be determined with certainty. An oppressed group may have political identity (mostly negative) based upon the belief that it does not identify with the oppressing state and that its identity is not expressed in the political culture and structures of this state. To the outside observer, the presence of this political identity, or psychological identification with membership in the group, indicates that the group exists. It is not clear, however, what type of political culture is properly the group's own, as its inability to function in the public sphere means that its identity cannot be communicated on a wide scale or thereby actualized. In the absence of expressed and recognized communication among citizens about the group's identity and its shared nature, it is hard to tell whether the group possesses the political culture required for nationhood. In the process of transitioning from a negative potential political culture to an actualized political culture, the group could develop into a linguistic, ethnic, or cultural community with a corresponding political culture. Or the group identity could transform into that of a national group—or more than one.<sup>6</sup>

The problem for international regulation in the case of potential political cultures, then, is that we cannot decide about a group's proper entitlements before the group is sufficiently actualized. It is not clear if a claim to self-determination made, say, by a national leader in exile truly reflects the existence of a nation. The Kurds in Iraq under Saddam Hussein were clearly severely discriminated against. There was no doubt that they existed as a group and that their human rights were violated. But beyond the demand that their human rights be respected, it was not immediately clear what kind of entitlement the Kurds deserved—whether they were a minority nation or an ethnic group. It could not be determined, moreover, whether only the Kurds in the territory of Iraq were a nation or whether these Kurds formed a nation together with Kurds outside of Iraq. Although we can make a provisional pronouncement about the character of a group based on the known content of its members' beliefs, the verification that comes from the proper functioning of a group in the political sphere is not available in cases of oppressed groups. It may appear, then, that the notion of potential political culture is not particularly useful for determining the entitlements of minority groups in oppressive or transitional societies because it does not help to identify the type of the minority group in question. The benefits of formulating norms for the regulation of self-determination claims and corresponding entitlements are not clear if the nature of the entitlements of substate groups cannot be determined. Below, I explain the ways in which the notion of potential political culture *can* assist in the formulation of basic principles for the arrangements of multinational states and international norms guiding such arrangements.

Potential cultures can be expressed in some ways, listed above, and thus can give some idea of the presence of national groups within the territory of an oppressive state. More significantly, the idea of potential political culture also allows us to formulate general principles for the regulation of substate relations in transitional societies, provides a warning against unjustifiable assumptions concerning the national makeup of such societies, and helps us to formulate norms that both limit unwanted behaviors and prescribe acceptable behaviors for a variety of provisional scenarios in the development of substate groups' relations.

In order to formulate the principles of an international arrangement that will take national minorities into consideration along with nations, it is not necessary to be able to determine with absolute precision which groups are nations and which are not in all societies. The practical significance of the notion of potential political culture is that it clarifies what ought *not* to be assumed and accepted as true about the relationship between political culture and the nationhood of substate groups in oppressive and transitional societies. It points out that a vacuous culture cannot be considered a national culture; even if no expression of potential political culture is detected, the notion of potential political culture retains its warning function and suggests that it is necessary to look beyond the official expressions of political culture. If sometimes it is not possible to determine the entitlement of a particular group with certainty, even if a potential political culture is detected, adopting the notion of potential political culture nonetheless directs our attention to some possible changes (namely, changes in national allegiances) and to the fact that there may be several nations emerging within the territory of a former oppressive state. Potential political culture also indicates that the mode of actualization of group agency may not directly correspond to the type of agent it seemed to correspond to, as what was tentatively a national group may mobilize to become a group with ethnic culture but no political culture of self-determination, or vice versa. Moreover, the strategy for approaching nationhood in transitional and oppressive societies can establish a set of conditional entitlements to be realized depending upon which circumstances apply to a given group at a given time. (In a way, it could provide an algorithm for solving the issue of future entitlement.)

Such a strategy for approaching nationhood in transitional societies consists of the following four basic steps.

1. It ought to be accepted that if there is a group with an actualized political culture of self-determination, and if the people of the group identify with this political culture, this group is a nation. If such a group makes a claim to self-determination, the international community needs to address the claim.<sup>7</sup>
2. We then need to formulate the norms regulating relationships between stateless and state-endowed groups with respect to self-determination. I formulate and defend the modified right to self-determination, which applies to both state-endowed and stateless groups, in Chapter 5. The right asserts that self-determination is a right to equal treatment within a multinational state. It specifies that only states that respect the equal status of different national groups within their territory, along with human rights, are just states.

3. We must take a cautious approach to treating oppressive states and their substate groups as nations. Judgment about nationhood in such societies should be suspended until national minorities (and the majority) are able to express and actualize their potential political culture (even minimally), offering the international community a better chance of verifying their claims to self-determination. To facilitate the process, the international community should insist that human, cultural, and linguistic rights in the oppressive states be respected,<sup>8</sup> including such basic freedoms as freedom of speech and association.

Without considering the demands of the actualized agency of the Kurds in the Iraqi political arena, for example, we will not know within which boundaries they perceive their membership to lie. The notion of potential political culture leads to an approach that determines what ought *not* to be assumed before a collective agent can express its preferences. In the case of the Kurds, it could not be assumed either that the Kurds in Iraq's territory are a part of the larger Kurdish nation divided among several countries *or* that the Kurds in Iraq are a separate nation until it was clear that Kurdish collective agency was operating freely enough to allow us to see what kind of agent the Kurds are and what beliefs about membership they share. It is a different question whether, if they perceive their national group's boundaries as crossing over the state borders of Iraq, they ought to be considered as having a right to secede. My approach to irredentas, which I will discuss in the next two chapters, requires that the Kurds have a right to equal self-determination within Iraq, not secession.

There is no doubt that factors of political life influence how a group's actions and self-perception develop. Given the political options the Kurds in Iraq now face, they might be more inclined to mobilize along the lines of self-determination within Iraq, especially given international support and the U.S. presence, if they are satisfied with the terms of their inclusion. The contingency of mobilization confirms the insight that it is hard to determine a group's nature precisely until it has actualized its collective agency to a certain extent.

