A DEFENCE OF AGONISTIC DEMOCRACY IN A POST-DEMOCRATIC AGE

WORKING WITH AND AGAINST CHANTAL MOUFFE FOR A DEFENCE OF
AGONISTIC DEMOCRACY IN A POST-DEMOCRATIC AGE

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ABSTRACT:

The objective of this thesis is to show that conceptualizing democracy in terms of "agonism" best addresses the ills of post-democracy. I characterize post-democracy as a democratic order that has all the trappings of democracy, including multi-party elections, but which has been enmeshed in a particular discourse or discourses that have become hegemonic. This has the effect of effacing real political difference as though various political actors in a democratic order might be different in word and name, they converge on major policy points. To show agonistic democracy as the best conception, I compare and contrast it to deliberative democracy. Briefly, deliberative democracy emphasizes rational argument and reaching consensus, whereas agonistic democracy valorizes fierce political conflict between competing hegemonic projects. I argue that an emphasis on consensus does not address the specific nature of the post-democratic age, while a valorization of fierce conflict ensures the facilitation of real political difference requisite for a vibrant democratic politics. Focusing on Chantal Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy, I identify some limitations which I attempt to overcome, namely her insistence on a form of consensus by which fierce political conflict should be bounded in order to stabilize democratic confrontations. I argue that it is possible to envision agonistic democracy in a purely procedural way, without any such consensus. Recognizing post-democracy to be a worrying reality in contemporary democratic societies, and the growing dissatisfaction with this situation, I believe democracy requires serious re-examination. This thesis does exactly that.

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INTRODUCTION

"What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."[1]

Is democracy in a crisis? This seems like an odd question to ask at a time when there are more formal democratic states in the world today than there ever has been in the past.[2] In fact, the process of democratization has arguably found significant impetus in the decades following the end of the Cold War. What the quote above by Francis Fukuyama states, in saying that we may be in a period in which history has come to an end, is in fact an ironic jab at Marxism. For Marx, with the worldwide victory of communism, and the end of economic exploitation of all people that it would herald, history would come to an end. That is, humanity would have developed to its most rational and free state. Though they both take their cue from Hegel in pronouncing the immanent end of history,[3] Fukuyama, unlike Marx, argues that not communism but liberal democracy is the final, and most rational form of human organization. This, of course, seems deceptively to be the case with the collapse of most of the self-declared communist states in the late 1980s and early 1990s and their replacement in large part by states that adhere to democratic forms of governance.

Despite the proliferation of democratic states, however, we may point to a stubborn fact of post-Cold War liberal democratic societies to show that formal democratic politics may in fact be in a form of crisis. That is, the persistence and indeed proliferation of *dissensus* against the established order. This dissensus can and does take the form of spontaneous or organized protests, struggles or social movements, either limited or broad in the scope of their aims and

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[1] Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *The National Interest*. Summer 1989.
[2] Roser, Max. "Democracy." *OurWorldInData.org,* 2006, https://ourworldindata.org/democratisation/.
[3] Hegel, Georg W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. Trans. H. B. Nisbett. New York: Cambridge UP, 1975. 197.

targets, and can be of a progressive, left-wing or conservative, right-wing nature. I will argue in this thesis that such a fact stems in large part from the existence of a particular hegemonic discourse or discourses in democratic societies that effectively stifles the possibility of real alternate choices from partaking in formal democratic politics. The unchallenged hegemony of any discourses in society is antithetical for a healthy and vibrant democracy. Discourses that become hegemonic in society threaten to foreclose the possibility of a vibrant clash of diverse discourses on how the social order might be organized in society because it facilitates reconciliation, agreement or consensus on common ways of organizing the social order. Neoliberalism is taken as a dominant discourse that is characteristic of the current post-democratic age. Briefly neoliberalism refers to a free-market economic ideology that includes a belief in privatization, austerity, deregulation, the favouring of the private sector and minimal government. However, regardless of the fact that neoliberalism is used as the paradigmatic example of a hegemonic discourse that has contributed towards stifling the possibility of a vibrant clash of political positions in contemporary democracies, I will argue that any discourse that is hegemonic is stifling for a vibrant democracy, including liberalism. As such, democracy needs to be re-imagined in light of this post-democratic shift in contemporary democratic societies. Democracy should be re-imagined as one that valorizes fierce conflict between competing discourses, rather than favouring any particular one, in order that no one discourse can become hegemonic.

The central argument of my thesis is that a radicalized notion of agonistic democracy is the best way of conceptualizing democracy in light of "post-democracy." I will do so by comparing and contrasting agonistic democracy[4] to the dominant conception, deliberative

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[4] There are several formulations of agonistic democracy, and it has been defended by different thinkers in different ways. See, for example: Honig, Bonnie. *Political Theory and the DIsplacement of Politics.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993,

democracy, arguing that agonist democracy better addresses the ills of post-democracy because of its valorization of conflict between competing discourses. In the course of doing this I will offer a revised version of agonistic democracy that eschews any emphasis on a normative framework in order to make it an internally consistent conception. An ancillary concern I will address is the role extra-institutional counter-hegemonic political movements and actions have for agonistic democracy. I will argue that Chantal Mouffe ignores their relevance beyond just that of a strategic one, despite her insistence on their importance for combating dominant discourses. While Mouffe focuses positive attention solely on extra-institutional movements that engage with democratic institutions, I believe those movements that maintain dissensus against the established order play an integral role in advancing an agonistic democracy. The reconciliation in theory of what I see as two complementary, albeit seemingly opposing, logics is an admittedly elusive goal. On the one hand, I am arguing for a particular kind of democratic politics that presupposes order, on the other hand I am also arguing there is a central place in that very conception for extra-institutional movements that maintain dissensus against the order presupposed by that politics. However, I will maintain that coming to grips with this ambiguous relationship is necessary for conceptualizing a truly vibrant agonistic democratic politics. Hence what I will be advancing and defending in this thesis is a vibrant, dynamic, messy, porous, precarious, and conflict-ridden conception of democracy.

In Chapter one I will lay out a negative diagnosis of the current state of democracy. Roughly, this is that given the unchallenged hegemony of particular discourses there is a

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and Connolly, William E. *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. While they share many similarities, among them the central role given to antagonism and conflict, they diverge in many ways. As such, I will focus on Mouffe's work throughout this thesis, not only in order to be as theoretically consistent as possible, but because she utilizes a range of concepts, such as hegemony, discourse and a particular notion of the "political", which I see as very fruitful for envisioning a particularly dynamic notion of agonistic democracy.

"consensus of the centre" in democratic politics that has removed real choices from which citizens are able to choose in determining how their society should be ordered. I will refer to this situation as "post-democracy" throughout this thesis. The unchallenged hegemony of particular discourses in a democratic social order is antithetical to a robust and vibrant democratic politics.

Chapter two will be spent critically examining deliberative democracy. I will spend some time describing the basic tenets of this conception before showing it to be an inadequate one in the face of post-democracy. I will argue this is because deliberative democracy tends to focus on consensus rather than conflict. For theorists of deliberative democracy, deliberation and the possibility of rational consensus between opposing agents is the ground for a more robust democratic politics. However, as I will argue, this approach forecloses the possibility of real political conflict, and so fails to address the possibility of particular discourses from becoming hegemonic.

In chapter three I will introduce Mouffe's panacea: agonistic democracy, which is her attempt to re-imagine democracy to better deal with the reality of post-democracy. Having noted the deficiencies of a deliberative approach to democracy, I suggest that an emphasis on conflict not consensus is the best way of re-conceptualizing democracy in the face of post-democracy. Following the ancient Greek term "agon" from which it is derived, agonistic democracy brings to mind the notion of contest or competition, in which competing political positions, each advancing different political projects, contest each other for the chance to define the contours of the social order. Envisioning democratic politics in this way can better ensure discourses are continuously challenged. So I will argue that agonistic democracy is the better of the two conceptions of democracy examined in the face of post-democracy, despite the fact that, while elevating robust, even irreconcilable conflict to the centre of democratic politics, Mouffe's

treatment of agonistic democracy relies heavily on a form of consensus on liberal principles. I will end this chapter with a critique of the notion of consensus which Mouffe employs for agonistic democracy, and suggest a slightly reformed version that only insists on democratic institutions and procedures, if only to make agonistic democracy more consistent with its aims.

In chapter four I examine what I take to be the integral role extra-institutional movements might have in an agonistic democracy. I will argue that the conflict between extra-institutional movements and the institutions of the democratic order provide the continual impetus for the realization and emergence of real political alternatives within those very institutions. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's conception of politics, which he characterizes as dissent against established orders, I argue that this logic of dissensus is integral to an agonistic conception of democracy.

CHAPTER 1: THE CURRENT STATE OF THINGS: HEGEMONY, DISCOURSE AND

   (POST-)DEMOCRACY

Introduction

   If the freedom to do and think in opposition to the dominant way is something to be

desired, then democracy appears to be the one socio-political form that best allows for this. Yet

democracy's very openness and instability invites the possibility of its inversion. In this chapter I

aim to show how democratic orders can succumb to what will be referred to as "post-

democracy." To do this, I employ the concepts of hegemony and discourse. Simply put,

hegemony refers to the dominance of one thing over another. Discourses, on the other hand, are

ways in which we approach and interact with the world. If the logic of hegemony involves the

imposition of a dominant way of viewing and doing things among a diverse society, it is not hard

to see how it involves a certain autocratic aspect to it. Taking my cue from Gramsci, who gives a

novel account of what he terms "cultural hegemony," I will argue that the democratic social

order is itself susceptible to the logic of hegemony. Namely, insofar as a democratic order is

characterized as an open political space in which people may freely contest their particular

values, opinions or worldviews, there remains the possibility that the diverse social agents

engaged in democratic politics can become influenced by a particular discourse that has become

hegemonic. The result of this is the blurring of political differences, which may lead to the

situation referred to as post-democracy. I will show why and how this has increasingly been the

case in contemporary democratic societies, and some of the ramifications for democratic politics

that stems from this. This chapter will thus provide some essential groundwork from which

competing conceptions of democracy can both be explained and critically examined. I will do

this, focusing on deliberative and agonistic democracy respectively, in subsequent chapters.

1.1) Democracy

The typical understanding of democracy is of a form of politics wherein the people, the

demos, exercise power over their community. Furthermore, it does not necessarily favour any

particular set of values, worldview or conception of the good life. A democratic order allows for

the continual contest of power by competing values or political positions, while providing some

social stability. As Ernesto Laclau puts it, democratic politics involves:

> a succession of finite and particular identities which attempt to assume
> universal tasks surpassing them; but that, as a result... can always be substituted
> by alternative groups. Incompletion and provisionality belong to the essence of
> democracy... as all social agents have to recognize their concrete finitude,
> nobody can aspire to be the true consciousness of the world. This opens the
> way to an endless interaction between various perspectives and makes ever
> more distant the possibility of any totalitarian dream.[5]

Claude Lefort characterizes democracy as the one novel political form in which the seat

of power is an empty space, and in which particular groups can exercise power only for a

temporary time. Every new formation of power in society is succeeded by another after a short

period, their stay in power determined by the will of the people.[6] Though it is clear that for

Lefort power does not cease to be a defining factor of the social with the advent of democracy,[7]

those specific social agents that come to periodically exercise it in a democracy "do not possess

it".[8] In a democracy thus characterized, no particular discourse, "which is always dedicated to the

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[5] Laclau, Ernesto. "Beyond Emancipation." *Emancipations.* Londong: Verso, 1996, 15.
[6] Lefort, Claude. *Democracy and Political Theory.* Trans. David Macey. Cambridge: Polity, 1991, 225.
[7] Marchart, Oliver. *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007, 94.
[8] Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, 225.

task of restoring certainty,"[9] can put an end to the constant shifting of power, and thus will always fail to become dominant or hegemonic. Mouffe would agree with this conception. In fact she says of democracy that for it to exist, "no social agent should be able to claim any mastery of the *foundation* of society."[10] If democracy is understood as keeping the contingent power relations that constitute every social order readily open to re-configuration, "this signifies that the relation between social agents becomes more democratic only as far as they accept the particularity and the limitation of their claims; that is, only in so far as they recognize their mutual relation as one from which power is ineradicable."[11]

We might say, in keeping with this typical idea of democracy, that a democratic order is ideally conceptualized as an open, horizontal and de-centred, rather than stratified, vertical and centralized terrain or arena on which various social agents can intervene as equals and compete to give shape to the social order, while providing stable contours within which daily life can function without being constantly disturbed. This may in part be the reason for its apparently wide appeal, especially to those who have lived under an authoritarian or repressive regime. The past century especially has seen the rise and fall of numerous such regimes, characterized either as left or right-wing due to the particular discourses that constituted them. In many of these cases, liberal democracy has apparently triumphed, especially with the end of the Cold War. It is now a world-wide phenomenon, encapsulating former Soviet-style communist states such as the states of Eastern Europe, many of which are now part of the European Union. Wherever a state has so far evaded democratization, democracy's advocates insist it is only a matter of time before they too succumb to its allures. This much, at least, can be read into the quote provided from Fukuyama at the outset of this thesis.

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[9] Ibid., 19.

[10] Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox*. New York: Verso, 2000, 21.

[11] Ibid.

Yet, despite this, there is the ever present possibility that the democratic order, given its characterization as an open space wherein the seat of power is formally empty, can be questioned and replaced internally by social agents that want to close the space and install a fixed social order. As Lefort says, "there is always a possibility that the logic of democracy will be disrupted in a society in which the foundations of the political order and the social order vanish... [by] the beginnings of a quest for a substantial identity... for an embodying power, for a state free from division."[12] No doubt, the typical image of this scenario is of an anti-democratic movement taking power and replacing democracy with a form of authoritarianism. But there is also a kind of authoritarian logic that can hide under the veil of an open multi-party democracy that is not dominated by a particular party or individual.

When the various social agents of a democratic polity become influenced by a *discourse* that has become *hegemonic*, it threatens the very notion of an open space wherein power is contestable by a diversity of social agents representing different views on how to shape the social order. That is, if different social agents representing opposing positions in a democratic order have both become enmeshed in a particular discourse, they may end up becoming akin to two sides of the same coin, to use a familiar expression. This would in effect be no different than if there were only one dominant position. Such a democracy can be termed a "post-democracy" because it is in all respects democratic, except that there are no real differences in how the social order is approached by the different agents engaged in the open democratic contest. The concepts of hegemony and discourse require a little elaboration to understand this argument.

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[12] Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, 19-20.

1.2) Hegemony

First, in its most basic definition, hegemony is the rule or dominance of one thing over another, for example the social, political, economic or military domination of one state over another, or the exertion of a dominant sphere of influence over a state, society or culture. However, we might speak of hegemony in other terms. We may say it is the domination of a particular way of thinking, an ideology or discourse over a group of people. When many or most people in a given society view phenomena through a particular discourse, it will make them believe that social policies, political enactments, or various natural or social events that occur are just how things are or must be.

The Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci gives a novel account of what he terms "cultural hegemony"[13] which the notion of discourse can be mapped onto. He defines cultural hegemony as the domination of a society marked by diversity in beliefs, values and norms by a ruling class that manipulates the culture of such a society in such a way that its own worldview is imposed and accepted as "common sense". When the culture of the ruling class is hegemonic, it serves to legitimise the economic and political status quo as being natural to those upon whom such a worldview is imposed and in whom it did not originate, rather than as contingent constructs that only benefit the ruling class. As a Marxist, he wanted to determine why and how capitalism can continue to reproduce itself and keep the working class subdued despite the fact that, according to classical Marxist discourse, capitalism creates its own contradictions that would necessarily contribute to its dissolution and lead to communism. If the working class was to be the catalyst of this revolution, it being a direct product of capitalist relations, according to classical Marxism, why, then, was it not effectively undertaking its historically determined role? According to Gramsci, the ruling class keeps the working class subdued, and saves itself from an

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[13] Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks.* Trans. Ed. Joseph A. Buttigied. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.

impending communist revolution by controlling the institutions that reproduce culture. Of course, the working class still occupies a particular place in a society dominated by the bourgeoisie, but by identifying itself with the cultural practices of the ruling class it is blind to its own oppression. The benefit to the ruling class is twofold: its cultural practices or worldview is reproduced, and the risks of any potential opposition or subversion from the working class is significantly reduced by a form of domination that is not continually reliant on repressive force (such as the army or police). While downplaying the focus on class conflict in the notion of cultural hegemony, when combined with the concept of discourse it provides a good theoretical tool by which to understand post-democracy.

1.3) Discourse

Discourse is central to the thought of Michel Foucault. I will understand discourse in a similar way to how Foucault did, for whom it was a way "of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern."[14] Furthermore, discourses determine how we understand and organize both ourselves and our social world. Discourses can reflect a particular ideology, worldview, or value system, and are expressed by and reproduced - explicitly or implicitly - through an engagement with a set of social practices, either linguistic or practical,[15] through which we approach the world. For example, a devoutly Christian person

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[14] Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, 108.
[15] This is following Mouffe and Laclau, who do not make a distinction between what Foucault distinguished as discursive and non-discursive practices (see: Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), or between what are usually called the linguistic and

might in an unreflective way view some kind of tragedy befalling an atheist as a divine act of retribution; their own attendance in mass every Sunday might be a practice that contributes to the sedimentation of this worldview. Alternatively, a working class person exposed to Marxist thought might view a workplace accident as the result of the indifference of the owner or shareholders of the company to safe working conditions, and thus of the wellbeing of the workers. Being part of a union, taking part in strike action and voting for or supporting an economically left-wing political party might all be practices which in part serve to affirm one's self-consciousness as being part of the working class. In either case, individuals speak, think and act in ways that reflect a particular discourse, Christianity and Marxism respectively. Individuals that might otherwise be very different from each other in other ways, can be collectively referred to as "Christians" or "Marxists," insofar as they engage in "Christian" or "Marxist" practices.