4. Rather than wait to formulate general principles for the arrangement and regulation of national relations for multinational states until the final crystallization of the nations in a given territory takes place, it is possible to formulate a set of normative guidelines for the treatment of substate national groups. These guidelines could include a general statement of principles upholding the equality of status of all national groups in the territory of a multinational state regardless of whether national allegiances change. Such a statement would conform to the general norm of equality of self-determination for state-endowed and substate groups and would assert that whatever nations there are or will be, they should be provided with opportunity equal to that of other substate groups to satisfy their aspirations for their political futures within the state. These norms will inform the general strategy for transition.

This strategy would need to explain how to approach the claims that minorities advance. It could require that no claims advanced by substate groups should be ignored and prescribe what claims (and what ways of advancing them) are

legitimate. To determine the legitimacy of claims, we would need a list of entitlements organized by type of group (cultural, national, ethnic, religious, and so forth) and of criteria for determining a group's type. To adjudicate a claim to self-determination, for example, such a strategy would need to specify the meaning of the right to self-determination within a multinational state and determine what groups (and at what stage of actualization) qualify as national and under what circumstances they do or do not deserve to have their claims fulfilled.

Even when it is not clear what type of political culture is present and a group is not being considered a nation for the purpose of the immediate regulation of its relations with others on the basis of nationhood, the cautious approach requires that a set of hypothetical options be made clear regarding the satisfaction of the groups' different possible claims. Therefore, when it cannot be decided whether a group possesses a political culture of self-determination, the group will not be completely excluded from the regulation of relations among national groups and the reach of the international legal system, but instead will be included provisionally. If the group claims that it is a nation in the future and this can be verified, it will have the right to be afforded proper accommodation, the general conditions for which will have been specified in advance.

International principles for the regulation of relations among national groups that have been accepted and promulgated ahead of the finalization of the national makeup of transitional multinational societies should assist in the more peaceful formation of nations within these territories. National minorities will know that their basic moral entitlements will be acknowledged and supported during a time of transition. Those minorities that are in a position to mobilize in various ways will be able to decide what they wish to attain and will be assured that whatever route they choose, their entitlements will be protected. They will therefore be less inclined to make extremist claims of the kind such groups often make in the present international system in order to receive attention in a world order that favors the entitlements of states. Thus, while mechanisms for the protection of human, linguistic, and cultural rights are already being applied, the basic international norms guiding relations among national groups in multinational states should also be available. The cautious approach to nationhood in transitional and oppressive societies would not preclude but rather would encourage the inclusion of such societies in the realm of the international regulation of relations among national groups.

The process of formulating the constitution of a transitional state may seem to present a problem for the cautious approach. The overall approach to nationhood and self-determination I propose addresses the question of what type of guidance international law ought to provide regarding norms and principles for conflict resolution; general principles, however, have an important but limited role when it comes to the formulation of domestic constitutions like the constitution for Iraq. The norm of equality for all national groups that exist or will emerge on the territory of a state is important, for example, to the formulation of the state's constitution, but when we are not sure about the nature of the entitlements of the agents involved in the process, the approach might seem to do little more than provide guidelines for the group's treatment that depend on what the group in question turns out to be. In

other words, while it matters a great deal for the constitution that is being drafted what its subjects are entitled to, when the cautious approach is taken they are not really entitled to any permanent rights until they prove to be a national group or a group entitled to some other type of right. Does my theory presuppose that international law ought to mandate that constitutions be malleable and open-ended? Such a requirement seems highly unrealistic and would require the international community to interfere with the domestic affairs of states to a degree that simply cannot be sustained. But though international law has imperfect influence when it comes to the domestic affairs of states, I will argue in Chapter 6 that just norms have a certain self-maintaining force that might assure their overall maintenance. As a general guideline, international law might require that the constitutions of multinational states (1) refer to or include a list of the entitlements for different types of minority groups and make sure it is clear that a group can be considered as a candidate for the enjoyment of a particular right only when it can prove with reasonable certainty that it is indeed of a qualifying type; (2) specify the steps involved in the amendment of status (how substate groups can apply, what has to be verified for them to change their status, the norms for negotiating and power sharing, and so forth), and (3) not deny outright the possibility of including substate groups.

The international community would, in the case of the Kurds, have to ensure that their needs were taken into consideration (in the form in which they are currently expressed) in the formulation of the new Iraqi constitution. What is more, the cautious approach warns us that the negotiation of political relationships among substate groups does not end with the signing of any constitution and that international monitoring may be required to assure that minorities' demands are met. Overall, no basic principles are immune from amendment even in a democratic state, and the issue of the constitution for a transitional state might be reformulated so as to require a mechanism that does not prevent possible future amendments from being included in a constitution that is being created.

One concern connected to the application of the norms I propose is that a non-democratic government might decide to suppress the actualization of a national group by refusing to accommodate its institutions and in this way prohibit altering the basic principles of its domestic arrangement after the text of the constitution is adopted by the country's legislature. If the persistent and sufficiently expressed demands of a national group for a certain constitutional status and other types of accommodation are repeatedly ignored, however, the cautious approach requires that the international community interfere to aid agents that qualify as nations in having their self-determination claims accommodated within their host states. If the state is democratic and it succeeds in persuading the collective agent in question to settle for a set of cultural rights, there is nothing wrong with such an outcome, provided it is reached by means of acceptable political methods.

From the point of view of international agencies, although nationhood in oppressive societies should be approached with caution, the notion of potential political culture keeps options open for the application of rules regulating relations among national groups in the future. Identifying a potential political culture is by no means

a definitive judgment about whether its members qualify as a nation, but instead describes adequately the situation of uncertainty in which the cautious approach ought to be adopted. This approach also warns against taking at face value the national makeup of nondemocratic states. Although the presence of potential political cultures does not signal the presence of national groups within the territory of a state with any certainty, it is definitive enough to indicate to the international community that it should attempt to influence oppressive states in order to make them improve their treatment of minorities and allow them more freedom of expression. The cautious approach, when combined with a set of general international rules for the regulation of substate self-determination claims, urges international agencies to remain alert to changes in national identities until the presence or absence of national groups can be established. It also provides general principles according to which national groups' entitlements can be specified and proposes guidelines to follow in the transitional period, and it demands flexibility in the formulation of internal laws so that they include provisions for changes in the national makeup of states.

### *Distinguishing Between Vacuous and Potential Cultures*

In an oppressive society, there are often some institutions for the realization of the collective agency of the people (like the Supreme Council of the former USSR), and the collective agent is often able to act politically (as in participation in elections or May Day demonstrations and various forms of discourse surrounding "workers' solidarity" in the former USSR). I have labeled the set of beliefs and attitudes associated with these institutions and activities "vacuous political cultures."

The cautious approach seems to apply in a straightforward fashion to cases of extreme subjugation of incorporated national minorities, where such minorities do not possess any self-governing structures, formal or informal, and expressions of their nationhood are banned from the public sphere. There are some cases, however, in which the approach might appear unnecessary. In a mononational nondemocratic environment, beliefs about nationhood will seem to overlap in the vacuous and potential political cultures. Potential and vacuous political cultures converged, for example, in Ukraine under the Soviet regime upon beliefs concerning the membership and the territory of the corresponding national group. In such a case, the set of beliefs of the vacuous political culture might seem to characterize a nation. Thus, treating some oppressive states as representing nations may seem to be warranted. Differences between the potential and vacuous cultures, it appears, could be explained as disagreements among co-nationals about competing paths of national development: one may say that the cultures share basic beliefs but differ in some extras, like sets of beliefs about the values of democracy or one-party rule.

Therefore, when it comes to the claims to national self-determination advanced by the official (vacuous) political culture of a mononational nondemocratic state or of a mononational substate group with its own territory and self-government structures in a nondemocratic environment, it is not immediately clear why one ought to

treat these claims within the framework of the cautious approach rather than consider the vacuous political culture as characterizing a nation.<sup>9</sup> These cases uncover a broader issue: it needs to be explained why under conditions of uncertainty it is preferable to consider none of the vacuous political cultures in oppressive or transitional societies as representing nations, rather than most or all of them. After all, it would make the design of international legal rules easier if we considered vacuous political cultures in oppressive states to represent nations until this assumption was proven false. Below, I demonstrate that vacuous and potential political cultures do not in fact share the same basic beliefs in the sense required to make them identical with respect to their participation in the construction of a collective agent. The vacuous cultures cannot constitute group agents based on the sets of beliefs they promote because most individuals do not act directly based on these beliefs.

It is important to distinguish between two questions: whether in a mononational oppressive state the vacuous culture characterizes the nation and whether mononational oppressive states ought to be considered nations with respect to the international legal order. I have answered the first question negatively and proposed the cautious approach as a response to the second question. This approach ties the answer to the second question to the answer to the first; in other words, it requires that issues of internal self-determination (democratic self-rule by the people) be taken into consideration when dealing with external self-determination (the absence of external rule over a national group). Given that formal acknowledgment of nondemocratic states in international politics is a matter of fact, it is also important, therefore, to clarify what exactly is being acknowledged: the sovereignty of the state over its territory or the nationhood of the people of such a state. The cautious approach does not preclude the regulation of relations among existing international agents, but it requires that judgment about nationhood and its corresponding moral entitlements be suspended and attention be paid to changing and emerging national allegiances.

Cases that are problematic for the cautious approach appear to blur the distinction between potential and vacuous cultures because some basic beliefs that characterize nationhood, such as beliefs about membership and boundaries, appear to be shared by vacuous and potential political cultures. In Chapters 2 and 3, I established that group members must self-identify with a set of beliefs in order for those beliefs to characterize the group agent. To self-identify with beliefs, group members must be capable of developing a disposition to behave directly based on the beliefs and must form a normative attitude of approval toward their content. Closer consideration of beliefs that allegedly overlap between vacuous and potential political cultures shows that even if individuals know and approve of the propositional content of certain beliefs that are shared between the vacuous and potential political cultures, they do not behave based directly on these beliefs, and thus there is no true overlap between the cultures. To support this point, below I will discuss three types of beliefs in a vacuous political culture: those whose propositional content the members of a national group consider to be false, those whose propositional content they may perceive as true as a matter of fact but not approve of, and thus which do not have corresponding normative beliefs; and those that the members believe to be

true and may want to endorse but on the basis of which they do not directly form a disposition to behave due to the oppressive context of their society. (In the first two cases, by extension, members do not form a disposition to behave directly based on the beliefs). The problematic beliefs this section addresses belong to the third category. I will start with the third type of beliefs and state my hypothesis concerning why individuals do not behave based directly on the content of these beliefs. Then I will consider the other types of beliefs to support my hypothesis and conclude that only the beliefs and corresponding attitudes of a potential political culture properly characterize nationhood.