Discourses can become hegemonic when the specific social practices that reflect them gain a wider currency outside of the milieu that engages with them, even when at best it might not make sense or at worst might not be in the best interests of those not originally of that milieu. This can take the form of non-Christians uttering "bless you" or "oh my God" and engaging in the traditions associated with major Christian holidays, or when public goods such as education and healthcare are viewed in the market terms of cost and benefits, economic rationalization and efficiency. Laclau uses the term sedimentation to describe what happens when certain social practices become routine and whose origins as contingent practices linking together various disparate elements of society become forgotten (and so come to be viewed as "natural"), which occurs when the discourses they reflect successfully emerge as hegemonic, "insofar as an act of

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behavioural aspects of a social practice (Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist* Strategy. London: Verso, 1985: 93). This I think makes discourse a more dynamic concept, in that it recognizes that linguistic and behavioural practices are directly influential on each other. This in turn makes it easier to argue that discourses can directly affect the material world - i.e. the institutions - of the society in which those discourses exist (Ibid., 95).

institution [of a hegemonic discourse] has been successful, a 'forgetting of the origins' tends to occur, the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade. In this way, the instituted tends to assume the form of a mere objective presence."[16]

It might seem that in a pluralist democratic society discourses are prevented from becoming sedimented because people are allowed the freedom to continually contest what they do not agree with. However, discourses are not necessarily easily challenged in pluralist societies in which there might exist several competing values or belief systems that are incommensurable, but are in fact particularly salient in them. Social agents in such societies inevitably coalesce around and become enmeshed in particular discourses precisely because of the very fact of social division that characterizes pluralist societies. Discourses provide a kind of social glue and are always "constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre."[17] In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Mouffe and Laclau explain that by engaging in social practices that reflect particular discourses, "relations of equivalence" are established between different subject positions[18] enabling individuals to construct stable collective identities. So while in most pluralist societies, different discourses do tend to exist side-by-side and are diffuse throughout various localized social sites (such as schools, hospitals, workplaces, government),[19] and furthermore that no society can become a fully structured totality (as a corporatist state might aspire to), certain discourses can become dominant, linking together and enfolding various subordinate discourses, thus threatening the

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[16] Ernesto, Laclau. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. New York: Verso, 1990. 34.
[17] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 99.
[18] Ibid., 91.
[19] Foucault, *Archaeology*, 37.

very possibility of various conflicting worldviews freely and openly contesting each other to gain power.

1.4) Post-Democracy

Taking off in the 1980s with economic liberalization policies implemented by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in United States,[20] neoliberalism is taken by many today as the dominant discourse[21] of contemporary times, encapsulating both democratic and non-democratic societies, and various localized discourses in social, political and economic realms. In fact, it has become so globally dominant that we may confidently speak of a hegemonic neoliberal world order.[22] Dismantling the welfare state, privatization, free trade, and austerity are some of the policies associated with neoliberalism.[23] Its proponents advocate giving the free-market a primary role in most aspects of peoples' lives. As a hegemonic discourse, we may say that most if not all societies around the world have been influenced by it, so much that a free-market logic has come to play a primary role in both how those societies are structured and how regular individuals approach the world itself:

> As a normative order of reason [that has] developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality, neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavour, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized.[24]

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[20] Jones, Campbell et al. *Business Ethics: A Critical Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

[21] Springer, Simon. "Neoliberalism as Discourse: Between Foucauldian Political Economy and Marxian Poststructuralism." *Critical Discourse Studies*. 9,2. (2012): 133-147.

[22] See: Stiglitz, Joseph. *Joseph Stiglitz and the World Bank: The Rebel Within*. Ed. Ha-Joon Chang. New York: Anthem Press, 2001; Plehwe, Dieter, Bernhard Walpen and Gisela Neunhöfer eds. *Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique*. New York: Routledge, 2006; Drainville, Andre C. *A History of World Order and Resistance: The Making and Unmaking of Global Hegemony*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

[23] Dumenil, Gerard and Dominique Levi. *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution*. Trans. Derek Jeffers. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2004.

[24] Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution.* New York: Zone Books, 2015, 9-10.

Mouffe argues that there is a general lack of real political choice in contemporary democratic societies, which she attributes to the fact that the various political positions or parties, wherever on the political spectrum they may be, have been largely linked to the dominant neoliberal discourse. She claims that both positions on the left and right in many established liberal democratic countries have accepted the "reality" of neoliberalism and present their respective issues or policies in such a way that it is very clear a neoliberal logic underlies them. If the right argues that, frankly, the public sector is too bloated and state coffers would benefit from a dose of austerity, the left argues that austerity measures are necessary to save what remains of the welfare state. In both cases the same logic underpins two divergent arguments, "unable - or unwilling - to visualize an alternative to the present hegemonic configuration, they advocate a form of politics which pretends to be located 'beyond left and right', categories which are presented as outdated. Their objective is the creation of a 'consensus at the centre'."[25] In summation, Mouffe puts the point poignantly: "the unchallenged hegemony of neo-liberalism represents a threat to democratic institutions. Neo-liberal dogmas about the unavoidable rights of property, the all-encompassing virtues of the market and the dangers of interfering with its logics constitute nowadays the 'common sense' in liberal-democratic societies."[26] As a leftist herself, Mouffe fixates on neoliberalism. But the point remains, I think, that a democratic order in which any discourse has become hegemonic effaces any real difference between various political positions and so is in an important respect deficient.

This is precisely what is meant by post-democracy. This term was first introduced by Jacques Rancière, who has characterized post-democracy as:

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[25] Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox*, 6.
[26] Ibid.

> the paradox that, in the name of democracy, emphasizes the consensual practice of effacing the forms of democratic action. Postdemocracy is the government practice and conceptual legitimization of a democracy after the demos, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and *dispute* of the people, and is thereby reducible to the sole interplay of state mechanisms and combinations of social energies and interests (my emphasis).[27]

This is similar to what Mouffe means by the development of a "consensus of the centre" between different political positions in a democratic polity. That is, that democratic contestation between the various positions is replaced by technocratic decision-making on how best to fit the state within the parameters of a dominant discourse. Colin Crouch has provided a forceful argument that liberal democracies have increasingly exhibited features of post-democracy from a sociological perspective. He argues that while the formal aspect of democratic institutions remain in place, "politics is shaped in private by the interaction between elected governments and elites."[28] Elections in this sense are merely formalistic procedures, or "tightly controlled spectacle[s],"[29] required to choose the next set of public administrators that will continue on with similar policies, in slightly different ways depending on their place on the political spectrum.

Why is the reality of a post-democracy problematic for democratic politics? The obvious reason that can be submitted in answer to this is that it clearly withholds any real choice through formal political channels to people who want to affect real change in their respective societies. It generates an increasingly passive and apathetic populace that either accepts the status quo and quiescently agrees to the policies enacted by each succeeding party in power, or disengages from

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[27] Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 101-102.
[28] Crouch, Colin. *Post-Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004, 4.
[29] Ibid.

democratic institutions and politics altogether. Indeed, there has been a noted general decrease in voter-turnout across liberal democracies over the past several decades.[30]

There are more promising symptoms in existing liberal democracies that can in part be attributable to or at least partly stem from the post-democratic situation. I call them promising because not only do they expose the specificity of the post-democratic situation, they also show a way forward in re-envisioning a more dynamic and robust democratic politics in the form of agonistic democracy. One symptom is the growth in saliency of left and right-wing populist parties and movements. Mouffe, given her own leftist orientation, fixates on the rise of right-wing populist parties and movements in recent times,[31] whose growth, she observes, "has always taken place in circumstances where the differences between the traditional democratic parties have become much less significant than before."[32] Regardless of the particularly unsavoury tinge to their messages and platforms - their xenophobia and racism, stress on national and ethnic identities, and distrust of "excessive freedoms" - she recognizes that they have successfully politically mobilized large swathes of people. Their success, says Mouffe, is due in part "from the fact that they articulate, albeit in a very problematic way, real democratic demands which are not taken into account by traditional parties. They also provide people with some form of hope, with the belief that things could be different."[33] Of course, we may question the idea of whether right-wing populists give hope to all those regular, usually politically moderate elements that flock to them, and that it is actually fear that motivates them. But certainly, we should stress the idea that these parties and movements present a radically different position or "alternative to the

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[30] Adimi, Jamal, et al. "Voter Turnout Since 1945: A Global Report." Eds. Rafael López Pintor and Maria Gratschew. *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)*, 2002, http://www.idea.int/publications/vt/.

[31] See: Klandermans, Bert and Nonna Mayer. *Extreme Right Activists in Europe: Through the Magnifying Glass.* New York: Routledge, 2006.

[32] Mouffe, Chantal. *On the Political*. New York: Roughtledge, 2005, 66.

[33] Ibid., 71.

stifling consensus."[34] But despite the worried attention paid to the rise of right-wing populism, left-wing populism has seen its own share of increased potency. The rise and popularity of Bernie Sanders in the US presidential primaries, the Podemos party in Spain, and Syriza in Greece, are just a few important recent examples of this trend.

Other symptoms have come in the form of more radical forms of disengagement and opposition that have arguably proliferated in democratic societies since the ascendance of the post-democratic era. Specifically, counter-hegemonic extra-institutional struggles and movements. Not confident in the ability or willingness of politicians and parties or the traditional institutions of the democratic order to make real changes to address their various demands, people have taken to the streets and to extra-institutional movements to make their voices heard and affect change. To list these movements would be redundant, as there are many examples, both large and small. But some of the more notable examples in recent times, whose aims were specifically in opposition to neoliberal discourses and the social agents and institutions representative of them, are: the Seattle World Trade Organization protests in 1999 , the anti-G20 protests in Toronto in 2010, the Occupy movement, and the various anti-austerity protests that erupted over Europe in the past several years which followed the 2008 global financial crisis and resulting recession. Nor are these restricted to "progressive" extra-institutional engagements, as evinced, for example, by the recent anti-immigrant and anti-Islam "Pegida" movement in Germany, which can be said to be a right-wing anti-establishment backlash against the dominant status-quo.

It may seem at first blush (especially to proponents of deliberative democracy) as if these symptoms only serve to continue to undermine democratic institutions. To others they might expose democratic institutions as unviable tools by which to challenge dominant discourses that

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[34] Ibid., 66.

establish themselves in their very midst; to "create a space in which [antagonistic confrontations are] kept open" and in which "power relations are always being put into question and no victory can be final."[35] To those who may think the former, especially when it comes to the increased polarization in democratic politics that an increase in support for both left and right wing populist parties and movements contribute to, I say that the alternative is bleaker - that is, a democratic politics focused on rational deliberation oriented towards achieving consensus. This conception of democracy will be more rigorously critiqued in chapter two. To those who might claim the latter, especially in light of the proliferation of counter-hegemonic extra-institutional political movements, it should be stressed that in arguing that current democratic institutions have been "hijacked," so to speak, by a dominant discourse, it is not being argued, as Marx did, that democracy should be understood as "bourgeoisie democracy," that is, "the notion that the laws and institutions of formal democracy are appearances under which, and instruments by which, the power of the bourgeois class is exercised"[36] as if democracy is a specifically capitalist or neoliberal form of politics. I do not think that democratic politics are the exclusive domain of any particular discourse. Any discourse that aims at hegemony can be challenged without doing away with democracy. In fact, democratic politics, as was argued above, is the one socio-political form that can ensure this. What can be taken out of this Marxian critique of democracy, however, is an implicit criticism of liberalism. "Bourgeoisie democracy" can be read as "liberal democracy" because it was precisely the bourgeoisie who were the most incessant in demanding for greater individual freedoms. Safeguarding personal liberties went hand-in-hand with the protection of private property and private wealth. The expansion of these liberties into the economic realm has gone so far in recent times as to be the primary concern of the neoliberal

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[35] Ibid., 15.
[36] Rancière, Jacques. *Hatred of Democracy*. London: Verso, 2014, 3.

discourse. Indeed, Mouffe herself has claimed neoliberalism is but one interpretation of the principles that constitute liberal discourse.[37] It is a liberal discourse that has swung too far in the direction of the protection of economic over personal freedoms, and has therefore become the dominant way in which liberalism has come to be interpreted. Mouffe argues that understanding neoliberalism in this way makes it possible to retain liberalism as a necessary component of an agonistic conception of democracy, as the principles which constitute liberal discourse may be interpreted in different ways without having to do away with it completely. I will argue otherwise. Many modern democratic societies today are typically referred to as "liberal democracies" because, though democratic in the sense that various different social agents have the unhindered and equal opportunity to acquire power, there is an underlying ethos that undergirds these societies that guarantees this freedom and equality, ensuring the pluralism characteristic of modern democratic societies. Liberalism acts as a kind of over-arching discourse that loosely binds the agents in these societies together. However, while liberalism as a discourse operates seemingly different from other discourses that reflect a totalizing world-view, such as a particular religion, or an economic discourse like neoliberalism, in that it in fact tolerates the existence of competing worldviews within its fold, I will argue that it should be seen in the same way as any discourse that becomes hegemonic in society, and as such can itself pose problems for the realization of a vibrant clash of worldviews that disrupt any discourse from becoming hegemonic.

My intention in highlighting the specificity of post-democracy is in part to show the deficiencies of democracy as it is typically understood. Democracy requires being re-imagined in order to ensure a more dynamic democratic order that is more capable of keeping any one particular discourse from becoming dominant. In the next two chapters I will present two

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[37] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 103-104.

opposing approaches to democracy: deliberative and agonistic. Broadly, the proponents of the former believe democracy is best conceptualized as the rational deliberation, guided by certain ideal procedures, between the various social agents of a society, with the goal of reaching consensus on issues agreeable to all or most of those it effects. The latter, advanced by Mouffe, confronts the deficiencies of democracy typified by post-democracy by valourizing difference and conflict, rather than procedures aimed at consensus making. I will argue that the latter conception, agonistic democracy, is the superior one in light of the danger to democracy typified by post-democracy.

CHAPTER 2: DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce and engage in a sustained critique of deliberative democracy.[38] I will focus on Jürgen Habermas' particular formulation of deliberative democracy, as it is fairly well developed and nuanced. If I intend to defend agonistic democracy as the best conception of democracy that addresses the problems of post-democracy, I think it is important to engage with deliberative democracy as it is a well-regarded and popular model in both theory and public policy that itself is a response to perceived deficiencies in existing democratic practice.[39] Furthermore, I believe that in examining and defending agonistic democracy, I am taking a position in what is already a well established and on-going debate between the two conceptions.[40] Naturally, I feel compelled to recognize this by taking some time to add to the critique of deliberative democracy. Generally, the main point of the critique will be that a democratic politics which focuses on the possibility of reaching consensus between opposing

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[38] According to Joshua Cohen, "citizens in such a democracy share a commitment to the resolutions of problems of collective choice through public reasoning, and regard their basic institutions as legitimate in so far as they establish the framework for free public deliberation" (Cohen. "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," *The Good Polity.* A. Hamlin and B. Pettit, eds. Oxford, 1989, 21.).

[39] See, for example: Fishkin, James S., *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991; Sunstein, Cass R. *Democracy and the Problem of Free Speech*. New York: The Free Press, 1995; Emerson, Peter ed. *Designing an All-Inclusive Democracy: Consensual Voting Procedures For Use in Parliaments, Councils and Committees*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2007; Thompson F. Dennis. "Deliberative Democratic Theory and Empirical Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science*. 11:497-520. 2008; Ozanne, Julie L. et al."The Philosophy and Methods of Deliberative Democracy : Implications for Public Policy and Marketing," *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing.* 28, 1 (2009): 29-40; Kahane, David et al. eds. *Deliberative Democracy in Practice*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010; Aikin, Scott F. and Robert B. Talisse. *Why We Argue (And How We Should)*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

[40] See, for example: Mouffe, Chantal. "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" *Social Research*. 66, 3 (1999): 745-758; Martin, Robert W. T. "Between Consensus and Conflict: Habermas, Post-Modern Agonism and the Early American Public Sphere," *Polity*. 37, 3 (2005): 365-388; Knops, Andrew. "Debate: Agonism as Deliberation - On Mouffe's Theory of Democracy." *The Journal of Political Philosophy*. 15, 1 (2007): 115-26; Gürsözlü, Fuat. "Debate: Agonism and Deliberation - Recognizing the Difference." *The Journal of Political Philosophy*. 17, 3 (2007): 356-368; Erman, Eva. "What is Wrong with Agonistic Pluralism: Reflections on Conflict in Democratic Theory." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. 35, 9 (2009): 1039-1062.

political agents, is one that fails to address the specificity of the post-democratic shift.

Deliberative democracy does just that, because, as I will show, its focus on reasoned exchange of

rational arguments aims at consensus building results in the elimination of the type of fierce

political conflict necessary to disrupt dominant discourses. Furthermore, I will show that

consensus-oriented deliberation is only possible against the background of an already hegemonic

discourse, which I will argue in the case of deliberative democracy is liberalism. As Andrew

Schaap has said,

> by understanding conflict in terms of a single moral community, deliberative
> democracy tends to elide the risk of politics: that a conflict may turn out to be
> *between* two political communities whose interests and values remain
> irreconcilable. This is the case whether the anticipated moral consensus is
> conceived thinly... or thickly... (267 Schaap).

As such, deliberative democracy is an ill-suited conception through which resistance to dominant

discourses may be realized, because it relies itself on a dominant discourse.

2.1) Deliberative Democracy

Some form of consensus, or at least procedures by which consensus may be reached over

political positions and decisions, can be argued to be vital for a functioning democratic order.

The reason for this, quite simply, is because of the fact of pluralism. A pluralist society, in which

there are various different and often competing worldviews and conceptions of the good life,

might otherwise be difficult to reconcile, and give legitimacy to, a common political project, in

this case democracy. While it is right and desirable that in a healthy and robust pluralist

democratic society, different viewpoints, based on particular worldviews, meet and confront each

other in democratic contestation, the case for consensus is that it ensures some stability for the

democratic order. Without this, a pluralistic democratic society without any form of consensus or

procedures by which it might be reached would at best not function properly, at worst resemble a chaotic or deeply divided society that cannot engage reasonably in democratic contestation over how to organize elements of that society. In short, some form of consensus, or procedures by which it may be arrived at, ensures the very possibility of a democratic order, characterized as it is as an open space in which different positions vie for temporary control over the empty seat of power.

So why might a conception of democracy that focuses on the possibility of consensus, paradoxically, also be considered to be an obstacle to democratic politics? Mouffe makes the bold claim that "envisaging the aim of democratic politics in terms of consensus and reconciliation is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers."[41] In other words, it can reinforce the very post-democratic situation laid out in chapter one, as it would presuppose "the very disappearance of what constitutes the vital core of democracy,"[42] which is the valorization of difference and conflict. For Mouffe, a modern pluralist democratic society must embrace the existence of difference and antagonism, and provide political institutions through which these may be accentuated. This state of affairs would be the main guarantor of a vibrant democratic politics that addresses the ills of post-democracy. I will say more on this when evaluating agonistic democracy in the next chapter.