### **True Beliefs that Individuals May Have Reasons to Endorse—The Hypothesis**

The following beliefs appear to be shared by vacuous and potential political cultures in the two cases that present problems: Everyone would appear to agree to some general statements about membership, such as “N is a nation,” and about territorial boundaries, such as “T is N’s territory.” Thus, within the contexts of both the vacuous and the potential political culture, a person may assent to both propositions, affirming “I believe that N is a nation” and “I believe that T is N’s territory.” Moreover, individuals may even normatively believe these propositions, that is, they may want to endorse the truth of both statements and believe that “It is good that, as a matter of fact, N is a nation, and T is its territory.” Still, it is my hypothesis that for most citizens of oppressive states, it is not the beliefs of the vacuous culture that motivate them to act but fear of the consequences if their actions do not follow a pattern that conforms to those vacuous beliefs. Even if groups can act as collective agents within a vacuous culture, their members’ reasons for action—even if they act seemingly in accordance with the beliefs of the vacuous culture—are not based directly on the vacuous culture. Suppose a citizen of N believes that “N is a nation” is true and endorses this belief. It is likely that if N is an oppressive society, when the citizen engages in actions accepted by the vacuous culture to exhibit her approval of the belief that “N is a nation,” the citizen is doing so from fear of the consequences that might ensue if she fails so to act. This is likely to be the case because the citizen’s actions would have to conform to a conjunction of beliefs, the content of some of which she would deem false or would not approve. For example, most citizens of the former USSR who might have carried a slogan reading “Long live the Soviet Socialist Federal Republic of Russia” would have done so in order to conform to the expectations of the party and of Soviet officials that they behave in accordance with the official complex of beliefs. Their action would not have been directly motivated by their approval of the idea that “Russia is a nation,” even if they would have independently endorsed it. Furthermore, the content of the belief “Russia is a nation” is not the same as the content of the belief “Russia is a socialist nation.” I will consider this difference in more detail below. Only the beliefs of the potential culture directly characterize the citizens’ disposition to behave and thus constitute their reasons for collective action. I will return to a discussion of the official national



identities in the former USSR after I discuss other types of beliefs in the vacuous culture.

### Other Types of True Propositions

Individuals clearly do not believe what they deem false. Thus, they would not be motivated to act upon or approve of beliefs based on statements the official culture tried to promote that they believed to be untrue. There are some propositions, however, that are believed to be true as a matter of fact whose corresponding descriptive beliefs belong to both vacuous and potential cultures. Yet the corresponding normative beliefs concerning attitudes that ought to be taken toward the descriptive beliefs and connected to motivations for acting are not necessarily shared by the two cultures. A person may believe a proposition as a matter of fact (“P is true”) or normatively (“I endorse that P is true”), but sharing a descriptive belief is not enough to create the meaningful agreement concerning its content required to directly motivate individual or collective action. An unqualified statement about the beliefs shared between vacuous and potential political cultures disregards this distinction between descriptive and normative beliefs.

In order to illuminate the distinction between normative and descriptive beliefs and corresponding types of agreement, consider the example of the former USSR. One of the propositions to which the population of the former USSR was supposed to develop an attitude of moral approval was “The Party is the core, and the Soviets are the basis of our society” [*Partia—eto jadro and Soveti—eto osnova nashego obschestva*]. This belief was a focal point for the system’s existence and was deeply connected to the membership and self-determination of the people expressed by the vacuous political culture. All citizens were supposed to memorize this sentence, and it was also in the Constitution. Yet different attitudes toward the belief existed at the levels of vacuous and potential political cultures. In the vacuous political culture, the belief was a fundamental guiding tool, with moral overtones. That the party was the core of society was perceived to be good, because the party represented the forces of historical progress and by virtue of this possessed a superior kind of knowledge about the needs of the citizens and all other peoples of the world. The descriptive belief that the party was the core of society belonged to the potential political culture, too, but the normative belief that corresponded to the proposition in the potential political culture was different from that of the vacuous culture. The proposition designated a reality against which most people were afraid to speak out, because the party was the core of everything, and party members, who were supposed to observe and guide others, were present at all levels of society. Members of the potential political culture believed that there was nothing good or historically progressive about the party—an attitude quite different from the official attitude. Thus, the potential political culture presented a different normative framework of interpretation and generated, subsequently, a different agreement regarding what attitude to take to the content of the official beliefs. Acting as if one acknowledged the sanctity assigned to the statement in the vacuous political culture was a

necessary move Soviet citizens had to make when asked about the subject. Many of them did so not as a matter of faith, however, but as a matter of strategic survival, even if most people were not willing to actively recognize or publicly acknowledge the strategic self-deception involved. Within the contexts of both the vacuous and the potential political culture, it made sense to say, "I believe that the Party is the core of our society," but a different attitude toward the expressed proposition and a different disposition to behave was presupposed by the belief in the two cultures. Normatively, then, the belief in question was a different belief in each of the two different contexts.

Archie Brown says that potential and vacuous political cultures (he calls them "dominant" and "official" political cultures, respectively) in Russia were more closely connected than in other republics of the former USSR<sup>10</sup> and that official and dominant cultures throughout the USSR had three elements in common: fear of chaos, patriotism, and heroes. But characterizing political cultures by listing sets of beliefs to which people assent ignores the crucial variable of members' self-identification. The same proposition, when looked at in different contexts of understanding and interpretation, is associated with different normative beliefs and different shared meanings. That the propositional content of the two sets of beliefs describing the group is the same in a mononational group does not say much, then, about the meaningful differences between the vacuous and potential political cultures. The normative aspects of these beliefs are likely to belong to different schemes of interpretation and different behavioral dispositions.

Of course, individuals often hold a mixture of beliefs made up of different combinations of propositions associated with vacuous and potential political cultures, especially when different members of a society have different levels of assimilation into the official culture and different levels of loyalty to it. Moreover, individuals switch between systems of interpretation at different times. Even if individuals have mixed beliefs, however, vacuous and potential political cultures' different systems of interpretation help to sort them out. This is another reason to look at the context and particularly at behavioral motivation, not at mere sets of propositions, when we determine what political cultures are present in a territory. Doing so allows different sets of beliefs to be more effectively distinguished in terms of where they stand with respect to the composition of a group agent. It should be emphasized that often we can only determine where individual allegiances lie if we consider individual self-identification with the whole complex, or with most of the beliefs that a political culture comprises.

To return to Brown's assertion, at the level of the potential political culture, the fear of chaos in the former USSR was a fear that chaos would result in even more brutal oppression, while at the level of the vacuous political culture the government perceived chaos as a threat to its power, which was allegedly the power of the people. Approximately the same list of national heroes existed in both the potential and the vacuous political culture. Nonetheless, the images of these heroes were used in different contexts and for different purposes. Brown reports that Lenin was a hero and that huge numbers of people lined up to see his body in the Mausoleum. The

question that needs to be investigated is *why* they did so. Imagine a person from a small town going to Moscow and then coming home to be asked, “Did you go to the Mausoleum?” Answering “No” to such a question would have been dangerous. What is more, one might have visited Lenin’s body out of mere curiosity to see a man who remained omnipresent even after death, and one might have done so without feeling the awe required by the vacuous culture. Lenin had an impact on people’s lives, but the vacuous and potential political cultures nevertheless disagreed in how they evaluated that impact. The state used various techniques to connect the name of Lenin to different contexts that were more or less meaningful for the people. The Communist Party widely used the epithet “holy” with Lenin’s name: his name was supposed to be a holy name to every Russian heart. This use of language connected his name to the pantheon of other, less political Russian heroes, like Pushkin and Glinka. In order to make Lenin closer to the people, the vacuous political culture characterized him as “the most humanistic human” (*samii chelovechnii chelovek*) and, to appeal to children, as “Grandpa Lenin” (*dedushka Lenin*). Even if Lenin retained his significance to some, it was often perceived in the potential political culture that what he had wanted and fought for had been distorted and forgotten by the communists and that they made a mockery of his name and used it to cover their own mistakes.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the fact that Lenin was regarded as a hero in both the vacuous and the potential political cultures of the USSR does not mean that there was a single attitude toward him in these different contexts.

Hence, the beliefs that characterize vacuous and potential political cultures may be characterized by the same propositional content, but group members’ differing attitudes toward these beliefs, revealed within the normative frameworks of interpretation and disposition to behave, make the two cultures different, even if the propositions to which these attitudes are directed are the same.

### **The Web of Beliefs and the Motivation to Act**

Communist ideology declared that the people of the land had been transformed by socialism into a new type of people, the “Soviet people,” striving toward communism and having their will expressed and guided by the party. This idea of socialist membership identified the primary characteristic of belonging to the USSR as the territory bounded by socialism. The ideas of national belonging and self-determination thus were inextricably bound with the communist ideology. “Russia is a nation” would not stand alone in the vacuous culture apart from “Russia is a socialist land.” Russia as a self-determining entity was understood in both Russia’s vacuous and potential political cultures as lying within the same borders and having the same members. The potential political culture, however, had a different understanding of the very mode of existence and expression of a Russian national identity. For example, the potential political culture perceived it to be a mistake that Russia did not have its own parliament and TV station, but instead utilized those of the USSR. This expression of national identity was considered right in the official ideology—that the Union Parliament reflected Russian identity was perceived in

the vacuous culture as a reflection of the fact that the Soviet Union was built around Russia.

Although vacuous and political culture converged upon the content of the descriptive belief concerning boundaries of and membership in a number of national republics, regions, and districts, the modes of expression of national identity inextricably linked to the descriptive statement diverged in the potential and vacuous cultures so as to prevent meaningful agreement in the corresponding normative beliefs. National republics had officially maintained folk cultures that were to a great extent artificial—not because they did not include elements of national dancing or singing, but because they were constructed and imposed with a particular ideological purpose and were practiced within the overall context of the socialist culture: they were vacuous cultures developed by the center. Another area of identity-maintenance where beliefs from vacuous and potential political cultures diverged was a set of formal institutional arrangements for national groups based upon a complex hierarchy (including national republics, national regions, and national districts) associated with the degrees of access to institutional expression political power. While the two cultures for each national group recognized in the hierarchy would generally agree on membership, they would disagree on how it was expressed.

Individual dispositions to behave cannot be reduced to mere assent to isolated propositions. Meaningful agreement about the beliefs of a political culture that motivate people to act derives from different frameworks of interpretation in vacuous and potential political cultures; the context of the vacuous culture does not generate a normative agreement that motivates individuals to act directly based on this web of beliefs. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that I do not include behavior among the characteristics of political culture, and one of the central reasons I exclude it is that individuals' actions may conform to the official beliefs of a vacuous culture while being motivated not by these beliefs but by fear of the consequences of failing to behave in the prescribed way. As I just discussed, their lack of motivation derives from three factors: some of the official beliefs are false, others fail to engender normative attitude of approval, and finally, the web of beliefs of the vacuous culture “tints” the beliefs to which individuals assent by mixing them with other beliefs that individuals do not endorse.

The beliefs of the vacuous political culture do not motivate individuals to act directly; rather, they tell them how to act so that they will appear to be motivated by the vacuous culture. Thus, individuals do not self-identify with the vacuous political culture, and the existence of an overlap in the propositional content of beliefs between vacuous and potential cultures does not mean that the cultures themselves overlap.<sup>12</sup>

Differences in the relationship of individuals to beliefs in the two political cultures are substantial enough to validate the use of the dichotomy between vacuous and potential political culture and to justify the cautious approach to nationhood in oppressive societies. The cautious approach, based on the idea of potential political cultures, helps us to formulate principles regulating the relations of national groups in transitional and oppressive states by taking into consideration the possible exist-

tence or emergence of nations and by ruling out vacuous cultures as representing the true national makeup of a multinational state. If one were to restrict oneself to the consideration of fully expressed political cultures, one would miss an important area of international relations that needs regulation: the formation of national identities in transitional societies. This process is largely about defining relations among national groups within the territory of a multinational state by defining power divisions, demarcating spheres of influence, and negotiating privileges, powers, and exemptions, among other things. It is important to formulate principles to regulate these relations, because their development has a profound effect on the future makeup and stability of multinational states. The cautious approach warns us not to take identities at face value or to identify world actors as what they are not. It anticipates possible changes of identity and, together with the principles of arrangement for multinational states that should be formulated and promulgated by the international legal system, provides support for developing national groups, although this support may not be as full as that given to actualized political cultures.<sup>13</sup> The coexistence and opposition of vacuous and potential political cultures highlights that the international community needs to take a certain kind of attitude toward national minorities—an attitude that is attentive to their potential political cultures—to maximize the chances of creating a balanced arrangement in a multinational state once it enters a transition from being an oppressive to a democratic state.