Mouffe says in *The Democratic Paradox* that "deliberative democrats affirm that it is... possible to reach a consensus that would be deeper than a 'mere agreement on procedures', a consensus that would qualify as 'moral'."[43] However, it may be more difficult to apply this claim to Habermas than she assumes. Habermas believes his conception of deliberative democracy, which relies more on procedure than a priori moral or rational principles, leaves "more questions

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[41] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 2.
[42] Ibid., 3.
[43] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 83.

open" to be discussed and deliberated in the public sphere.[44] It is, "the more open procedure of an argumentative praxis that proceeds under the demanding presuppositions of the 'public use of reason' and does not bracket the pluralism of convictions and worldviews from the outset."[45]

In advocating for deliberative democracy, Habermas is concerned primarily with the question of legitimacy. That is, how it is possible for common institutions that exert political power over citizens to be accepted as legitimate in pluralist societies. On the other hand, he does have concerns that dovetail, in a certain way, with Mouffe's own. He believes the way democratic politics proceeds today in most contemporary liberal democratic states results in, among other things, a passive public, and their withdrawal from the political process through increased nonvoting;[46] in which the political sphere has become dominated by political elites that operate "relatively independently of society, *procures* the necessary mass loyalty and determines political goal functions more or less by [themselves]."[47] In short, the type of issues that characterizes post-democracy.

Habermas' solution to this state of affairs essentially has to do with removing the obstacles to a fuller participation in democratic politics, and the inclusion of more voices in the political process. In short, there needs to be a more inclusive pluralism. In a first step in this direction, he believes the circulation of power must be reversed from the situation in which it flows from what he refers to as the "core", i.e. the political institutions such as parliaments and the judiciary, to the "periphery". In order to be accepted as legitimate, power should flow from the periphery, i.e. civil society, to the core:

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[44] Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy.* Trans. William Rehg. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996, 72.

[45] Habermas, Jürgen. *The Inclusion of the Other.* C. Cronin and P. De Greiff eds., C. Cronin trans. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998, 59.

[46] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms,* 333.

[47] Ibid., 332.

> binding decisions, to be legitimate, must be steered by communication flows that start at the periphery and pass through the sluices of democratic and constitutional procedures situated at the entrance to the parliamentary complex... That is the only way to exclude the possibility that the power of the administrative complex, on the one side, or the social power of intermediate structures affecting the core area, on the other side, become independent vis-a-vis a communicative power that develops in the parliamentary complex.[48]

To facilitate this flow, Habermas believes a robust public sphere is necessary. The public sphere, he says, "can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view."[49] It is the intersubjectively shared space that arises when individuals enter into communicative acts in public[50] and "contributes to legitimation by producing political communication, by keeping it active, by steering - and filtering - it."[51] In order to encourage public participation in the political process and in so doing strengthen democracy, while ensuring rational outcomes, politics, according to Habermas' model, must be seen in terms of a public discourse or conversation taking place in the public sphere by members of civil society. And, according to him, this discourse must be governed by certain legitimating procedures and a guiding reason. As far as deliberative democracy is concerned, democratic institutions and the political decisions that flow from them can be said to be legitimate insofar as they result from a public discourse following certain procedures, and rational insofar as they are the result of some form of "quasi-universal" reason, which Habermas refers to as communicative reason.

Habermas attempts to develop a procedural conception of democracy, the core of which is this: "the democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communication that promise that all outcomes reached in conformity with

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[48] Ibid., 356.
[49] Ibid., 360.
[50] Ibid., 361.
[51] Habermas, Jürgen. *Europe: The Faltering Project.* C. Cronin trans. Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 2009, 159.

the procedure are reasonable"[52] and that it should "facilitate the rational *solution* of pragmatic, moral, and ethical questions" (my emphasis).[53] The procedure deliberation should follow in the public sphere, which is encapsulated by what Habermas refers to as the "ideal speech situation", includes the following fundamental features: (1) it is inclusive (anyone has the right to participate in discussions on and question issues they are relevantly affected by); (2) it is coercion free (everyone freely engages in arguments, without trying to dominate them or intimidate other participants); and (3) it is open and symmetrical (each participant can initiate, continue, and question the discussion on any relevant topic, including the very rules of the deliberative procedures and the way in which they are applied or carried out).[54] It should be added that Habermas believes that for his model of deliberative democracy to function in the way he advocates, liberalism must be an integral component of it, for "only in the framework of... a [liberal] political culture can the conflictual tensions among competing forms of life, identities, and worldviews be tolerated and handled without violence."[55]

As long as an ideal speech situation is in place, Habermas does not have to add any caveat to the types of issues, topics, opinions, political conceptions, or worldviews in which these are based, that are allowed in the public sphere. He does not make a strict separation between public opinions and private conceptions of the good. In fact, Habermas believes that,

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[52] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 304.

[53] Ibid., 320.

[54] Kapoor, Ilan. "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? The Relevance of the Habermas-Mouffe Debate for Third-World Politics." *Alternative: Global, Local, Political.* 27, 4 (2002): 462*;* Benhabib, Seyla. "Deliberative Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy." *Constellations*. 1, 1 (1994): 30. 26-52.

[55] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 317. Most, if not all, deliberative democrats work within a liberal framework. Habermas, for example, goes so far as to say that liberalism and democracy are inextricably linked (see: Habermas, Jürgen. "Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy*. 92, 3 (1995): 109-131). And though Rob Talisse has argued that deliberative democracy can be defended without also defending liberalism (Talisse, Rob. *Democracy After Liberalism: Pragmatism and Deliberative Democracy*. New York: Routledge, 2005) , Andrew Knops has shown how liberal values are already presupposed by the procedures that guide deliberation (Knops, Andrew. "Integrating Agonism with Deliberation - Realising the Benefits," *Filozofija i Društvo* 23, 4 (2012): 151-169.)

"such a rigid constraint, which a fortiori excludes ethical questions, would at least implicitly prejudice the agenda in favour of an inherited background of settled traditions. If we do not even present our different ethical views for discussion, then we cannot *sound out* the possibilities for reaching consensus through discourse."[56] That is, we could only arrive at a truly representative consensus on social and political issues if a full pluralism of views is represented in the public sphere. In any case only those participants would be excluded which would seek to violate the ideal speech situation, and only those positions would be eliminated which the participants in the public discourse could not agree to after lengthy deliberation.[57] For example, presumably outright non-liberal doctrines would quickly be eliminated as they would contravene the liberal ethos of the ideal speech situation. To be sure, in this sense Habermas' model allows for exclusions, but only so as to maintain the ideal speech situation.[58]

Although Habermas believes the public discourse should be guided by a type of reason, this reason, for him, does not rest in some robust or universal intuitive notion of what is to be considered reasonable or un-reasonable. Habermas believes that "communicative reason" should guide deliberation in the public sphere, that is, a practical reason organically generated through the act of exchanging arguments and counterarguments:

> in everyday life, the mutual understanding between communicatively acting subjects is measured against validity claims that - against the massive background of an intersubjectively shared lifeworld - call for the taking of yes/no positions. Such claims are open to criticism and contain, together with the risk of dissent, the *possibility* of discursive vindication as well. In this sense, communicative actions *refers to* a process of argumentation in which those taking part justify their validity claims before an ideally expanded audience.[59]

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[56] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 309.
[57] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 86.
[58] Thomassen, Lassen. *Habermas: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum, 2010, 41.
[59] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 322.

Habermas expects that participants engaged in deliberation in the public sphere reflecting the ideal speech situation should only deem reasonable, and therefore be willing to accept, those decisions that are based solely on the force of the better argument. Having said all that, Habermas believes that, "under idealized circumstances of the free exchange of reasons, it is possible to reach a universal, unconstrained... rational consensus."[60]

Habermas' conception of deliberative democracy would purportedly remove exclusion (by allowing for a true plurality of opinions and positions to participate in the deliberative process), antagonism (by aiming at rational consensus), and power (as only the force of the better argument would count), from politics. So perhaps this conception is best placed for envisioning a democratic politics which precludes the very possibility of discourses becoming hegemonic. There are a few arguments as to why this might not be the case, which will open the way, finally, for us to examine agonistic democracy and why it is better situated than the deliberative conception examined to avoid the problems associated with post-democracy.

2.2) The Problem of Consensus

Supposing for a moment that rational consensus born of an inclusive and coercion-free process is possible, or even the modified version that I will suggest below, it would not be desirable in light of post-democracy. After all, once a rational consensus is reached between two competing positions, it would seem that there would be no further need for deliberation. If every political position or decision were the result of a rational consensus in the public sphere and we merely acquiesced to it on this basis, it is not difficult to see the clearly post-democratic nature of such a situation. For example, if a particular discourse has become entrenched in society, the kinds of political consensus that would be reached through the process of deliberation will more

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[60] Thomassen, *Habermas*, 10.

than less likely reflect the logic of that discourse. If the majority of society happen to be practicing Christians, then political decisions will reflect Christian values; if the majority of individuals come to view everything in market terms, then political decisions will reflect neoliberal policies; similarly, if a liberal ethos undergirds society, then political decisions born of consensus will be prejudiced in favour of specifically liberal principles. To ensure that such a situation does not take hold, that every discourse remains temporary, insofar as it successfully takes hold of the empty seat of power of the democratic order, instituting the real possibility for dissent and disagreement are necessary. The notion of reaching rational consensus in the public sphere precludes this, and does not encourage the type of fierce dissent against dominant discourse that might foreclose a post-democratic shift. I am not claiming that consensual political decisions arrived at through deliberation in a pluralist, democratic society are necessarily final, and there are deliberative democrats that are critical of Habermas's emphasis on reaching consensus.[61] But there is some sense in which, or an expectation that, such decisions have an incorruptibility about them once they have been arrived at. This is especially the case where there is a concern for ensuring the legitimacy of the decision making process itself.[62] By this I mean that for someone to challenge the very procedures encapsulated by the ideal speech situation itself would put them on the side of unreason, and have them viewed with suspicion by those who accede to the consensus.

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[61] See, for example: Benhabib, Seyla. *SItuating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 8; Dryzek, John S. "Legitimacy and Economy in Deliberative Democracy," *Political Theory.* 29, 5 (2001): 661. 651-669.
[62] See: Purcell, Mark. "Resisting Neoliberalization: Communicative Planning or Counter-Hegemonic Movements?" *Planning Theory*. 8, 2 (2009): 140-165.

Although Habermas, and others,[63] do appear to accept that disagreement is necessary for the process of democratic deliberation, "because without it the source of communication would dry out,"[64] they are ultimately concerned with ensuring legitimacy for the political process and democratic institutions in the face of pluralism.[65] The fear of fierce partisanship or polarized politics, no less than the incommensurability that may exist between different worldviews in pluralist societies, and their perceived negative effects for social and political stability, is a motivating force for favouring deliberative democracy.[66] This is why the possibility and desirability of reaching consensus is so important for deliberative democrats. As Habermas says, "if questions of justice cannot transcend the ethical self-understanding of competing forms of life, and if existentially relevant values, conflicts and oppositions must penetrate all controversial questions, then in the final analysis we will end up with something resembling Carl Schmitt's understanding of politics,"[67] a prospect deliberative democracy seeks to avoid. Positions which rest on some robust form of disagreement to the procedures which facilitate a rational consensus could not reasonably be expected to take hold in the public sphere, as they would risk putting the legitimacy of the political process and the model on which it rests into question. Presumably, these positions would not be rational or reasonable according to the way in which Habermas' public sphere is designed. Whatever disagreements remain, or would be allowed to remain

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[63] See, for example: Gutmann and Thompson. *Democracy and Disagreement*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1996; Young, Iris Marion. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000; Sunstein, Cass R. *Why Societies Need Dissent.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2003.

[64] Thomassen, *Habermas*, 102.

[65] See, for example: Manin, Stein and Mansbridge. "On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation," *Political Theory*. 15, 3 (1987): 338-368; Cohen, *Deliberation*; Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation*; Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993; Benhabib, Seyla. *Democracy and Difference*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1996; Gutmann and Thompson. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2004; Parkinson, John. *Deliberating in the Real World: Problems of Legitimacy in Deliberative Democracy*. New York: Oxford UP, 2006.

[66] See: Gutmann, Amy. "The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 22, 3 (1993): 171-206; Dryzek, John S. "Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies: Alternatives to Agonism and Analgesia," *Political Theory. 33, 2 (2005): 218-42;* Fishkin, James S. "Deliberative Democracy and Constitutions," *Social Philosophy and Policy*. 28, 1 (2011): 242-260.

[67] Habermas, Jürgen. "Reply to Symposium Participants," *Cardazo Law Review*, 17, 4-5 (1996): 1493.

within the deliberation of the public sphere guided by the ideal speech situation, would be akin to minor disagreements between two different positions on how to implement commonly accepted principles or positions. If post-democracy is the characterization of democracy in which political differences are merely superficial, given that the different positions have all been linked to a hegemonic discourse, then a democratic order in which rational consensuses take hold through a deliberative process guided by the procedures of the ideal speech situation in the public sphere simply does not adequately address post-democracy. If a democratic politics is to be an open affair that allows for a continual questioning of the status-quo, disrupting the hegemonic formations that come to undergird a social order, then an emphasis on procedures that facilitate consensus surely cannot be the ideal by which such a politics is achieved.

It could be said in response: given the procedural norms that should guide deliberation guarantee that anyone, presumably at any time, can question whatever consensus may be reached, including the very procedures of the ideal speech situation, without fear of being felt left out, or intimidated to think otherwise, the argument I just offered is unfounded. The procedural norms enshrined in the ideal speech situation foreclose this possibility. But this supposes deliberative democracy is not exclusionary, and really is as open and inclusive as the procedural norms would guarantee.

However, this is assuming, as Habermas argues, that there can be some kind of rational dialogue bound by a communicative reason that any and all can participate in, regardless of their particularities. But I would argue that this very form of deliberation is only possible in the first place because those who are engaged in it in the public sphere already share what Wittgenstein calls a "lifeworld". This would inevitably result in the exclusion of those whose reasons, opinions and political positions are informed by different forms of life. Iris Marion Young

criticizes, "the model of deliberative democracy [for tending] to assume that deliberation is both culturally neutral and universal,"[68] when in fact it prioritizes reason over other forms of communication, and rests on a particular conception of deliberation and what it means to be rational that goes unnoticed. To get a sense of how or why this may be the case it would be beneficial to turn to Wittgenstein's theory of language.

According to Wittgenstein, we learn to use certain words or phrases in particular contexts.[69] Only having heard, and then used, a certain term or phrase over and over in similar contexts will they come to have a particular understanding for us. Like learning to ride a bicycle, it is only after repeated attempts, and not always without some failures along the way, that we come to master it. There is thus a distinctly practical element to learning language, and so also of the evolution of language itself. According to Wittgenstein, "learning or understanding a language is an *activity* that involves *using* the word in the correct situation. It is not a case of applying a clear-cut rule to a definite situation."[70] There are two further relevant points to draw out, relevant to the critique of Habermas here.

First, because of the practical nature of their learning and understanding, words and phrases rarely have single, fixed meanings. The different situations in which general words are used are like Wittgenstein's different "language-games". Like any game that has its own set of rules that do not necessarily apply to other games, each new situation entails and requires mastering a set of words and phrases necessary to navigate that unique situation. There may be similarities between different-language games, but their connections are not uniform or

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[68] Young, Iris Marion. "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton UP (1996): 123.
[69] Knops, *Debate: Agonism as Deliberation*, 5.
[70] Ibid., 6.

complete.[71] This is why no clear-cut rule can be applied in advance across the board, regardless of the language-game, to know how and when to use any particular word or phrase. Secondly, there must be some kind of regularity to our use of words, otherwise they would be completely devoid of meaning and mutual intelligibility. This regularity, again, is not because of some kind of formal rule that undergirds them. That words do exhibit regularity, according to Wittgenstein, is because of their practical nature, that it is in their *use* by groups of us in *shared* activities and situations.[72] For Wittgenstein, language is grounded by what he calls "forms of life," or all the activities that are typical of a living being,[73] done in a specific way by different individuals, which, when shared with a group of people constitute a particular "lifeworld." For example, the way certain individuals eat food, with the use of forks and knives, is different than the norm for others, who may tend to use chopsticks. The meaning of the utensils *fork, knife* and *spoon* may only have a specific meaning to those who use these utensils regularly. To the users of chopsticks, such words may have no meaning even if they were given a fork, a knife and a spoon and told the word for each. So although rational agreement through the mutual exchange of reasons is possible to a point, beyond that remains "simple agreement in activity, ways of going on, or forms of life."[74]

  To engage in the type of deliberation that would take place in the Habermasian public sphere, and the procedures and reasons governing it, will thus necessitate, insofar as mutual understanding is necessary to ensure it is possible in the first place, a tacit, unreflective agreement on the practices, or habits and norms, of a particular lifeworld shared by those engaged in the deliberation. This is because, not just the language-games that are employed, but

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Hunter, J. F. M. "'Forms of Life' in Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations'." *American Philosophical Quarterly*. 5,4 (1968): 235.

[74] Knops, *Debate: Agonism as Deliberation*, 7.

the type of reasoning and the procedures of the ideal speech situation, would, according to Wittgenstein, be bound up in the specific lifeworld of the deliberative community. But if this is the case, then deliberation in the public sphere will be prejudiced against those whose habits and norms are informed by different lifeworlds: "Habermas' conception of deliberation is a restrictive one because it relies on a certain notion of what it means to be rational, what it means to give rational arguments and so on. Thus...even if Habermas allows everybody to have a voice in the making of law, in reality some are more equal and have more voice than others."[75] Nor could it be a simple matter of overtly agreeing to the procedures of the ideal speech situation to ensure this is avoided. One would first have to partake in and assimilate the practices of the specific lifeworld in which the procedures are the norm, and this would result in a kind of handicap given that the practices associated with one's previous lifeworld may clash with these former practices.

Thus, despite what Habermas thinks, where two or more principles, opinions, or political positions clash, informed by different and potentially incommensurable lifeworlds, resolution cannot be left to some kind of procedure or communicative reason supposedly acceptable to all who partake in the deliberation. This is because this deliberative process will already have been prejudiced in favour of certain reasons, and so of positions which those reasons where offered in defence of. Given this, when political decisions in a pluralist society need to be made, they cannot be based in some over-arching form of reasoning acceptable by all. There must be an appeal to some form of persuasion that does not rely on reason giving to persuade those of other lifeworlds to accept a particular position. As Wittgenstein says: "where two positions really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and an heretic. I said I would 'combat' the other man, but wouldn't I give him reasons? Certainly, but

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[75] Thomassen, *Habermas*, 133.

how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion.*"[76] Failing this, the deliberative democratic political process will indeed result in exclusions that have no rational or reasonable basis once a decision has been made.