### *Democracy and Nationhood*

Since one of the elements potential political cultures lack in order to be actualized is proper expression, it may appear that democracy, which allows the greatest degree of expression in the public sphere, stands on the opposite end of the continuum from oppressive states and properly represents the type of collective agent that qualifies as a national group, while different degrees of potentiality are deviations from this epitome of nationhood. This understanding of the continuum of political culture is incorrect, however. Connection to democracy is good for the actualization of agency represented by nationhood but not necessary for the set of beliefs associated with nationhood to exist, and a country's commitment to democratic governance cannot on its own produce proper accommodation for national identities without the "admixture" of the idea of nationhood.

Concentrating on the democratic end of the continuum excludes from consideration or portrays as imperfect many groups whose relations need to be regulated. This complicates the formulation and enforcement of norms for the regulation of relations among national groups. Focusing solely on democratic states would be like defining the term "government" as referring to democratic regimes only and then evaluating all other types of government in relation to this perfect type. This would require to label as "not a government at all" or "somewhat a government" a great number of political actors that democratic countries have to deal with. While we can evaluate a government as good or bad from a liberal point of view, we cannot con-

clude that it is not a government simply because we have developed a very limited idea of what qualifies as one. Moreover, a notion of nationhood based exclusively on democratic political culture would fail to satisfy C2, the constraint on the definition of nationhood that requires that it provide sufficient guidance in determining whether a group qualifies as a nation for the purpose of regulating relations among the subjects of multinational states. The merit of the notion of political culture lies not in its providing the theory of nationhood with a precise tool for determining what qualifies as a nation or for evaluating how well a group approximates the national ideal; rather, it lies in its ability to render a picture of nationhood that does not treat substate groups in nondemocratic societies as unequal but rather includes them, even if only provisionally, in the international community.

Part of the population may consider itself a separate nation even in a perfect democracy. Although such a group's claims can be freely expressed in the public sphere, this does not automatically guarantee that its interests will be reflected in political decisions and implemented in the design of institutions of power. Even if a national minority is proportionally represented, it may be outvoted on important decisions concerning its future. In order for a national group to be represented as a group in the legislative body of a country, the democracy principle should be supplemented by the idea of nationality, the latter being the basis for justifying changes to the design of the institutions of power and redrawing the boundaries of administrative units.<sup>14</sup> A national group may want its self-determination claims to be reflected in a form separate from the existing system of institutions, moreover.<sup>15</sup> A model of "nationality-friendly" democracy that accommodates national minorities through a particular process, like deliberation based on the power of rational argument, might be proposed, but such a model presupposes that an initial step has been undertaken before the deliberation begins to determine which groups are to be included in the deliberation and what their mutual status in the process should be. Such a step would not be taken on the basis of democratic principles alone. The nationality principle, which requires the acknowledgment of the existence of substate groups and the importance of recognizing their identities, is thereby entered into such a model as an independent variable. If a nationality-friendly democracy is shown to be capable of accommodating national minorities, this does not mean there is a theoretical connection between nationhood and democracy. The conditions of deliberation were modified by the principles of nationhood and equality, with democratic background principles being sufficiently neutral to be receptive of group identities of this particular kind. In reality, representation and voting are based on group interests and preferences, and if the interests of the minority run against some interests of the majority, the minority usually loses. This is a grave situation if the minority is a permanent one. The case is made worse if a permanent minority is a national minority, for it will want a separate set of institutions expressing its self-determination. Thus, the ideas of nationhood and democracy are conceptually compatible but not dependent upon each other. Democracy does not lead directly to the realization of national self-determination claims, although such claims can be more easily expressed in a democracy.

Robert A. Dahl points to the existence of the problem presented for majority rule by the justification of the boundaries of a democratic unit. The problem arises from the fact that the democratic process—and majority rule in particular—assumes “the existence of a political unit, within which a body of citizens must arrive at collective decisions,” while “nothing in the idea of majority rule provides a rational justification of the boundaries around any specific unit.”<sup>16</sup> The question of what constitutes the best unit for democratic rule is beyond the democratic process and the majority principle itself.<sup>17</sup> If a permanent minority is a national minority as well, the rules of the democratic process alone would not allow for the expression of its self-determination and nationhood. Democratic rule can also belong to local or supranational levels of government and have nothing to do with nationhood. Thus, for distinguishing the levels of democratic self-rule and drawing the boundaries of the units of democratic self-rule, it is necessary to look beyond democratic principles. If we wish to describe adequately what is meant by “the people” apart from a set of individuals involved in democratic participation, we must supplement democratic principles with an explanation of the boundaries of the field of power (why “we” is such that it is held together through, for example, interpretations of history, traditions, and so forth in the political culture of a national group). It is necessary, in other words, to see why a particular collection of individuals considers itself a people and to explain this perception of the limits of the group as a collective agent. This aspect of self-understanding and motivation to act could be missed by definitions of nationhood that are based solely on the measure of democracy.<sup>18</sup> Frans De Wachter, for example, states that “the only attribute that the group must share in order to be a nation is the will to cluster around the universal reasonableness of democratic principles.”<sup>19</sup> But if this approach is taken, it must be explained whether there are any features of the group that identify it prior to or in relation to the political identity of the group associated with the will of the people to be a democratic society.

Even if ideas concerning national belonging can be expressed in a democracy, it may be impossible to legitimately act upon them because these ideas are about the limits of political communities. Hence, in the case of minorities, following the rules of democratic participation alone will not guarantee the actualization of their political cultures unless the notion of entitlements associated with national identity is incorporated in the process of designing the basic norms for the organization of a multinational state and is made into either a procedural or a constitutional constraint on the democratic process. Citizens of various national groups in a territory of a multinational state may share a will to be governed democratically but consider the democratic process to be localized primarily within the political boundaries of their respective national units while nevertheless being committed to the statewide democratic process as well (via the federal parliament and other institutions of the federal authority, for example).

The notion of nationhood I propose calls for concentrating attention on the internal constitution of a group, on its self-perception and motivation to act to fulfill its goals in relation to other national groups that also make claims to self-determination, as well as in relation to existing governments, many of which repre-

sent the nationhood of a select number of national groups. I highlight the relational and relative nature of nationhood rather than its particular relation to a democratic, authoritarian, or other kind of political organization. The mechanism required for the institutionalization of self-determination claims does not rely on democracy, but rather on the equal recognition of different national groups by granting them equal status with respect to self-determination and thus a chance to actualize their collective agency.<sup>20</sup> This does not, of course, prevent the international community from failing to recognize a group as a national group if the political regime that governs it is too oppressive for its claims to nationhood to be verified.

## **Implications and Advantages of the Nations Approach**

In this and in the previous chapters, I have proposed that a nation has a political culture with which people self-identify and that this political culture is associated with the goal of maintaining or acquiring collective agency having to do with self-determination. I have also suggested that such political cultures do not have to be democratic to be identified as national cultures: it is sufficient that political cultures have access to the proper actualization and expression of their collective agency. Otherwise, they are potential political cultures. It needs to be emphasized that the human rights of group members need to be respected for such a pronouncement to be made, in part because we want to make sure that we have correctly identified nations. Once a group is identified as national, its enjoyment of the right to self-determination, to which the group is in principle entitled, can be made conditional upon its human rights record. I will talk about how to reconcile the universal right to self-determination with demands of respect for human rights in Chapter 5.

The notion of potential political culture is theoretically useful because it supports the internal consistency of the notion of political culture. It is useful practically because its inclusion when thinking about nationhood helps us to formulate a coherent approach to oppressive and transitional societies that provides guidance for dealing with change in these societies. Countries that do not allow expression to political cultures should be treated with caution with respect to national identity. Their official (vacuous) political cultures should not be considered as defining a nation, and careful attention should be paid to signs suggesting that potential political cultures exist in their territory. Once efforts at improving opportunities for political cultures to be expressed are made in such nations and prove at least partially successful, it may become easier to determine the national makeup of these countries.

A group can only be identified as a nation if it expresses its political culture sufficiently to reach the level at which it can be determined that members of a group share the required kind of beliefs and can identify with them. The idea of potentiality is used to indicate that the level of expression is not fixed and that the idea of nationhood should be considered dynamically. We may conclude that the group is a national group, even if its members still need to meet certain conditions in order



to be able to act upon their beliefs. However, with many groups that have potential political cultures, we simply cannot tell with certainty whether they are nations or will ever become nations. What we can tell is that a certain degree of actualization is required for a potential political culture to become a candidate for nationhood, for only when a group expresses its beliefs can we know whether its members identify with them. This fact implies that in cases of totalitarian and transitional societies, it is possible that new nations will emerge apart from those officially presented, and this possibility has to be reflected in the norms guiding the arrangements of multinational states. What is more, it would be good if all state arrangements, even those of democratic states, were made with the dynamic nature of nationhood in mind. Thus, the idea of potential political culture provides a perspective on nationhood that gives useful guidance for formulating the principles that regulate relations among nations.

The merit of the notion of political culture lies not in its providing the nations approach with a more precise tool for determining what qualifies as a nation but rather in the formulation of a dynamic approach to the treatment of nations in international relations. While it creates a clear criterion for the recognition of national groups and the assessment of claims to self-determination made by them for most societies, it also provides a basis for dealing with changing national identities and national identities that are not yet clearly expressed in transitional and oppressive societies. Although the presence of a vacuous political culture indicates that judgment about nationhood should be suspended, the concept of potential political culture makes it possible to set up the basic arrangement of a multinational state even before it has become fully democratic and its national composition finalized. My approach calls for the determination of the entitlements of different types of minorities and the requirement that they be accommodated depending on the type of their agency; this implies that if the type of a group's agency changes, its accommodation has to change as well. The principles regulating relations of self-determination can be introduced while nations are still being formed in transitional or formerly oppressive societies, thus permitting, in time, a more equitable distribution of power in a given territory. In the next two chapters, I will demonstrate that having such principles in advance and steering transitions in terms of them can help regulate the conflicts that often result from uncontrolled transition.

The proper actualization of potential political cultures requires that the problem of the entitlements of various national and minority groups be resolved. The problem for the present set of norms of international law, even in cases where national groups are unequivocally recognized, is that national groups' entitlements are construed in a way that does not satisfy their members. The modes of actualization allowed to substate national groups are limited in advance, and their desire to transcend the limits of the legally acceptable creates a problem for the territorial and political stability of their host states. A group may be given a second-best option of self-government when it demands self-determination. Such an option is acceptable if the group's right to self-determination is recognized and it voluntarily agrees to self-government or if all similar groups are provided with the same arrangement,

“leveling down” their entitlements. Both options presuppose that the group is considered equal to other groups of the same type. The absence of equal status and the presence of grievances related to the status and equality of a group with respect to self-determination should bring our attention back to the mode of recognition those national groups that are clearly nations deserve. My definition of nationhood, which includes the idea of potential political cultures, creates a conceptual basis for formulating principles of reform for the international legal system, which I propose in the next two chapters, because it does not introduce inequality among state-endowed nations and substate national minorities, can handle changes in national identities, and allows us to include nondemocratic societies in the regulation of relations among national group agents.