To his credit, Habermas does recognize that "communicative action takes place against the implicit background consensus of [a] lifeworld, where norms, and so on, are taken as given. We are always already situated within this mostly unquestioned lifeworld consensus."[77] According to him this situation enables inter-subjective communication and understanding, however it should not be mistaken as a constraint, either to those from within that life-world seeking to engage those from other life-worlds, or those of other life-worlds coming in.[78] Indeed, the habits and norms of specific forms of life enable individuals to engage in intersubjectively understood forms of communication *within* their own lifeworlds, but though participants in the shared public sphere, "must draw from resources supplied by their lifeworld... [they] are not simply *at the mercy* of their particular lifeworld."[79] He believes that in the public sphere, where two or more different positions, informed as they are by different lifeworlds, meet, as soon as the participants that espouse them "want to reach a communicative understanding with one another, [they] cannot fail to raise mutual validity claims for their utterances."[80]

Presumably in the course of this engagement the particular arguments and reasons used, though maybe resulting at first in only a low-level form of cogency between those engaged, will evolve into more mutually understood ones as a result of the practice itself, in effect transcending

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[76] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969, 81.
[77] Thomassen, *Habermas*, 69.
[78] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 323.
[79] Ibid., 324.
[80] Thomassen, *Habermas*, 147.

the initial arguments and reasons, informed as they are by specific lifeworlds.[81] But this does not address the fact that there may be situations where the exchange of reasons just cannot get off the ground because there may be individuals whose reasoning is informed by a very different lifeworld. More likely, and indeed more prevalent, than this scenario, is when individuals refuse to settle for reasons given or giving reasons for their position, despite the existence or possibility of understanding. So the form of deliberation Habermas stresses, i.e. the mutual exchange of reasons, is still too restricted to deal with such situations. Democratic politics, insofar as it should be an open and inclusive affair - a point integral to deliberative democracy, no less than to an agonistic conception - should not be limited to only those social agents or positions that are based solely on reason giving.

Recent work on deliberative democracy has attempted to address this very concern. For example, Iris Marion Young argues that "a more inclusive model of communication"[82] would be needed to deal with this situation. She proposes a type of deliberative process that allows for different ways of engaging in the deliberative process. If Habermas can allow for these, including, for example, the use of rhetoric, narratives, and activist politics,[83] it would allow for a greater recognition of the plurality of voices in the public sphere. While this is a promising reform of deliberative democracy, this would require re-defining Habermas' original notion of the deliberative process as a rational exchange of reasons. If we modify Habermas' notion of deliberation to account for this, and insofar as the deliberation in the public sphere carries into formal political institutions, perhaps these shared perspectives can become, in effect, consensual political positions. If we grant that this could take place, however, what would follow is the

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[81] Knops argues something to this effect, addressing the Wittgensteinian critique of deliberation, in *Debate: Agonism as Deliberation,* 2007.

[82] Young, *Communication and the Other*, 123.

[83] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Ch.2.

erasure of a diversity of political positions and perspectives, insofar as a consensual political

position is expected to emerge through the course of deliberation in the public sphere.

Recognizing the difficulty of defending the democratic credentials of a theory of

deliberative democracy which is predicated on reaching consensus, some of its sympathizers

have sought to downplay this emphasis on consensus.[84] What if the ideal of deliberative

democracy and its aims is understood in an even more modest way than Habermas' model of

deliberative democracy? What if the aim is not a rational consensus, but rather bringing political

conflict and disagreement "within a shared horizon of meaning between conflicting parties," by

merely presupposing the *possibility* of reaching consensus?[85] Amy Gutmann and Dennis

Thompson attempt to do just this. They rest their theory of deliberative democracy on

reciprocity, which requires citizens to respect those who make legitimate effort to engage in the

mutual enterprise of deliberation, even in situations when they cannot resolve their differences.[86]

According to this principle, they add that citizens should refrain from giving reasons based in

their own worldviews, and to seek out points of convergence between their own points of view

with those with whom they disagree.[87] In this way, reciprocity is supposed to provide a certain

degree of inclusivity while at the same time permit a wide range of reasonable disagreement.

Conflict, which is so important to an agonistic politics, is retained, while respect for one's

opponents is maintained. As Gutmann and Thompson argue: "when confronted with deliberative

disagreement, one can nonetheless continue to respect those with whom one disagrees so long as

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[84] See, for example: Benhabib. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986, 313-315; Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*. 25, 26 (1990): 56-80.

[85] Schaap, Andrew. "Agonism in Divided Societies." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. 32, 2 (2006): 259.

[86] Gutmann and Thompson. "The Moral Foundations of Truth Commissions," in *Truth vs. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000, 36.

[87] Schaap, *Agonism in Divided Societies*, 261.

one recognizes that they are sincere and committed to finding fair terms of social cooperation."[88] Yet Gutmann and Thompson's more moderate version of deliberative democracy nevertheless relies on a form of exclusion hardly different from Habermas', as they justify such exclusion on grounds of reasonableness and morality. They insist that a shared moral perspective is necessary which would provide some criteria for distinguishing between reasonable and unreasonable claims. Those who "reject the aim of finding fair terms for social cooperation" or those who refuse to present their positions and address their fellow citizens in an accessible and reasonable way could not be included.[89]

Habermas, however, remains steadfast, despite increasing reservations,[90] that reaching rational consensus through deliberation is not only a desirable state of affairs in a deliberative democracy, but indeed an empirical fact.[91] This brings me to the last critique of Habermas' model: is the ideal speech situation, which would at least ensure the *possibility* of reaching a rational consensus, even possible? Habermas recognizes that, "dogmatic worldviews and rigid patterns of socialization" can foreclose the possibility of a dynamic and inclusive public sphere guided by communicative reason,[92] and he believes given this, and a myriad of other obstacles, including the ingrained power relations in society, it would be difficult to bring about the ideal speech situation. He nevertheless believes these obstacles are mostly empirical in nature.[93] It would be, according to Habermas, "possible to overcome these [obstacles] through a process of immanent critique, where they are held up against the promise of equality and inclusion that is

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[88] Ibid.
[89] Gutmann and Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*, 55.
[90] Habermas, Jürgen. *Truth and Justification*. Trans. B. Fultner. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, 7, and *Between Naturalism and Religion*. Trans. C. Cronin. Cambridge: Polity, 2008, 103.
[91] See: Habermas, *Europe*, 215.
[92] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 325.
[93] See: Ibid., 386, and Habermas, *Europe*, 175.

inherent in the self-understanding of the public sphere."[94] The ideal speech situation should therefore be seen as a regulative idea, "a counterfactual stance from which to assess and criticize non-deliberative processes and power politics."[95] However, it might be fundamentally impossible to implement the ideal speech situation, whether as a real possibility or even as a mere regulative idea, given its very nature. That is, this impossibility would not only be due to empirical constraints, but ontological ones.

According to Mouffe, "consensus in a liberal-democratic society is - and always will be - the expression of a hegemony and the crystallization of power relations."[96] There cannot be a neutral ideal speech situation if, as I will now argue, realizing consensus is possible only against the background of an already hegemonic discourse. Habermas' theory is blind to the fact that any supposed rational consensus could not ultimately be the result of some ideal deliberative process, but rather because of the presence of dominant discourses that have successfully enmeshed a large portion of the social agents in the public sphere. This claim is easier to accept if we can accept that the identities of particular social agents which are enmeshed in those discourses are modified by them.

Recall the example of the devout Christian and the Marxist worker used in chapter one to illustrate how social agents approach the world through particular discourses, in this case Christianity and Marxism. The Christian, for example, has ways of engaging in the world that are different from the Marxist worker. For the purpose of this particular argument, this thought can be extended by saying that the very terms and arguments employed in the course of communication of either the Christian or the worker will be inflected by the respective

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[94] Thomassen, *Habermas*, 49.
[95] Kapoor, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?*, 462.
[96] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 49.

discourses in which they are enmeshed. Žižek offers a good way of illustrating this by way of a

discussion on ideology:

> Our descriptions do not naturally and immutably refer to things, but - this is the defining feature of the symbolic order - things in retrospect begin to resemble their description. Thus, in the analysis of ideology, it is not simply a matter of seeing which account of reality best matches the 'facts', with the one that is closest being the least biased and therefore the best. As soon as the facts are determined, we have already - whether we know it or not - made our choice; we are already within one ideological system or another. The real dispute has already taken place over what is to count as the facts, which facts are relevant, and so on.[97]

Žižek is trying to get across, more or less, that we often unconsciously tend to be situated

in and situate or orient ourselves to the world through a particular ideological lens, which will

necessarily distort and determine our understanding of the world. And, to extrapolate further

from this notion and apply it to the current discussion, this will also necessarily determine which

reasons, arguments or positions we will be apt to make and accept in the public sphere. Insofar as

consensus on particular positions is reached or is reachable, this is because particular discourses

have become hegemonic. So, if the Christian and Marxist can come to a consensus on some issue

on which they would otherwise disagree, it is only because they have both become enmeshed in

a discourse that has become dominant and shapes the social order in which they both live. This is

how post-democracy has been characterized in chapter one, and why, for example, Mouffe can

argue that a consensus of the centre, between the left and right of the political spectrum, can take

place in contemporary democratic political practice: those engaged in this consensus have been

mutually enmeshed in a dominant discourse. In Habermas' case the hegemonic discourse in

question happens to be the liberal ethos that undergirds the ideal speech situation. It is, as Schaap

says in the quote provided in the introduction, that which constitutes the common moral

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[97] Butler, Rex. *Slavoj Žižek: Live Theory*. London: Continuum, 2007, 31.

community within which rational discussion can take place. But, as Schapp notes, this elides the very risk of politics, by which is meant fierce political conflict between different "political communities whose interests and values remain irreconcilable", or various political agents who subscribe to different discourses each aiming to hegemonize the space of the social order.

Habermas fails to recognize that consensus between political adversaries cannot emerge from within a vacuum or neutral space, or the result of some kind of rational, inclusive, coercion free deliberation. Consensus can only be reached within a common social order which provides a shared discursive space within and by which a plurality of different social agents of various identities and allegiances can meaningfully interact or deliberate with each other in the first place. If social orders reflect particular discourses which become hegemonic at the expense of other discourses, this would violate the condition that an ideal speech situation is one that could take place under neutral conditions that are not coercive. It is only in the absence of a dominant discourse that particular positions and opinions in the public sphere would not converge in a consistent field of meaning, and remain free floating potentially antagonistic opinions and positions. This would preclude, of course, any possibility of a rational consensus.[98] And as a conception of democracy that aims at rational consensus, through the exchange of reasons, deliberative democracy cannot therefore create such an open space.

Moreover, barring the very possibility of institutionalizing something like an ideal speech situation, I contend that it cannot even be utilized as a mere regulative idea to ensure no discourse remains or becomes dominant. Žižek argues that to think we live in a post-ideological age[99] is in fact the very expression of an ideology that has become hegemonic, as such an idea is

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[98] Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?,* 751.
[99] The idea that the world is no longer divided between competing ideologies, such as capitalism, communism, or fascism, nor that people are guided by grand narratives based in these ideologies; that we have reached an

precisely thought from the viewpoint of an ideology that no longer has any competing ideologies

from which to compare itself or which can effectively compete with it.[100] Similarly, to evaluate

the deliberation in the public sphere with reference to the features of the ideal speech situation,

would be like doing so through a post-ideological lens, so to speak. The seemingly impartial

procedures of the ideal speech situation and communicative reason would do nothing to help

challenge hegemonic discourses or "dogmatic worldviews and rigid patterns of socialization" as

they may mask particular hegemonic discourses themselves.[101] As Lasse Thomassen puts it,

Habermas' model of deliberative democracy, informed as it is by his ideal speech situation,

> is in fact just one perspective among others. Any perspective will be coloured by its particular context of emergence; it will be particular and interested....So it may be argued that Habermas' [model] is really the explication of a modern, pluralist and liberal democratic Western way of life. Its claim to universality is ideological in that it serves to hide the fact that actually it is just the expression of a particular way of life; and it is imperialistic because it is imposed on others in the name of universality.[102]

In not offering appropriate channels by which hegemonic discourses might be challenged,

by focusing on procedures aimed at arriving at consensus rather than envisioning democratic

politics in terms of the accentuation of conflict, deliberative democracy fails to address the ills

related to post-democracy. Hegemonic discourses cannot be challenged by focusing on rational

deliberation and consensus, because these in fact are reliant on the existence of hegemonic

discourses. As I will show, the main question of democratic politics is therefore not how to

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objective state of understanding and living in the world. (Myers, Tony. *Slavoj Žižek*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2003, 71-72.)

[100] Ibid.

[101] Kapoor, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?*, 470.

[102] Thomassen, *Habermas*, 108.

construct procedures aimed at transcending conflict, but how to constitute conflict in a way that

is compatible with the aim of disrupting dominant discourses.[103]

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[103] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 100.

CHAPTER 3: AGONISTIC DEMOCRACY

Introduction

      Chantal Mouffe follows in the same vein as others engaged in what has been called the ontological turn in political theory, making a distinction between the ontic realm of *politics*, what we may call here institutionalized political practice (governance, policing, law, party politics) and the *political*, which refers to the ontological dimension of politics. For Mouffe, following the German jurist Carl Schmitt, the nature of the political is antagonism, or conflict, between two or more established frontiers - a "we" which stakes out a position in opposition to a "they."

      I will begin this chapter by further elucidating these notions of politics and the political, before introducing agonistic democracy. I will argue that agonistic democracy has the upper edge over deliberative democracy in the face of post-democracy, for its valorization of fierce contestation between different hegemonic political projects is better suited to challenging dominant discourses than a focus on consensus. However, I will show that only a modified version of Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy has this upper edge.

      To do this, I will engage in a sustained critique of agonistic democracy's reliance on consensus over what she terms the ethico-political principles of liberty and equality for all, which are constituent principles of a liberal discourse. That is, due to its valorization of conflict, Mouffe argues that agonistic democratic politics requires some kind of consensus by which the political antagonisms that characterize it are sublimated into fierce *agonism.* In this sense, agonistic democracy as Mouffe conceptualizes it can be critiqued in a similar way as deliberative democracy. To be sure, she characterizes this as a twofold consensus: on the principles of liberty and equality for all, and on the institutions constitutive of democracy. Mouffe insists this consensus would remain a contested or conflictual one in an agonistic democracy. Despite this, I

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argue the insistence on such a consensus constitutes a debilitating inconsistency and tension in her theory of agonistic democracy. That is, if agonistic democracy is characterized as the robust conflict between different political alternatives, each representing different discourses aimed at shaping the contours of the social order, the type of consensus Mouffe requires of it, ostensibly to ensure a modicum of stability and legitimacy, prevents it from doing just that in the long run. I will offer a possible solution to this tension, retaining a conception of agonistic democracy that avoids this problem. I will do so by criticizing the supposed necessity for a shared allegiance to the principles of liberty and equality by those engaged in democratic politics, leaving a procedural conception of agonistic democracy without the normative framework Mouffe attaches to it. Acknowledging that a procedural conception might nevertheless engender the same possible issues that beset a post-democracy, that is, of political opponents sliding towards some kind of consensus, this will open the way for a discussion in the fourth and final chapter on the importance of extra-institutional political engagements for maintaining agonism in the democratic order.

3.1) The Political

What is the proper ground of politics? As Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy rests on a particular notion of politics it is necessary that I elucidate it before continuing. Mouffe is one of many contemporary political theorists who have engaged in what is known as the "ontological turn" in political theory.[104] These thinkers make a theoretical distinction between the interrelated notions of "politics" and "the political." This distinction is made to evaluate the ontological nature of politics, that is, what the stuff that grounds or determines politics is, and can be said to be the outcome, according to Oliver Marchart, of a perceived deadlock in the way

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[104] See: Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*.

conventional political theory had been done and conceptualized.[105] Regardless of the various ways in which each term in this distinction has been understood, generally speaking what is meant by "politics" are the *ontic* "practices of conventional politics,"[106] or the institutions of political practice (governance, policing, law, political parties), whereas "the political" refers to the *ontological* dimension of social relations, or the fundamental characteristics of society, that define or ground politics. While interpretations of this latter term vary among different thinkers, in general the political is understood in terms of a negativity: difference, lack, conflict, antagonism.[107]

This theoretical distinction between politics and the political was first made by Carl Schmitt, particularly in his work "The Concept of the Political."[108] Looking beyond the traditional notion of politics as the interplay of formal political institutions, Schmitt was trying to determine what the essence or ground of politics was. For Schmitt, politics *is* conflict. He argued that what was essentially proper to politics was the antagonistic relationship between opposing positions or political identities on a friend/enemy axis.[109] Politics involves the staking out of a collective political identity, a "we," in opposition to a "they," by which it differentiates itself, and which it confronts as an enemy. Schmitt says that the political enemy need not be morally evil or bad, or even a competitor in various aspects, such as economics, and that it may in fact be beneficial to engage with them,[110] but that they remain, "the other, the stranger; and it is

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[105] Ibid., 5.

[106] Ibid.

[107] See: Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*.

[108] Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political.* Trans. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

[109] Ibid., 26.

[110] Quite simply, as long as other people exist alongside us, we may come to view them as an "other" distinct from ourselves in some way, especially when staking out a distinct identity for ourselves. This need not always be a conscious activity but rather a subconscious or implicit feature of our interaction with others. The concept of the "other" and the process of "othering" are otherwise well documented in philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, and is usually taken as a regular event in our lived experience. See, for example: Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and*

sufficient for [their] nature that, in a specially intense way, [they are] existentially something

different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with [them] are possible."[111]

Furthermore, he claims that the political can never be eradicated from society, insofar as the

potential for antagonism is ever present among human relations, especially in pluralist

societies.[112] Schmitt says that "every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis

transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively

according to friend and enemy."[113]

    For Mouffe, following Schmitt, the nature of the political is characterized by antagonism,

or conflict, between two or more clearly established frontiers. And if politics, according to her,

refers to "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain

order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual,"[114] a

democratic politics should be one that is established, not with the aim of consensus and

reconciliation, but around the dynamics of difference and conflict. A democratic society, she

says, "requires a debate about possible alternatives and it must provide political forms of

collective identification around clearly differentiated democratic positions."[115] Thus, if it is about

highlighting and drawing out the antagonisms latent in society, a democratic politics that can

continually call into question discourses that aim at hegemony should be one that takes seriously

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Infinity: An Essay On Exteriority. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969; Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 2: The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988; Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness.* Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992 ; de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Vintage Books, 2011; Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self and Society*. Ed. Charles W. Morris. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2015.

[111] Schmitt*, Concept of the Political*, 27.

[112] Schmitt was heavily influenced by Hobbes, who constructed his own political theory on the premise that in the state of nature, humans exist in a perpetual state of "war of all against all".

[113] Ibid., 37.

[114] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 101*.*

[115] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 31.

the dimension of the political in the Schmittian sense. It is one that allows for the full play of competing discourses within a framework that does not aim at smoothing this conflict over. On the other hand, a democratic theory that aims instead at the possibility of consensus, as well as being anti-political, can at the same time be characterized as post-democratic.

3.2) Agonistic Democracy

The main argument underlining agonistic democracy as conceptualized by Mouffe is that democracy should be envisioned as the fierce conflict between a myriad of collective political identities established around clearly differentiated political projects informed by different discourses each with the aim of becoming hegemonic and defining the contours of the social order.[116] An agonistic democracy is one in which space is given for the potential antagonisms that are latent in the social order to become politically manifest, accentuated and allowed to be played out. I contend that only in a democracy envisioned in this way can discourses be effectively and continuously challenged, thus evading the danger of post-democracy. It is in this way that democracy can remain open, robust and vibrant. I have already noted that Habermas does not outright aim to eliminate different political positions from engaging in the public sphere, but given the way in which he theorizes the public sphere, what these opposing positions amount to in a theory of deliberative democracy are mere competitors that compete within a shared field of meaning, or hegemonic discourse. The field of politics is for Habermas "a neutral terrain in which different groups compete to occupy positions of power; their objective is merely to dislodge others in order to occupy their place. They do not put into question the dominant

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[116] "What is at stake in the agonistic struggle... is the very configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured: it is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally," Mouffe, *On the Political*, 21.

hegemony and there is no attempt at profoundly transforming the relations of power."[117]

Furthermore, unlike deliberative democracy, what matters in an agonistic democratic politics for Mouffe is passion, not rational deliberation. It is not feasible to expect rational and inclusive conclusions in politics, and to push for this has a post-democratic logic to it. Mouffe accepts that compromises between competing political actors are possible, and says that positions can shift, but this is only the result of either dominant discourses having successfully influenced elements of competing discourses, or as pragmatic attempts to transform elements of a competing discourse in order to maintain hegemony. She maintains, however, that the practices involved in this process should involve passionate appeal or rhetoric, resulting in a "radical change of identity" that would be "more a sort of conversion than a process of rational persuasion."[118] Passion and not reason is what should drive political engagement in an agonistic democracy, as it ensures that political divisions are maintained.

As an approximation of agonistic democracy in practice, the political situation in Greece in 2012 is a good example of why agonism is a good conception in the face of post-democracy. In Greece, politics was long dominated by the centre-left Pasok and centre-right New Democracy parties. In the aftermath of the economic downturn in 2008, it became very clear that both were united ideologically in their commitment to neoliberalism, as both parties decided to support stringent austerity policies in return for bailout money from the European Union.[119] Thus, the political situation in Greece was clearly dominated by a "consensus of the centre," as both parties represented similar policies in the face of the crisis. The elections in 2012 in Greece saw a shift

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 102.

[119] See: Douzinas, Costas. "Greeks must fight the neoliberal EU." *The Guardian*, 4 Feb 2010, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/feb/04/greece-eu-fiscal-policy-protest; Smith, Helena. "Antonis Samaras appointed Greece's prime minister." *The Guardian*, 20 June 2012, www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/20/antonis-samaras-greece-prime-minister.

in this situation, with the diversity and proliferation of political parties not "only participating in the election, but also seen as genuine, meaningful and powerful actors."[120] Though the break with the status-quo was spearheaded by the significant rise of Syriza, which was at the time classified as a radical leftist party, parties such as the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party and the far-left Communist Party of Greece also came to prominence.[121] While the established parties had pounded into the heads of Greeks, using all the organs of the state available to them, that austerity was the only way forward, the once marginalized parties offered radically different visions of Greek society and of how to deal with the economic downturn. Eschewing traditional methods to get their message across, such as rational debate, parties like Golden Dawn and the Communist Party focus on a form of political engagement that includes bullying, intimidation, incendiary rhetoric, rage, vilification of its political and ideological opponents, extra-institutional organization and ideological indoctrination to garner support for their respective messages. In addition, both vilify central aspects of the liberal ethos of the democratic state.[122] In sum, the Greek political situation during this time was marked by the emergence of radical new positions that railed against the dominant discourse, giving voice to those who felt disenfranchised by the stifling political consensus and who wanted something new, and was marked by a decreased emphasis on reasoned exchange of arguments. It was in this more agonistic climate that Syriza was eventually elected in 2015.[123]

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[120] Weeks, Harry. "'Democracy is in Peril': Agonistic Pluralism after the Greek Election." *E-International Relations*, 23 Jul 2012, www.e-ir.info/2012/07/23/democracy-is-in-peril-agonistic-pluralism-after-the-greek-election/.

[121] Smith, Helena. "Greece election: rise of the far right." *The Guardian*, 1 May 2012, www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/01/greece-election-rise-far-right

[122] Traynor, Ian. "Neo-Nazi party on the rise in Greece." *The Guardian*, 7 May 2012, www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/07/neo-nazi-golden-dawn-party-greece; Charalambous, Ismini. "Understanding the Greek Communist Party." *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2 Sep, 2012, blogs.lse.ac.uk/greeceatlse/2012/09/02/understanding-the-greek-communist-party.

[123] In the same election, Golden Dawn took third place. Smith, Helena. "Greek election 2015: Golden Dawn rises on austerity-driven despair." *The Guardian*, 16 Sep. 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/16/greek-election-2015-golden-dawn-austerity.

Detractors could reasonably argue that this is a potentially unfeasible conception of democracy. They might worry that political opponents in an agonistic democratic order may come to view each other increasingly as enemies holding irreconcilable positions, and that the conflicts between them turn violent, so that this conception is in no way constructive towards engendering political compromise necessary to ensure a relatively stable social order.[124] In order to get around this critique, Mouffe argues that the multiple antagonistic political frontiers that would characterize an agonistic democratic society need to be constructed in a way fruitful for democratic practice, where political opponents would not view each other as enemies to be destroyed or eliminated, that is, as existential enemies, but as legitimate political adversaries. Part of the task of an agonistic conception of democracy, according to Mouffe, is thus to show how antagonistic political conflicts can be sublimated into agonistic ones. The friend/enemy relation that for Schmitt is the axis around which the political is framed, needs to be re-conceptualized. "Envisaged from the point of view of agonistic pluralism," Mouffe claims that the aim of democratic politics is to construct the "them" in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but an "adversary," i.e. somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question.[125]

Mouffe believes that the fierce political conflict that is characteristic of agonistic democracy needs to take place within some kind of common symbolic space to ensure competing political positions view each other as "legitimate enemies," political adversaries that fiercely oppose each other, but that do not negate or deny each others' positions as legitimate ones. She claims that there are two things on which there must be some kind of consensus by all the participants in a democratic agon: "the institutions constitutive of democracy and on the 'ethico-

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[124] See: Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies*; Deveaux, Monique. "Agonism and Pluralism." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. 25,4 (1999): 15.
[125] Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?*, 755.

political' values informing the political association - liberty and equality for all."[126] This does not mean she believes that there should be a shared acceptance of a set of immutable and static democratic institutions or procedures, or that liberal democratic values or principles should be understood in a particular and restrictive way by all parties involved.

Regarding democratic institutions, Mouffe believes they act as important tools by which antagonisms can be transformed into political agonisms. Engaging politically through elected representatives and constrained by the procedures of parliaments, for example, provide a restraining factor for all those engaged. So while different political actors might fundamentally disagree with each other, they are compelled by institutional procedures to accept each others' respective right to partake in political engagement by virtue of the fact that they choose to engage with the institutions. However, unlike Habermas, Mouffe does not believe there should be one form of institutionalized procedure or institutions by which this contestation takes place. She says,

> we should acknowledge and valorize the diversity of ways in which the 'democratic game' can be played... space needs to be provided for the many different practices in which obedience to the democratic rules can be inscribed. And this should not be envisaged as a temporary accommodation, as a stage in the process leading to the realization of the rational consensus, but as a constitutive feature of a democratic society.[127]

For Mouffe, the public sphere should be viewed as a fractured space or a multiplex arena in which different political positions informed by different discourses can contest each other in a myriad of different ways with the attempts at defining the very contours of the social order, not a uniform place merely of rational debate and deliberation between competitors with the aim of reaching consensus in a space whose contours or institutions are already accepted and left unquestioned. According to Mouffe, "an agonistic conception of democracy acknowledges the

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[126] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 31.
[127] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 74.

contingent character of the hegemonic politico-economic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment. They are precarious and pragmatic constructions which can be disarticulated and transformed as a result of the agonistic struggle among adversaries."[128]

Mouffe believes that maintaining the institutions of democracy, but envisioning them in a contingent, contestatory way, is the best way to ensure their democratization and to ensure that the confrontation between competing discourses vying for hegemony becomes agonistic.[129] Because they are the privileged sites by which discourses are perpetuated and dispersed,[130] institutions can change the way a social order is organized more effectively than the actions of individuals or associations in civil society. Mouffe claims, for example, that "without any institutional relays," extra-institutional political movements "will not be able to bring about any significant changes in the structures of power."[131] This explains why those institutions should be a site of contestation, rather than consensus and reconciliation. If a consensus is reached in politics over particular decisions, the institutions of a society will reflect them, making it difficult for individuals who disagree with it to challenge the resulting order. Thus, these institutions should themselves be open to be transformed or interpreted in different ways. I will say more on this when defending a purely procedural conception of agonistic democracy below.

Regarding the consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, Mouffe believes that in their absence nothing would guarantee the vibrant clash of competing discourses vying for hegemony characteristic of an agonistic conception of democracy would not turn into a form of politics that puts democracy itself in jeopardy. This in part stems from her

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[128] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 33.
[129] Ibid., 23.
[130] Foucault
[131] Mouffe, Chantal. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. New York: Verso, 2013, 77.

belief that the specificity of contemporary democracy lies in the fact that it exists "within a symbolic framework informed by the liberal discourse, with its strong emphasis on the value of individual liberty and on human rights. Those values are central to the liberal tradition and they are constitutive of the modern view of the world."[132] They insure the protection of the very pluralism requisite for a vibrant clash of discourses central to an agonistic democracy. She adds, however, that there should not be acceptance of one particular way of interpreting these values. Indeed, she says that the different agents in the democratic contest need to share an allegiance to these values, but she believes there should be dissent over their interpretation. By allowing for different political positions that express a plurality of interpretations of these principles, the realm of democratic contestation is widened without jeopardizing the democratic project itself, as extreme types of avowedly illiberal and undemocratic forces would not be able to engage in political institutions. Admittedly, she leaves this a vague notion, and never fully elucidates what these principles at their bare minimum might look like. However, she does offer a few examples of contemporary political parties or organizations to help illustrate her point: a right-wing party like the Front National of France would be an acceptable party according to the terms of Mouffe's notion of consensus, because it claims an allegiance to a particular interpretation of liberty and equality for all in their policies, albeit that the "for all" implicitly refers to a restricted notion of the French people, but a far-right party like Golden Dawn - a neo-Nazi party - would not.[133] I will say more on this below.

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[132] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 2. She is heavily inspired by Norberto Bobbio who has argued for the modern interdependence of liberalism and democracy. See: *Liberalism and Democracy*. Trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper. London: Verso, 1990.

[133] Mouffe, Chantal. Interviewed by Biljana Đorđević and Julija Sardelić. "'A Vibrant Democracy Needs Agonistic Confrontation' - An Interview With Chantal Mouffe." *Citizenship in Southeast Europe*, 22 July 2013, www.citsee.eu/interview/vibrant-democracy-needs-agonistic-confrontation-interview-chantal-mouffe.

Thus agonistic democracy, like deliberative democracy, would entail structural exclusions: illiberals and those who wish for the destruction of democracy. According to Mouffe, democratic politics cannot be envisaged as allowing for a total pluralism, as she is cognizant of the dangers of this for the very existence of a democratic order. Without some kind of basic structure or common symbolic space within which competing discourses can clash, democratic politics risks becoming a totally relativistic enterprise, jeopardizing the stability of society and the very democratic process. And so, "some limits need to be put to the kind of confrontation which is going to be seen as legitimate in the public sphere."[134]

3.3) The Recurring Problem of Consensus

Though the quote I provided by Schaap at the beginning of the previous chapter is specifically directed at deliberative democracy, I think the critique he is aiming at applies just as much to Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy. As I have mentioned, Mouffe believes a type of consensus on certain over-arching principles is necessary for agonistic democracy, yet she argues that it is a "conflictual consensus" that should constitute the common symbolic space of an agonistic democracy; a consensus that does not foreclose the possibility of fierce political conflict, but a precarious one that is open to constant re-definition by various competing political discourses. I will conclude this chapter having argued that this notion of consensus represents an inconsistency in her conception of agonistic democracy as it risks foreclosing the type of fierce political conflict that is so important for an agonistic conception of democracy, and should be eschewed in favour of a purely procedural conception that allows for those political projects that do not have an allegiance to the ethico-political principles of liberty and equality for all. It is only

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[134] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 93.

in this modified way that agonistic democracy can be viewed as a better conception than deliberative democracy in the face of post-democracy.

Mouffe's characterization of an agonistic democracy as a struggle between competing hegemonic projects[135] is incompatible with her insistence that this struggle be mediated by a shared allegiance among all those engaged in the struggle to the principles of liberty and equality for all. If agonistic democracy is characterized by Mouffe as the fierce contest between opposing political agents, each one attempting to gain the empty seat of power by dislodging ruling discourses and imposing its own particular discourse on the social order, then a tension arises with her insistence that there must nevertheless be a shared acceptance of the principles of liberty and equality for all among these competing agents. This common reference point that different political agents should share in an agonistic democracy is at odds with the notion that they should also represent opposing hegemonic projects, especially if we understand the principles of liberty and equality to be the main components of a particular discourse: liberalism. If liberalism is the common discursive field through which opposing political agents interact in an agonistic democracy, whatever differences might otherwise exist between them would be ancillary to that which binds them together. This risks the very post-democratic logic that Mouffe complains is overtaking contemporary democratic societies: the different political positions on offer for the electorate espouse minimally differing policies that nevertheless are quite similar given their common grounding in a particular discourse.

Mouffe might argue that conceptualizing agonistic democracy within a liberal framework is problematic only if one is assuming that there is only one basic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality for all. She claims, of course, that there can be different interpretations of these principles. She would argue that valourizing these differences in an agonistic democracy

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[135] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 17.

rather than focusing on them as mutual points of contact, makes the type of consensus characteristic of agonistic democracy open, contingent and contestable, in contradistinction to that characteristic of deliberative democracy. The tension between different interpretations is fundamental to maintaining an agonistic democracy, and "can only be temporarily stabilized through pragmatic negotiations between political forces which always establish the hegemony of one of them."[136] But how can liberty and equality for *all* have different interpretations? And would allowing different interpretations to exist side-by-side not trivialize these principles to the point where they no longer have any substance, making any insistence on them redundant?

In response to the first question, it might help to make a distinction between political disagreement and political conflict. According to Matt Sleat, political disagreement is contestation between mutual adherents of a common political framework (i.e. liberals, fascists, communists). So it may in fact be possible that a group of individuals could all claim to be liberals, but each disagree on how to implement or interpret the fundamental tenets or values of liberalism. Political conflict, on the other hand, characterizes the fault lines that exist between adherents of different political frameworks (for example, liberal democrats versus fascists).[137] In this distinction, political disagreements are of a weaker sort than political conflicts, as the differences between the latter are greater and the possibility of reconciliation and communication between them is less than between the former. Yet, in light of this distinction, that there can be conflicting interpretations of liberalism does not vindicate Mouffe's position on consensus, because if we understand liberalism as a particular political discourse, and accept that there can be different interpretations of the principles of which it is composed, then she cannot claim that an agonistic democracy that is restricted by a conflictual consensus of these principles entails

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[136] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 5.
[137] Sleat, Matt. *Liberal Realism: A Realist Theory of Liberal Politics*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2013, 56.

robust political conflict between competing hegemonic discourses. As an agonistic democracy

must, according to her, play out within a particular discourse (i.e. liberalism), she is in fact

aiming at political *disagreement*, not robust political *conflict*.

Mouffe might argue that she means as a purely *rhetorical* frame of reference, liberty and

equality for *all* can engender different interpretations. But what force remains in these principles

as constraints on the actions and policies of those political agents that adhere to them if they did

not even have pretensions to universality? To illustrate what I mean, recall the examples of the

Front National and Golden Dawn parties that Mouffe uses to exemplify a far-right party that has

an acceptable, though not necessarily ideal, interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality

for all, and one that cannot be said to have an outright allegiance to the principles. She mentions

the French party Front National as an example of the former, and the Greek party Golden Dawn

of the latter. Yet how can it be said that the Front National has any different interpretation (or

lack thereof) than Golden Dawn, whose members actively and vociferously promote hatred

towards non-Greeks?[138] The Front National has taken a hard-line stance against migrants and

cultural difference, and if in power, would very likely make life increasingly difficult for French

citizens and migrants of non-European descent.[139] As this example illustrates, any determination

of what does or does not count as a legitimate interpretation of the principles of liberty and

equality for all is a purely arbitrary choice. But if that is the case, why even insist on them at all?

If there is no clear-cut way to determine what is an acceptable interpretation of the principles of

liberalism, it does not seem as if a so called conflictual consensus revolving around them could

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[138] Quinn, Ben and Ross Domoney. "Greek MP: TV assault reveals true nature of far-right Golden Dawn party." *The Guardian*, 10 June 2012, www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/10/greek-mp-assault-golden-dawn.