## Notes

1. Archie Brown, for example, finds that a useful conception of political culture considers it as that part of culture that bears relevance to politics, while not only laws and formal institutions but also behavior patterns are excluded from the scope of culture. See *Political Culture and Communist Studies*, p. 155. Stephen White offers a definition of political culture that includes behavior. According to him, political culture is “the attitudinal behavioural matrix within which the political system is located.” In *ibid.*, p. 6. And Stephen Welch points out the necessity of transcending the dichotomy between culture and social structure and includes social structures in his definition. of political culture. See *The concept of Political Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 79.
2. Joseph Schull, for example, states that social practices embody the self-definition of a people and are also made meaningful by them. See *Russian Political Culture and the Stateless Intelligentsia* (Montreal: McGill, 1986), p. 18.
3. If I were to include social structures, I would concentrate only on those related to self-determination, and then only on those with which people self-identify, which is redundant with respect to my definition.
4. The way beliefs are considered depends on the general approach to culture taken. There may be different views on what a culture is and, consequently, on what a political culture is. The positivist view of culture suggests that the existence of a particular culture inheres in the lives of its membership and that the culture’s value is derived from this embodiment. The essentialist model of culture presupposes the existence and particular emblematic features of a given culture regardless of its membership. The critical view of culture presupposes that cultures do not designate stable realities and are, rather, a medium and consequence of social relations. On models of culture, see *A Critical View of Cultural Essentialism: The Native Women’s Association of Canada, Problems of Inequality and Aboriginal Self-Government* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1995), pp. 31–32. I agree with the critical view and consider political culture neither as a set of beliefs that is expressed, for example, in a particular ideology, nor as a sum of individual beliefs about politics. Beliefs describing political culture cannot be depicted without reference to individual attitudes toward them and to the relations that shape individual beliefs. It would be hard otherwise to use the notion of political culture to describe a situation in which several political cultures—or a vacuous and a potential political culture—coexist within the same state.
5. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. 87–88.
6. This point is connected to the objection that an approach like mine may stimulate creating nations where otherwise another type of group agent would emerge. It is true that a group with an unknown constitution can develop in several ways, but if the norms regulating any

type of group relations are in place, there is no harm done with any type of actualization, even if it could have been turned into a different group. In the case of particularly severe oppression or genocide, the will of the group to exist as a collective agent may be destroyed, and the remaining members of the group may want to opt only for a set of linguistic or cultural rights.

7. In Chapter 6, I will consider why it is better to accept the general rule of supporting groups that make self-determination claims even if there is a chance that such claims might become a tool of political bargaining. I already pointed out that this is why political culture is important: a claim to self-determination made by the leaders of an ethnic group would not qualify this group as a nation unless it is supported by the type of political culture characteristic of a nation, although in principle it can change into this kind of claim over time.
8. A document similar to the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities could be introduced and implemented.
9. There are two reasons to keep the cautious approach in the case of oppressed minorities. First, although the boundaries of a national minority's territory might be appropriate, the minority does not identify with the vacuous political culture of self-government because it is oppressive, like the central government, and because for the most part it represents this central government. The other reason is the random nature of the assignment of self-government structures in "national minority—friendly" totalitarian states. In the former USSR, for example, many national minorities were ranked and given autonomous or Soviet republic status. There were, however, many other national minorities that did not benefit from such status or that were in the sorts of arrangements that did not suit their national identity.
10. Brown, "Conclusions," p. 188.
11. The maniacal insistence on Lenin's inclusion in every context—children and teenagers wearing badges with his face on their chests from the age of seven to the end of high school, for example—or the insistence that he was always right would often plant a suspicion in an individual's mind, prompting this person to resort to coping strategies such as self-deception.
12. It would be interesting to see a study of the motivations of those who have enforced official norms in repressive states. It is likely that such people are not motivated by their belief in the truth of the state's pronouncements but rather by the goals of a system that required for its stability that they oppress the rest of citizens or set an example of proper behavior for them.
13. This support would, nonetheless, assure minorities that they are going to be assisted in the implementation of their rights, while also providing a useful framework for the consideration of national dynamics.
14. It is possible that a minority could be represented not as a result of a special policy but by chance, especially if it is territorially concentrated and the representatives of the national minority win in all electoral districts of its territory. This, however, does not constitute a systematic connection of nationhood to democracy. Besides, even if the minority group's representatives are always elected, the group can still remain an underrepresented permanent minority if voting in the legislative body is not designed in such a way that permanent minorities have a say in its decisions.
15. John Stuart Mill, for example, thought that different nationalities, granted that they are democratic and geographically concentrated, should have different states: "It is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with those of nationalities." See "Considerations on Representative Government" in *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, and Considerations on Representative Government* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1991), p. 394. Nationality was an idea suitable for the justification of the boundaries for Mill, because he considered aspiration for self-rule to be a characteristic of a nation. *Ibid.*, p. 391.
16. Robert A. Dahl *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 147.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
18. Given the historical coincidence of the rise of democracies and nationalism, a democratic definition may appear quite natural. Other historical coincidences have been pointed to as significant: the development of industrialized societies and nations has been mentioned by

- Gellner, while the rise of print and widespread literacy is important to Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism. Theorists opposed to the democratic conception of nationhood, Yael Tamir among them, point out that the historical coincidence of the emergence of nationhood and democracy does not mean there was influence or inherent connections between the two.
19. Frans De Wachter "In Search of a Post-National Identity: Who Are My People?" in *Rethinking Nationalism*, ed. Jocelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen, and Michel Seymour (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1996), p. 201. He also stresses that "the people" appeared on the political scene only in the eighteenth century, when a bond based on common belonging to a nation or a people came into existence. Political forms of organization tended toward the homogeneity of "a people" after peoples democratically freed themselves from monarchs (*Ibid.*, p. 200).
  20. Not all problems of sharing power are national problems. A federation, for example, can consist of territorial as well as national units. My task in this chapter, however, is not to provide an account of how institutionally to promote equality among all sorts of political units, but only of how to provide an equal recognition of national groups in a multinational state. Such a state may need basic principles for accommodating mixed federal units (territorial and national), which I discuss in Chapter 6.