[139] Dearden, Lizzie. "Paris Attacks: Support rising for far-right Front National as immigration backlash continues." *Independent*, 23 November 2015, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/paris-attacks-support-rising-for-far-right-front-national-as-immigration-backlash-continues-a6745186.html.

play the role of sublimating political conflict in the way Mouffe argues it could for an agonistic democracy.

Let us nevertheless grant to Mouffe that there could be significantly different interpretations of these principles, and furthermore that there is a generally clear line that can be drawn between acceptable and unacceptable interpretations. Perhaps the line is between those who at the very least have pretensions of adhering to the principles of liberty and equality for all, and so can cautiously be accepted into the liberal democratic fold and be held accountable to them at any time by citizens and other political actors, and those who reject the principles outright. Let us assume citizens of an agonistic democratic polity are more or less apt to draw a consistent, if not always firm, line. The possibility remains that these different interpretations sooner or later coalesce into very similar, if not the same interpretations. This slide towards a consensus may happen the more the political agents that subscribe to different interpretations are held accountable to a general understanding of liberty and equality. This would of course reflect a strong, and not weak, or "conflictual," consensus, something which I have shown is reflective of post-democracy.

For example, one can say the process of fully realizing in practice the liberal principles upon which the constitution of the U.S .was founded took this route: The United States went from a slave-owning nation to one in which a black man was democratically elected to its highest political office; it went from a nation in which women initially did not have the right to vote, to one in which they did. These transformations occurred only after a process (an admittedly often brutal, dragged out, deeply conflictual, and incomplete one) by which the oppressive political structures and agents that upheld them were held accountable to the general liberal principles to which they (at least in word, if not deed) adhered to by the oppressed segment of the population.

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There was, undoubtedly, an implicitly or explicitly different understanding of what liberty and equality for all meant to the middle-class white man, and the poor black person or between men and women in the period between America's founding and now, but these differences have slowly but surely narrowed (though they have certainly not disappeared), to the point that a black man like Obama could gain the votes of millions of diverse American citizens and be elected as President. If the aim of an agonistic democratic politics is to ensure no discourse remains hegemonic, then the trend just illustrated is anathema to such a politics.

This is not to go as far as suggesting that contemporary liberal democracy is so structurally or historically intertwined with particular discourses, such as neoliberalism, that no political project could effectively challenge such discourses that also start out within a liberal framework (such as liberal conservative or social democratic).[140] However it certainly does point to the limitations to challenging discourses for any political position that is bound to a meta-hegemonic discourse to which its competitors are also bound. So whether there can be different interpretations of the principles of liberalism or not, to expect the different political positions in an agonistic democracy to be beholden to them is to restrict the democratic contest to certain political contestants, thus limiting the kind of fierce political confrontation Mouffe otherwise wants for an agonistic democracy. Besides, expecting a consensus on the principles of liberalism risks the same post-democratic effect deliberative democracy was accused of: that is, the emergence of a general consensus, and a complacency with the political status-quo.

Others have recognized this tension in Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy and have attempted to resolve it. Stefan Rummens, for example, recognizes this "unresolved" tension in Mouffe's work, "between the hegemonic nature of the democratic struggle, on the one hand,

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[140] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradoxix*, 104.

and the presence of a common symbolic framework on the other."[141] In order to resolve this tension, he suggests Mouffe could take one of two paths, without moving outside her own conceptual framework. She could take the common symbolic framework seriously, in which case she would have to give up the hegemonic nature of the democratic struggle. This, he says, would result in exactly what I have argued above: that the differences and disagreements between political opponents would be minimal, certainly not as robust as Mouffe would like them to be. Alternatively, he suggests that Mouffe could try to retain the hegemonic nature of the democratic struggle, with the consequence that nothing would remain in her theory to perform the integrating or sublimating function the shared point of reference to the principles of liberty and equality for all would. Democratic politics would be a vicious battleground between incommensurable political projects, potentially putting into jeopardy the democratic social order itself.

Rummens proposes that the best solution for resolving this tension, and thus for guaranteeing a more coherent version of agonistic democracy, should begin by making an unambiguous and careful distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic struggles. That is, liberal democracy should be recognized as a particular hegemonic regime, distinct from other political regimes (such as theocracy, fascism, communism), in the sense that it has to impose and preserve its own power structure and values at the expense of others that it "must reject as politically illegitimate."[142] Liberal democracy is a distinct regime, or social order, from others, however, in that it *hegemonically* establishes a space for *non*-hegemonic disagreements between political adversaries within its domain. Thus, whereas hegemonic political projects aim to end political struggle by imposing their own view of society, and thus delegitimizing their political

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[141] Rummens, Stefan. "Democracy as a Non-Hegemonic Struggle? Disambiguating Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Model of Politics." *Constellations*. 16,3 (2009): 383.
[142] Ibid., 385.

opponents, "democratic political projects should be able to recognize the ongoing legitimacy of their adversaries and the necessarily temporary nature of the exercise of democratic power."[143] This requires, according to Rummens, a non-neutral commitment by democratic political adversaries to the universal inclusionary logic of liberalism, and the principles of liberty and equality for all in particular,[144] to ensure the protection of pluralism requisite for democratic political disagreement. This must be a non-neutral commitment, because, according to Rummens, in order to be consistent and prevent any internal conflict to the hegemonic social order that is liberal-democracy, an agonistic democracy needs to reject "as inimical those political projects that are incompatible with the idea of pluralism."[145]

To sum up, Rummens suggests liberalism should operate on the basis of two complementary mechanisms in a theory of agonistic democracy: one being hegemonic, the other non-hegemonic. On the one hand, liberalism hegemonically defines the contours of a liberal democratic social order, with the necessity that those political agents, "which aim to change the power structure of society on the basis of values that are incompatible with liberty and equality" act as the constitutive outside of liberal democracy and should thus be deemed illegitimate by those within a liberal democracy.[146] On the other hand, it provides for the possibility of non-hegemonic *disagreements* within liberal democracy. This is because Rummens accepts that a final and particular interpretation of the core principles of liberalism is not possible, but argues that the ongoing democratic struggle over their proper interpretation is to be viewed as providing the ethos that binds together the disagreeing agents to the common open-ended project that is democracy.

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.*, 386.

Though helpful in clearly exposing the tension present in Mouffe's theorizing of agonistic democracy, I disagree with Rummens' re-affirmation of the necessity of a consensus on liberalism for an agonistic democracy. He is essentially arguing for the first path he suggested Mouffe could take: that she take the common symbolic framework of liberalism seriously, at the expense of characterizing the competing political positions *within* a liberal democratic order as hegemonic themselves. This path, however, runs into essentially the same problems I have already outlined above regarding Mouffe's own insistence on such a common symbolic framework. In contradistinction to Rummens, I do not think that agonistic democracy needs to take the conceptual connections between liberalism and democracy seriously. The common acceptance by all political actors of the ethico-political principles of liberalism would only lead to liberalism's hegemonization at the expense of other possible discourses, and therefore domesticate politics by denying the ability of competing hegemonic projects latently present within the social order from legitimately contesting the empty seat of power. A truly agonistic democracy should be the struggle between competing hegemonic projects. This, of course, could only happen if, as Rummens correctly argues, these projects represent, as Sleat calls them, competing political frameworks. Anti-democrats or illiberals, far-left or far-right parties who do not even have pretensions to an interpretation of the liberal principles of liberty and equality for all, should all be able to contest the empty seat of power in the democratic order, alongside those who do hold an interpretation of these principles. And this could only truly take place if an agonistic democracy is not bound within a liberal framework.

Wendy Brown makes a good argument for this, though she falls short in an important respect of what I am arguing here. In *Politics out of History*, she proposes that "democracy

requires for its health a nondemocratic element,"[147] or, as Zizek says in his analysis of Brown, democracy needs "a permanent influx of anti-democratic self-questioning *in order to remain a living democracy.*"[148] This nondemocratic element should be, according to her, anti-political *theory* .[149] Brown believes those engaged in politics (even those engaged in a democratic politics) are always engaged in a practice that aims at installing a particular discourse, and hence of ensuring stability and continuity, while anti-political theoretical projects, which aim to show the contingent and provisional nature, and lack of ultimate foundation of any political project, are always involved in the opening up or destabilization of meaning "without proposing alternative codes or institutions."[150] Her claim is that a healthy dose of the latter in a democracy would ensure those engaged in democratic politics do not lose sight of what is characteristic of democracy, namely, the lack of a fixed ground or meaning, lest they slide "towards cathexis onto principles antithetical to democracy,"[151] or towards a consensus of the centre.

While I think Brown is on the right track with this proposal, articulating, to a certain degree, what I am trying to argue, I think she falls short of her stated aims. Žižek points out that Brown seems to view such theories as having a legitimate and illegitimate use in democracies: "it is legitimate to use it as a negatively regulative corrective, a provocation, and so on, but it is illegitimate to use it as a constitutive principle to be directly applied to reality as a political program or project."[152] For Brown, democracy requires purely theoretical, domesticated provocations "to awaken us from our democratic-dogmatic slumber and thus contribute to the

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[147] Brown, Wendy. *Politics out of History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001, 122.
[148] Žižek, Slavoj. *In Defense of Lost Causes*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2008, 103.
[149] Brown, *Politics out of History*, 128.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Žižek, *Defense of Lost Causes*, 104.

revitalization of democracy."[153] Any actual attempt to "elaborate a positive *liveable* project

'beyond democracy'"[154] would, according to her, most likely end in disaster for democracy. I

disagree, and do not think Brown goes far enough. If there is no practical force to the theories

Brown argues are necessary for a healthy democracy, it is very likely that liberal democratic

forces in a democracy would continue to remain largely complacent with the status-quo. Thus I

believe an agonistic democracy *should* allow for those liveable "political projects that are

incompatible with the idea of pluralism" into its fold. The inclusion of such projects in a

democratic social order could actually contribute to preventing those allied to liberalism and

democracy from falling in a "dogmatic slumber", and ultimately make it more difficult for any

one discourse from becoming or remaining hegemonic.

I am not so naive as to deny that the risks to democracy are potentially monumental.

There is, for example, the very real risk that, in allowing illiberal and/or anti-democratic political

forces in the democratic fray over the empty seat of power, they may actually acquire it and

proceed to dismantle democracy, or else install a dominant discourse that eschews the pluralism

a liberal discourse would otherwise ostensibly protect. There is both historical and contemporary

precedent for this. The most well-known example from history that is often provided to highlight

the risks of allowing radical (in this case, illiberal or anti-democratic) political forces from taking

part in formal democratic politics is that of the rapid electoral ascendance, and eventual victory,

of the Nazi party in interwar Germany. Apart from this hallmark historical example,

contemporary examples abound. Whether it be the recent political dominance of the Fidesz party

in Hungary, whose leader Viktor Orban has claimed he wishes to recreate Hungary into an

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[153] Ibid., 106.
[154] Ibid.

"illiberal democracy,"[155] or the increasingly autocratic rule of Vladimir Putin through his politically entrenched United Russia party in Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan via the Justice and Development party in Turkey, liberal democracy is currently finding itself increasingly on the defensive. What all these parties, and their leaders, have in common, apart from their illiberal or anti-democratic bent, is that they were elected through the established democratic procedures, govern through the established democratic institutions and enjoy popular legitimacy from the populations they govern.[156] The risk extends, in fact, beyond such political agents actually being voted into office, however. For example, their presence in the political arena could contribute to a shift in popular discourse towards a more relaxed and even positive appraisal of illiberal and anti-democratic discourses, as is evinced in the increasingly radicalized political climate of established liberal democratic states such as Denmark, France, Sweden, Austria, and Germany (despite the fact none of these states are currently ruled by illiberal or un-democratic parties).[157] If democracy, especially agonistic democracy, is the creation of a space wherein it is understood that all discourses are provisional, and that furthermore aims at precluding the possibility of any one discourse from achieving uncontested hegemony in the social order, it might seem that the proposal to reject illiberal and anti-democratic political forces is a necessary evil to ensure democracy's survival as a functioning political order.

This conclusion, however, would undermine most of Mouffe's diagnosis of the state of democratic politics today and indeed her negative appraisal of the practice of ignoring, playing

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[155] Sharkov, Damien. "'Hungary's Mussolini' vows to make the EU member an 'illiberal state'." *Newsweek*, 30 July 2014, www.newsweek.com/hungarys-mussolini-vows-make-eu-member-illiberal-state-262127.

[156] Lyman, Rick. "Elections in Hungary Tighten Prime Minister's Hold on Power." *New York Times,* 13 Oct 2014, http://nyti.ms/1xKkixa; Koplow, Michael. "After surprising election results, Turkey's authoritarian trend looks like it's getting even worse." *Business Insider*. 2 Nov. 2015, www.businessinsider.com/after-surprising-election-results-turkeys-authoritarian-trend-looks-like-its-getting-even-worse-2015-11; Riefer, Felix. "Russian parliamentary elections to take place under new rules." *Deutsche Welle*. 16 Aug. 2016, http://dw.com/p/1JjMu.

[157] Aisch, Gregor, Adam Pearce and Bryant Rousseau. "How Far is Europe Swinging to the Right." *The New York Times,* 5 July 2016, http://nyti.ms/25aJlue.

down and castigating in moralistic terms illiberal and undemocratic political forces by those committed to liberal democracy.[158] Mouffe argues that rather than employing a moralistic stance vis-a-vis illiberal and undemocratic forces within liberal democracies, they should be engaged *politically* as a significant step in overcoming the political malaise of contemporary liberal democracies. However, her argument that in a properly agonistic democracy the various participants must all have a shared set of principles that they agree on does not go far enough in advocating for such an engagement. Indeed, her argument is no different than taking a moralistic stance as it continues to treat those political actors that do not accept the principles of liberty and equality for all as radical others external to the democratic project!

If, as Mouffe believes, democracy's vitality should come from the incessant, fierce political conflict between real political alternatives over the empty seat of power that is characteristic of a democratic order, then the risks of allowing illiberal and anti-democratic political forces to vie for the empty seat of power is a necessary gamble that any proponent of a truly agonistic democratic practice needs to make. Such a conflict could not otherwise take an actively political form (rather than a moralistic one) if those illiberal and anti-democratic forces are not allowed to contest the empty seat of power in a democratic order along with the rest of those that share a common set of political principles. As some consolation to the legitimate fears that these forces could gain the empty seat of power, it is possible to imagine that the inclusion of illiberal and anti-democratic forces might goad liberal and democratic political forces into more fiercely contesting against the former to ensure democracy and pluralism are safeguarded. The ever-present possibility that such political forces legitimately gain power can act as the

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[158] Part of Mouffe's negative diagnosis of the state of democratic politics today, particularly in liberal-democratic societies, is the taking of a "moralistic" stance on the side of those that uphold liberal-democratic principles towards the above mentioned political projects, effectively shutting them out of the democratic contest (by the unwillingness to work with them, by not taking them seriously, by setting up a political *cordon sanitaire* against them - indeed, by treating them antagonistically rather than agonistically!)

constant foil for those political forces allied to liberalism and democracy, ensuring these latter forces do not become complacent with the status-quo and slide "towards cathexis into principles antithetical to democracy" as Brown put it. So while it might seem paradoxical, even antithetical to the democratic project, the inclusion of illiberal and anti-democratic forces into an agonistic democratic order is actually, despite the risks, a guarantor of a vibrant, pluralistic democratic politics. Only in this way would democracy be replete with real political alternatives whose struggles with one another ensures curtailing the risk of any one competing discourse from becoming hegemonic.

Resolving the tension in Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy in this way, however, does not come without some additional problems. By eschewing the requirement for a consensus on the ethico-political principles of liberty and equality for all, this might potentially preclude the transformation of political antagonisms into agonisms. Instead what might result is what Žižek terms "ultrapolitics,"[159] the characterization of a nihilistic war of all against all, where different political agents view each other as enemies to be destroyed, and indeed aim to do so, and not as mere adversaries to be fiercely contested. This would surely be an unviable state of affairs. The risk is that political institutions and political communication would break down, putting in danger a relatively stable social order within which a democratic politics can reasonably take place at all. Mouffe herself is cognizant of this concern when she states that, "antagonistic principles of legitimacy cannot coexist within the same political association; there cannot be pluralism at that level without the political reality of the state automatically disappearing."[160] In light of this, we must resolve the question of whether an agonistic

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[159] Žižek, Slavoj. *The Ticklish Subject The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2008, 225.
[160] Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*. New York: Verso, 1993, 131.

democratic politics could be envisioned without the stabilizing features a common symbolic or normative framework such as a liberal discourse otherwise provides in Mouffe's theory.

3.4) A Procedural Account of Agonistic Democracy

In answer to this, I think a procedural account of agonistic democracy can be retained. I will end this chapter by offering an argument as to why this revised version of agonistic democracy that does not rely on a normative framework like liberalism is possible. By procedural democracy, I mean a democracy in which the basic procedures, rules and institutions - such as a basic constitution, voting, elected representatives, and parliaments - are the only necessary requirements for a stable and functioning democracy. While Mouffe is sympathetic to the importance of the institutions constitutive of democracy, by claiming there needs to be a consensus on them in an agonistic democracy, she ultimately argues that a purely procedural democracy is not feasible. Mouffe believes democracies must also have a substantive element, and this is clearly shown by her insistence that those engaged in an agonistic democratic politics need to hold a consensus on the principles of liberalism. She claims that with no substantive or normative values to undergird a democratic society, mere procedures or institutions could not ensure the type of mutual respect requisite for a stable agonistic confrontation between opposing political projects.[161] Furthermore, Mouffe claims that those who argue for a purely procedural democracy are blind to the fact that those procedures or institutions only have meaning in relation to certain political values,[162] so that to speak of a purely procedural democracy in the absence of certain principles or values is not even possible. I do not deny that the institutions of a

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[161] Monique Deveaux criticizes agonistic democratic theorists in general by asking what agonistic institutions would look like, and how they could help to inculcate and sustain the mutual respect needed to transform political antagonisms into agonisms (Deveaux, 1999: 14).
[162] Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, 131-132.

democratic order will always have certain values or discourses that undergird them. What I maintain here, however, is that there should not be one accepted particular value-system or discourse that defines them - nor do democratic institutions require being defined or rest on the foundation of specifically liberal principles.[163] The institutions should be open to modification and transformation dependent on which political agent gets in power and which discourses they attempt to make hegemonic.[164] Mouffe might argue that in this case nothing would stop illiberal or anti-democratic forces from radically transforming or dismantling democratic institutions if they were allowed to contest and gain power in a democratic order. She may add that such a situation would be easily precluded if there were a basic consensus on certain principles among competing political agents. In response to these possible critiques, I think that there is good reason to believe that: a) a kind of agonistic respect could emerge between these political opponents in the absence of a general consensus on certain normative principles, and furthermore, b) there would not be an incessant or radical creation, removal, modification and/or transformation of social and political institutions even if they were the only things holding together a democratic order in which radically opposing political projects were locked in a contest for the empty seat of power. If this is the case, I can maintain that insisting on a mere procedural understanding of agonistic democracy is enough to evade the charge that allowing illiberal and anti-democratic political projects in an agonistic democracy is antithetical to the overall stability of the democratic order.

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[163] There has been recent work done that argues that contemporary democracy need not be tied to liberalism. See, for example: de Benoist, Alain. *The Problem of Democracy*. Arktos Media: 2011; Ober, Josiah. "Democracy Before Liberalism." Harry Lyman Hooker lecture, 17 March 2016, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON. Guest Lecture.

[164] Mouffe herself claims this is both possible and should take place in an agonistic democracy (Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, 130; *Democratic Paradox*, 74), though of course such modifications would be limited in scope given that she only accepts political projects that adhere to some interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality for all.

In response to the first criticism, I think that a kind of mutual respect is possible between radically opposed political agents in the absence of certain normative or "ethico-political" values or principles, or in the case of deliberative democracy, some notion of what constitutes reasonable deliberation. Opening up the public sphere to those political discourses that may have questionable interpretations of the basic principles of liberalism, or to those that are outright illiberal or anti-democratic, can have the potential to transform them[165] and lead to the development of a kind of respect[166] by the supporters of these discourses for each other, those who uphold more mainstream or less questionable interpretations, and even for the basic institutions of the democratic order. The open-ended, tension-filled interaction between potentially radically opposed political positions, would, I think, entail a certain kind of "openness to listen to those who appear to us unreasonable and a willingness to question what counts as reasonable political speech."[167] This resulting "agonistic respect", as William Connolly puts it, "exceeds the reach of any fixed code, austere set of procedures, or settled interpretation of moral universals."[168]

Žižek's disdain for what he sees as the problems of political correctness is useful to understand this notion of agonistic respect. He argues that a fixation on political correctness can impede the cultivation of genuine or authentic respect between different individuals in a pluralist society. Furthermore, he thinks that the possibility of engaging one another with the use of obscenities, otherwise regulated by some kind of explicit or implicit taboo, can in some sense bring diverse people closer together. Rules or expectations governing what is appropriate and

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[165] Without foreclosing the possibility that their inclusion has the potential to transform democratic institutions in their image.

[166] No doubt an imperfect one that may not always be realized.

[167] Schaap, *Agonism in Divided Societies*, 269.

[168] Connolly, William. *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, xxx.

what is not tend to gloss over and in fact can allow hatreds to fester. In relaxing them, a genuine kind of respect that is not predicated on trying to mitigate or cover over differences, but one that allows them to take centre stage, could evolve organically, with all the bumps and bruises that would certainly mark its progress. Every use of a slur, caricature, stereotype, or every obscene, racist or sexist joke, for example, is a potential teaching or learning moment, or otherwise, used in the right circumstances, a potential recognition of solidarity.[169] He gives a personal example that I think states his point poignantly:

> I remember when I was young when I met with other people from ex-Yugoslavia republics - Serbs, Croat, Bosnians, and so on. We were all the time telling dirty jokes about each other. But not so much against the other. We were in a wonderful way competing who will be able to tell a nastier joke about ourselves. These were obscene, racist jokes, but their effect was a wonderful sense of shared obscene solidarity. ... Of course racist jokes and so on can be extremely oppressive, humiliating, and so on. But the solution I think is to create an atmosphere or to practice these jokes in such a way that they really function as that little bit of obscene contact which establishes true proximity between us.[170]

Bearing in mind this last point of his, I think this is similar to the kind of agonistic respect one could envision taking place in an agonistic democracy where there is no consensus on certain moral or political principles.[171]

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[169] Žižek, Slavoj. "Why 'Political Correctness' Gets in its Own Way." *Youtube*, uploaded by Big Think, 16 April 2015, https://youtu.be/5dNbWGaaxWM.

[170] Ibid.

[171] The authors of *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces* present findings from various multi-faith regions that have experienced conflict throughout the centuries to support the notion of what they call "antagonistic tolerance" existing in communities between different religious groups. Such communities are marked by a simmering struggle between the different faith groups for dominance, particularly over shared religious sites, which sometimes erupts into open conflict. Their claim is that despite this, these communities are *tolerant* in that its members tend to live relatively peacefully with each other for prolonged periods of time. Admittedly, the authors recognize that in many of these cases such an antagonistic tolerance is an ongoing and constantly evolving process that is periodically punctuated by fierce conflict (such as the civil war in Bosnia in the early 1990s), but that conflict might indeed be that which contributes paradoxically to the emergence of that very tolerance. These communities show the possibility of a competitive sharing of particular spaces, spaces which do not foreclose the possibility of conflict as members adhering to competing worldviews always have an eye to control it, but which are shared and largely accepted as such between the various competing worldviews that exist

It is enough, I think, to briefly examine the nature of institutions in general to defend against the second possible criticism to a purely procedural conception of agonistic democracy entertained above. Douglass North has argued that, due to the uncertainties that are involved in human interaction, institutions exist as constraints intended to regulate these interactions. They are designed to order our lives, and as such they establish expectations that become difficult to alter.[172] Furthermore, institutions play some part in structuring and constituting the cognitive frames through which we interpret things, say the principles of liberty and equality for all. In other words, they have a concrete role in dispersing particular discourses in a society. Since institutions tend to persist beyond those who created them and can tend to surpass the very reasons for their creation, they are also slow to change. So institutions have what I will call a conforming effect.

To illustrate this, consider that many post-communist states that emerged as fledgling democracies in the 1990s have societies that continue to show influences of their socialist past in various ways. For example, Slovenia has one of the lowest rates of foreign direct investment in the European Union despite being considered a post-communist success story due to its relatively seamless transition from a constituent republic of communist Yugoslavia to an independent, free-market oriented democratic member state of the European Union within just over a decade. It has one of the lowest rates of foreign direct investment in the European Union.[173] In fact, just over 25% of Slovenia's GDP is made up of state-owned companies, which employ one out of eight people in the country. This is not including those directly employed in

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within it (Hayden, Robert M. et al. *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.)

[172] North. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1990.

[173] Georgieva, Svetoslava and David Marco Riquelme. "Slovenia: State-Owned and State-Controlled Enterprises." *Economic Analysis From European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs*, 10,3 (2013): 7.

the public sector. [174] In addition to this, Slovenes are wary of foreign ownership of the domestic

economy, which is shown by the preference made to domestic investors during its privatization

process during the 1990s.[175] This wariness of foreign investment, and continued prevalence of

the state in the domestic economy is certainly partly a result of the influence of socialist

institutions during Slovenia's time in Yugoslavia. The upshot of this in terms of Slovenian

politics is that Slovenian political parties that are pro-privatization and have economically liberal

policies, i.e. submit to a neoliberal discourse, find it difficult to implement those policies, fearing

popular public backlash.[176]

In light of this understanding of their nature, I believe the institutions of a democratic

order would have a conforming effect on any political agent that engages with them, even if they

win an election and get a majority. This would ensure the attempts of any political agent that

wins the seat of power at transforming institutions to reflect and disperse their own discourse

would be significantly hampered or slowed down. So, for example, it would be unthinkable for

Viktor Orban or Vladimir Putin to overthrow the institutions of democracy in their respective

countries overnight for more authoritarian ones. And though in some cases they have engaged in

a slow process of dismantling certain institutions, or transforming them to reflect a more

authoritarian or illiberal discourse, most democratic institutions remain intact, which they find

necessary to engage with in order to retain their legitimacy. Both leaders and their respective

political parties, despite having majorities in their respective parliaments, and having been in

power for extended periods of time, continue to have regular elections, and maintain institutions

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[174] Ibid., 2.

[175] Ibid., 7.

[176] See, for example: Fangmann, Alexander. "Thousands of Slovenian students protest attacks on their conditions." *World Socialist Website*. 22 May 2010, www.wsws.org/en/articles/2010/05/slov-m22.html; "Thousands protest against austerity in Slovenia." *Deutsche Welle*. 18 Nov. 2012, http://dw.com/p/16l6l; "Največja vseslovenska vstaja končna s pozivom: Oblast ljudem!" *RTV Slovenija*. 9 March 2013, www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/foto-najvecja-vseslovenska-vstaja-do-zdaj-protestiralo-20-000-ljudi/302017.

like constitutional courts and the parliamentary system.

On the other hand, the conforming effect that I have just described has the possible outcome of eroding the counter-hegemonic nature of political projects engaged in formal democratic politics. The more that political parties initially subscribed to very different discourses engage in democratic institutions that have been shaped by previous discourses, the more their own policies may become shaped by these discourses, and the less they could be considered to offer a *counter*-hegemonic discourse to that which is dominant. So although the characterization of agonistic democracy is that of diverse hegemonic projects fiercely contesting each other for the empty seat of power, even in the less restrictive version I have just outlined, in the final analysis it is clear that the limitations to the aspirations of any hegemonic political project entailed by working through the institutions of the democratic order ultimately point to the limits of an agonistic democracy. To expect anything beyond would be to argue for either a different social and political order altogether, or the withering away of the state, as classical Marxism expects after the final victory of communism over capitalism. Neither possibility, of course, would be an agonistic democracy. In the next and final chapter, I will argue that there is a way to see past these limitations by engaging with the political thought of Jacques Rancière.

Nevertheless, if the danger of post-democracy is the lack of political venues for fierce contestation between different hegemonic political projects, democratic politics should be constructed with the aim of valorizing conflict, not ensuring consensus. Thus, despite the apparent limitations of agonistic democracy, it is clear that it is a better conception than deliberative democracy in confronting post-democracy.

CHAPTER 4: AGONISTIC DEMOCRACY AND EXTRA-INSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL

MOVEMENTS

Introduction

Any formulation or conception of democracy that is theorized or constructed with procedures and institutions in mind; that is, any conceptualization of a particular kind of democratic order needs to eventually confront the limits necessarily imposed on democratic politics within such a conception. Agonistic democracy is no different. As I have already argued, the empty seat of power of a democratic order should be open to those who do not necessarily adhere to the principles of liberty and equality for all in order to ensure a truly agonistic struggle. Following this I claimed that the basic democratic framework could remain intact so that this struggle can continue without it falling apart, because of both the real possibility of an agonistic respect emerging between political opponents in the absence of some normative consensus, envisioned as conflictual or otherwise, and the conforming effect institutions have on political agents engaged in formal politics. I ended by noting that this risks eroding or erasing altogether the counter-hegemonic nature of competing political projects. Insofar as it is understood as the vibrant clash of competing hegemonic political projects for the empty seat of power of a democratic order, these are the limits of a procedural conception of agonistic democracy.

The limits that define a particular kind of social order necessarily brings to the fore the "surplus," "remainder," "constitutive outside," or "excess" of politics, or those elements that have been left out of the order.[177] While the account of agonistic democracy I have defended in the

[177] Mouffe herself constantly argues that there will always be a "constitutive outside" or political remainder that is consciously left out or remains outside of the democratic order, no less an agonistic one, though for slightly different reasons than I have argued. She claims this outside will be all those who are opposed to democracy or the principles of liberty and equality for all that should act as its normative frame, where I have argued that they

previous chapter was my attempt at theorizing a more inclusive agonistic democratic politics than Mouffe allowed for, both the conforming effect that democratic institutions have on counter-hegemonic political projects, and the possibility of illiberal or anti-democratic political forces gaining political power will necessarily alienate a certain portion of the population from the formal political process. This remainder will either be those who feel their convictions were betrayed by those political agents that have had their counter-hegemonic position eroded by the conforming effect of the institutions, or those who feel themselves or the democratic order is threatened by the growing strength of illiberal and anti-democratic political forces. In either case, insofar as this remainder feels they are increasingly less able to combat such tendencies through the formal democratic procedures (i.e. by forming a new party, by joining a party and influencing it from within, by voting for another party that genuinely represents their interests), there is an increased likelihood that they will take to the streets, so to speak. Indeed, as I have mentioned in chapter one, there has been a proliferation of extra-institutional movements and actions in contemporary democratic societies in the face of what I argued was the reality of post-democracy.

To defend agonistic democracy requires that we positively evaluate and articulate the integral role played by extra-institutional political movements and actions in such a conception. I will critically examine the treatment by several democratic thinkers of what has variously been referred to as "civil disobedience," "activist politics," or "radical politics." I will refer to the appraisal of extra-institutional movements in democratic theory by these thinkers as the "civil" approach. I will contrast it with what I will call the "agonistic" approach. I will argue that thinkers of the "civil" approach only focus on extra-institutional movements that remain within

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should be considered part of the democratic order (see: Mouffe. "The Limits of John Rawls' Pluralism." *A Journal of Social and Political Theory*. 56,118 (2009): 4.) In any case, she does not allow for this outside to play as an integral role in an agonistic democracy as I will attempt to show.

or engage with the democratic institutions of the established democratic order. They view these movements positively only when they can potentially lead to fixing the deficiencies of the established democratic order. They ignore the importance of extra-institutional movements that are opposed to the social order and are aimed at fundamentally shifting the discourses of that order. In contradistinction, the agonistic approach views these extra-institutional movements like jumper cables which serve to reactivate politics. That is, these movements provide the continual impetus for the rejuvenation or emergence of real political alternatives within an agonistic democratic order, which risks sliding towards post-democracy in their absence. This is because any political movement that advances competing discourses to that of the reigning one in a particular social order through actions outside of the institutions of that order is more able to preserve its counter-hegemonic nature. More than this, an agonistic approach to extra-institutional movements shifts the traditional notion that the privileged site of politics are formal political institutions, or a rational public sphere. Their nature as disengaged and dissenting forces against reigning discourses and the institutions that perpetuate them should be seen as a continuation of the agonistic struggle albeit on a different terrain (outside of the institutions rather than inside of them).

4.1) A *Civil* Approach to Extra-Institutional Political Movements

Many democratic political theorists have in some form dealt with the question of protests or civil disobedience, which I am specifically referring to as extra-institutional political movements and actions here. Compelled by a consideration of the limits of their own political theories or the deficiencies that accompany existing political arrangements, these thinkers have argued in various ways about the role extra-institutional movements have played in repairing

democratic politics or, more radically, of (re-)instituting it. What follows is a consideration of thinkers that advance what I will refer to as a "civil" approach to extra-institutional political movements, and show this approach to insufficiently address what role extra-institutional movements might have in an agonistic conception of democracy.

For some theorists, civil disobedience[178] is viewed as an important or necessary internal corrective to democracy. That is, to provide any positive gain for democracy, the end game of the type of civil disobedience these thinkers theorize about cannot be the complete rejection of the social order, but rather usually the rectification of perceived injustices or deficiencies of that order. The problem with this notion of civil disobedience in relation to democratic politics, in addition to the secondary role given it by these thinkers, is this ready acceptance of the status-quo. Civil disobedience is usually included as an afterthought by many democratic theorists who understand it in this sense. Rawls, for example, argues it is acceptable only after all other proper (i.e. institutional) channels have been exhausted.[179] Habermas situates civil disobedience within the 'wild public,'[180] and though he understands it to be a normal part of a healthy democratic public sphere, like Rawls, he believes its use is legitimate only after all other official avenues of having civil society exert its influence on political institutions have been tried.[181] They focus on acts of civil disobedience as occurrences that are like blips or glitches that reveal flaws in an otherwise well-designed social and political system, not as political events in their own right.[182]

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[178] A public collective act undertaken by those who wish to communicate their dissatisfaction with and desire to rectify what they perceive to be injustices perpetuated by the official institutions of the state (See: Rawls, John. "Definition and Justification of Civil Disobedience." in *Civil Disobedience in Focus*, edited by Hugo Adam Bedau. London: Routledge, 1991: 103-121)

[179] Ibid., 106.

[180] The anarchic complex of communication and action that exists outside of the institutions of formal politics (Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 107.)

[181] Ibid., 382-384.

[182] Todd May says that for thinkers like Rawls, or Habermas, what the acting out of individuals engaged in protests or civil disobedience means is "that there has been a failure of [formal] politics. Politics has not achieved its task,

Some theorists, like Iris Marion Young, attempt to give extra-institutional movements a more central place in democratic theory. In pointing out the flaws of the often exclusive attention paid to rational speech in theories of deliberative democracy, Young argues that activist politics should be accepted as one of a myriad of legitimate and accepted ways to engage in deliberative democratic politics.[183] She claims activist politics is specifically important for deliberative democracy, as it gives the added boon of helping to expose dominant discourses that might be hidden behind accepted deliberative processes, and which implicitly exclude certain positions and prejudice certain arguments over others.[184] Thus, unlike thinkers like Rawls and Habermas who view acts of civil disobedience as outbursts that erupt when otherwise well-designed democratic institutions fail to live up to their own standards in some serious way, Young argues that democracy requires the continuous presence of activist politics because of the inherent flaws of its procedures and institutions. Yet, like Rawls and Habermas, she envisions activist politics, or civil disobedience, as a supplement to the official or formal relays of political engagement in a democratic order. While critiquing them, Young does not attempt to argue away deliberative procedures, and in fact highlights their importance for democracy. She transfers this faith in deliberative democracy onto those who choose to engage politically outside of its institutions, by arguing that activist politics should be an accepted way to engage in deliberative democratic politics. As Todd May says of Young's approach to "activist politics": "political action that

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and so corrective action must be taken" (May, Todd. *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 2008. 52.)

[183] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Ch.2.

[184] "Certain activists concerned with specific areas of social life claim to identity such ideologies and hegemonic discourses... democratic theory that emphasizes discussion as a criterion of legitimacy requires a more developed theory of the kinds and mechanisms of ideology and methods for performing critique of specific political discussion... because he suspects some agreements of masking unjust power relations, the activist believes it is important to continue to challenge these discourses and the deliberative processes that rely on them..." (Young, Iris Marion. "Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy." *Political Theory*. 29, 5 (2001): 687.)

resists domination requires participation in the creation of the institutional context in which one lives."[185]

Mouffe's own affirmation of the importance of extra-institutional movements for an agonistic democracy extends only to those movements that accept the liberal principles of liberty and equality for all, and only insofar as they directly engage with the institutions of the democratic order. She believes these movements are important for democracy, especially for their role in creating spaces, or starting a dialogue, in which a challenge to dominant discourses such as neoliberalism are staged beyond the local sphere. However, she ultimately insists that the strategy of what she calls "withdrawal from,"[186] or even direct opposition to, the institutions by some of these movements does little either to deepen democracy, or confronting the problematic of hegemonic discourses that agonistic democracy is theorized as a direct reply to. She offers the example of the *piqueteros* movement in Argentina as a way to show her point. The *piqueteros* were a movement of poor, mainly unemployed workers who, following several years of protests against neoliberal policies, were part of the popular protests that brought down Argentina's government in 2001.[187] Mouffe claims that, had it not been for the election of Nestor Kirchner, who implemented many of the policies popular with the protestors, the unwillingness to engage with the institutions of the state on the part of the *piqueteros* would have brought those policies to nought.[188]

She says something similar of the Occupy Movement. In not engaging with the institutions, by putting up candidates for elections, for example, or seriously engaging in civil debates or projects with different elements and levels of government, whatever concrete

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[185] May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière,* 5-6.
[186] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 65.
[187] Ibid., 76.
[188] Ibid.

demands that were espoused by the movement did not get a chance to be implemented. While it started a conversation, it ostensibly did not contribute to effectively challenging the discourses it was opposed to. According to Mouffe, the so-called "failures" of groups like Occupy or the *piqueteros,* "brings to light the importance of combining parliamentary with extra-parliamentary struggles in a common fight to transform the configuration of power *within* the institutional framework."[189] Which is why she insists that "radical politics," or what I have been referring to as extra-institutional political movements, must be "envisaged in terms of 'engagement' with institutions, with the aim of bringing about a different hegemony."[190]

Like Young, Mouffe recognizes extra-institutional movements are important for democracy because they bring to light and combat dominant discourses, which, if left unchallenged, can lead to a post-democratic situation. Her point is that to further the democratic project and ensure a more agonistic public sphere, counter-hegemonic projects require access to institutions and the ability to diffuse their competing discourses throughout the social order to be able to offer a concrete political position in the democratic arena. And while extra-institutional movements are important insofar as they might embody competing discourses to firmly entrenched dominant ones, their attempts to compete with these dominant discourses and thus widen the space of democratic contestation would not be very effective without access to the institutions of the social order.

Paulo Virno has critiqued this civil approach to extra-institutional movements, which he decries as implying a "deeper loyalty to State command"[191] than the type of actions employed by those engaged in activist politics might otherwise reveal. That is because, while the types of

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[189] Ibid., 77.
[190] Ibid., 71.
[191] Virno, Paolo."Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus." *Radical Thought in Italy, A Potential Politics*. Ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996, 17.

actions employed might involve violating accepted mores, norms or laws, they are done to address some unjust aspect of the established order by reference to the same ideals that very order formally endorses. One might counter that this particular critique might be fine for someone advocating a complete rupture with the established order - and indeed Virno has argued that disobedience should be developed as "radical disobedience," that is, action that fundamentally "casts doubt on the State's actual ability to control."[192] But they might question what end extra-institutional movements that do not engage with or are directly opposed to the social order serve for democracy.

My argument is not that only extra-institutional movements can challenge and replace discourses. This would be advocating for something like revolution, which I am not. Furthermore, I am not saying extra-institutional movements should never or do not ever engage positively with the social order in which they find themselves. Strategically speaking, they may find it absolutely necessary. But insofar as the institutions of any particular order, democratic or otherwise, will always reflect and perpetuate particular discourses, any political agent that engages in formal politics, no matter how opposed and determined to replace those discourses they are, will always be at risk of having its own identity changed through the course of that engagement. So only those acting outside of the institutions of a particular social order can be said to truly represent counter-hegemonic projects, making them best placed as the foci of resistance to dominant discourses and the creation of new ones. It is this aspect of extra-institutional movements that is missed out by the "civil" approach, and which is captured by what I will call the "agonistic" approach.

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[192] Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2004, 69.

4.2) An *Agonistic* Approach to Extra-Institutional Political Movements

In the aftermath of the economic downturn beginning in 2008, the Greek people took to the streets and organized in defiance of the consensus among the established political parties across the political spectrum on the need to implement austerity measures in exchange for bailout money from the European Union. These protests, organized and sustained by a myriad of extra-institutional movements, arguably contributed immensely to propelling the nominally anti-austerity leftist Syriza party to power in 2015. The Greek political scene found itself with a real alternative to the established parties, giving Greek democracy a breath of fresh air among the stifling consensus. On the other end of the political spectrum, the Pegida movement has been a driving force for the radicalization of the nationalist, anti-migrant Alternative for Germany party, which stands in opposition to the pro-migrants consensus of the ruling government coalition. In either case, despite individual contacts between those respective movements and political parties, there has not been sustained or formal connection or synergy between them. To use Rancière's language, those who were initially represented in formal politics by particular parties had their positions effaced when those parties slid towards a consensus with other parties. Those who felt excluded from the emerging consensus re-actualized their subject positions when they decided to break with the social order. These are clear examples of extra-institutional movements and actions that have sustained the political direction and projects of parties engaged in the formal political institutions. In the absence of such movements, these parties may sooner or later lapse in parliamentary influence, or moderate their aims in order to maintain and gain influence, losing some of their counter-hegemonic character in the process.

Rancière's work provides a good conceptual framework for the notion of extra-institutional movements and their role in an agonistic democracy that I am advancing. For

Rancière, what is proper to politics is the moment of rupture with the established order. That is, when one is engaged in politics (*le* politique), one is necessarily engaged in a practice that disengages from and confronts the established social order. Any space in which everything has its place, in which the role and identity of everything within its realm has been formalized, is referred to as by Rancière as "the police" [*la* politique]). The state and its institutions and the discourses that ground them and their practices can collectively be referred to as "the police." "Policing," for Rancière, does not solely or necessarily refer to the coercive instruments of the state such as the police force, army, prisons or the law. Rather, it simply refers to giving everything and everyone a place within its sphere. Politics, on the other hand, is "an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing" which "breaks with the tangible configuration" of things within the police order" and is "manifest in a series of actions that reconfigure the space where parties, parts, or lack of parts have been defined."[193]

　　Rancière's understanding of politics is decidedly different than Mouffe's. While for him politics involves a rupture with order, for Mouffe, as I have already mentioned, it is the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to institute a particular order. Furthermore, Rancière understands democracy as simply equated to his notion of politics. That is, democratic politics just *is* '*le* politique'.[194] For Mouffe, of course, democratic politics revolves around the contest between different social agents vying with each other to shift the contours of the social order. This contest takes place primarily within and relies on institutions and procedures. Rancière's analysis of what is initiated by the eruption in the order by an excluded element of

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[193] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29-30.
[194] " Democracy is not a regime or a social way of life. It is the institution of politics itself.... Every politics is democratic in this precise sense: not in the sense of a set of institutions, but in the sense of forms of expression that confront the logic of equality with the logic of the police order" (Ibid., 99-101.)

that order is critical to understanding the role I argue extra-institutional movements play in an agonistic democracy.

For Rancière, every order reflects a kind of consensus,[195] even if that order is criss-crossed with division and antagonism such as would characterize a pluralist society. This makes more sense in light of Rancière's understanding of consensus: "... [it is] the presupposition of *inclusion* of all parties and their problems that prohibits the political subjectification of a part of those who have no part..." (my emphasis).[196] When an element of society has been left out of the social order, Rancière would say it is because their subject position has been effaced from that order, despite the fact that they occupy a place in it. So it is not because that element of society is physically left out, but because their identity is determined by a particular dominant discourse which might only represent them in a particular way, without them given the opportunity to represent themselves in a way in which they choose. Though they might not have initially agreed with the place they occupy in that discourse, or would insist on a different discourse were they given a chance, the more ubiquitous or hegemonic a discourse is in that social order, the less likely could a subjected social agent change their position in that social order by working with it. Their own particular subject position, or ability to affirm for themselves such a position, is effaced precisely in the sense that they are *given* a place in that order.

According to Rancière, the process of subjectification of social agents that have been left out of the social order - the "part-of-no-part" as he refers to them - can only be undertaken by those very same social agents themselves, and can only take place when they eschew dominant discourses in favour of ones in which they hold an equal place in the social order, effecting a

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[195] In another way, this is stating that every social order reflects the hegemony of specific discourses that determines the place of every social agent in the social order according to that discourse.

[196] Ibid., 116. A more inclusive agonistic democracy, which I have defended in opposition to Mouffe, might certainly fall into this category. And indeed, any institutionalized democratic order, or democracy as a particular socio-political form, is for him already a post-democratic one (See: Ibid., 97-102).

rupture with the social order that has left them out. And this is precisely why the act or event of subjectification can only occur as a rupture with the social order, because those social agents are claiming for themselves a position that does not fit the official discourses that undergird that order. Furthermore, as it was formed on their exclusion, this act of claiming entails calling into question and resisting the social order that has effaced their subject positions. Contemporary and historical examples of certain social movements have shown this very logic played out time and again. The protests and movements I mentioned in chapter one are some recent examples: the Seattle protests, the anti-g20 protests, Occupy and the various anti-austerity movements and protests that have proliferated around Europe in the wake of the 2008 economic downturn. In all these cases traditional political outlets had been perceived as failing to address the concerns of those elements of society who had been left out of and exploited by the dominant neoliberal discourse, given that political parties across the spectrum tended to coalesce around a consensus on neoliberal policies. So the parts-of-no-part in all the societies in which these protests occurred took to the streets to stake a position outside of, and in opposition to, the reigning order, and in so doing made themselves visible as subjects.[197]

Rancière's notion of democratic politics is centred around the concept of equality.[198] For him, those engaged in extra-institutional movements that dissent against the social order must do so first and foremost out of the presupposition of their own equality with those who benefit from the dominant discourses of the social order. He would thus only recognize progressive movements aimed at a wider emancipation of individuals and groups in society as being legitimate subjects of democratic politics. A movement like Occupy is lauded by Rancière as a good contemporary example of his notion of democratic politics. In particular, as Keith Bassett

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[197] "To become a subject is to make oneself appear, to create oneself as a subject, to impress oneself on the scene" (May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 70.)

[198] "Democratic politics is defined not by opposition, but by its declassifying presupposition of equality" (Ibid., 135.)

notes, this is because Occupy "did not seek recognition as a new interest or identity group within the existing political structure, nor did it aim to seize control of existing state structures, but challenged the legitimacy of the structure as a whole" and because it was "often seen by the participants themselves as a process of creating new subjects and subjectivities, rather than simply bringing together temporary coalitions of established protest organisations."[199] Those movements that seek to re-claim or defend their dominant position in society, that are caught up in an identity politics (i.e. a movement focused on issues concerning a particular race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.), or that quite simply fail "to see [their] adversaries as equal to [themselves] leads not to the destruction of the police order but simply to its inversion. Rather than ending the hierarchies associated with domination, treating those who have a part as less than equal to oneself only reverses the hierarchical roles."[200] A right-wing movement like Pegida would thus not be accepted by Rancière as proper subjects of democratic politics.

　　While not suggesting that these aforementioned movements might be expressly dissenting from a presupposition of equality, or that they are fighting for equality, I would like to argue that within a conception of agonistic democracy they express a logic similar to that of the type of subjectifying event Rancière locates in his notion of democratic politics. The individuals that constitute these movements might not by and large be adversely affected by, and indeed may benefit from, certain dominant discourses in their respective societies. But insofar as there is an aspect to those discourses that leave out, for example, traditional practices or ways of life, religious tenets, or, conversely, includes what they view as not having a part in that discourse, those dissenting with a social order that has not taken these into account are staking out a subject position in opposition to that order. Even those who are not necessarily marginalized in a society

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[199] Bassett, Keith. "Rancière, politics, and the Occupy movement." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.* 32 (2014): 893.
[200] May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 134.

in some aspects may act out in defence of discourses that benefit them, which they might otherwise feel are under attack.

One general criticism of this approach might be that the proliferation of such movements, given their anti-establishment positions and idealistic zeal, might push both civil society and the formal political establishment further into a position of ultra-politics. But just as formal politics can have a tendency towards consensus, so too can regular members of civil society set aside their differences and come together through extra-institutional opposition to the bitter divisions that an agonistic politics can succumb to in the absence of agonistic respect. This happened recently in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2014 protests involving a few hundred workers of several former state-owned factories in the city of Tuzla that had been privatized and sold off unexpectedly exploded into a popular mass movement that encompassed most elements of Bosnian society, transgressing ethnic and class divisions: workers, the unemployed, students, professionals, Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks.[201] Ethnic divisions between the three constituent nations of the country in particular have become socially and politically entrenched in a discourse of ethnic nationalism and separatism. The major parties of the country (the Party of Democratic Action, Croatian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Serb Party, representing Bosniak, Croatian and Serb interests respectively) have done much to perpetuate this discourse, finding themselves in a strange consensus on issues that perpetuate divisions between the peoples they represent. The Bosnian Spring, as the collection of protests and movements that erupted during this time was dubbed, disrupted this discourse, if only for a short time frame. Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats found common cause against the policies of ethnic division promoted by the elected officials that represented them. Mass protests were staged,

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[201] Mujanović, Jasmin. "It's spring at last in Bosnia and Herzegovina." *Al Jazeera,* 11 Feb. 2014, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/02/it-spring-at-last-bosnia-herzegov-2014296537898443.html.

buildings were burnt, and peoples' plenums were organized.[202] Politicians were scared, and

regular Bosnians of every class and ethnicity breathed an air of freedom and dared to dream of

better days for their battered and struggling country.

There is one more thing to say about his notion of politics which I need to address if it is

to contribute to an agonistic conception of democracy. Rancière does not discuss whether or how

these subjectifying ruptures might infect and influence the social order, and he is adamant that

they are purely evental. That is, they are momentary happenings that come and go, so that they

cannot be institutionalized nor their energies captured by the interplay of formal democratic

politics.[203] In fact, he believes that once an extra-institutional movement begins to seek greater

participation in governmental decision making and engage with the institutions of the social

order, they will have lost their status as a subjectifying event. Or, put in other terms, their

counter-hegemonic stance will have eroded. The same might happen if the social order

incorporates the demands of the excluded elements of society that had protested. There is no

concrete guarantee that these movements will always provide the necessary influence over the

political actors engaged in the democratic institutions that share their political values. For

example, Syriza became increasingly disengaged from the protests and movements that

catapulted it into power, especially after the infamous July referendum. Despite over half of

voters saying no to the proposed EU bailout deal in the referendum, Syriza decided to backtrack

on its own promises and is now faithfully implementing austerity measures prescribed by the

EU.[204] It is now the target of renewed extra-institutional action from segments of the population

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[202] Rossetter, George. "Bosnia's Plenums: a missed oppurtunity?" *Insight on Conflict*, 15 July 2015, www.insightonconflict.org/blog/2015/07/bosnias-plenums-missed-opportunity.

[203] At best they create insubstantial communities that "can never achieve substantial form as a social institution" (May 103)

[204] Mason, Paul. "Greece in chaos: will Syriza's last desperate gamble pay off?" *The Gaurdian*, 29 June 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/29/greece-chaos-syriza-gamble-banks-closed-

that rightly feel betrayed by it.[205] In most cases, however, extra-institutional movements will fizzle out, and their demands, or the counter-hegemonic discourses they develop, will either not be heard, or will only be accepted in some cosmetic way. This is precisely what happened with the Bosnian Spring: the plenums slowly stopped taking place and there were only minor political changes.[206] In all of these cases, the status-quo, or the dominant discourses that define the social order, continue on.

It is Rancière's apparent short-sightedness to the practical side of extra-institutional political movements that has been criticized by many theorists of both a radical-Leftist or democratic bent.[207] Yet, the always precarious results of such movements should not detract from their integral place in a formulation of agonistic democracy. When the different positions competing for power in formal politics come under sway of a discourse that has become hegemonic, and the social practices that reflect that discourse become sedimented throughout society, extra-institutional movements that suddenly erupt should be welcomed like a herald that announces an end to the stifling consensus in society. Sheldon Wolin's treatment of democratic politics lends some weight to this notion. Echoing his words on the nature of democracy, we might say that *agonistic* democracy "is not about *where* the political [understood in the Schmittian sense of the latent antagonistic relations prevalent in pluralist societies] is located but

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referendum?CMP=share_btn_tw; Zartaloudis, Sotirios. "Why Greece's Syriza Party is Embracing Austerity Now." *Fortune*, 3 June 2016, http://fortune.com/2016/06/03/greece-eurozone/.

[205] Polychroniou, C.J. "Syriza-led Government Has Lost Legitimacy: What's Next?" *Greek Reporter*, 16 Feb. 2016, http://greece.greekreporter.com/2016/02/16/syriza-led-government-has-lost-legitimacy-whats-next/.

[206] See: R.J. "Premijer Unsko-sanskog kantona Hamdija Lipovača podnio ostavku!" *Index*, 10 Feb 2014, www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/premijer-unskosanskog-kantona-hamdija-lipovaca-podnio-ostavku/726642.aspx; Rossetter. "Bosnia's Plenums: a missed opportunity?"

[207] Žižek, for example, criticizes this approach to radical politics as avoiding any formulation of a positive political project. While dissent against the status-quo is a necessary step in breaking down a faulty political system, he also believes that any positive appraisal of this demands also taking a step further by theorizing how such dissent might be extended to the point of establishing a new social order (see: Žižek, *The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*). Mouffe, much more moderate than Žižek, might nevertheless criticize Rancière's treatment of extra-institutional movements by claiming that a society's democratization would not be advanced if these movements are to exist in a purely dissenting, rather than engaged, relationship with the institutions of a social order.

how it is experienced" (my emphasis),[208] and because formal democratic politics tends towards

consensus and the foreclosure of conflict, if not because of stress on rational communication or

some over-arching meta-discourse, but of the very nature of institutions, the political constantly

requires to be renewed[209] in order to maintain an agonistic democracy. Extra-institutional

movements enact a repoliticization of society or "a revocation of the social contract that was

stifling political life."[210]

These movements bring to the fore competing discourses that may have been latent in

society, but shunted out by the consensus among those engaged in formal politics. Or, more

radically, they might generate completely new discourses; new ways of approaching how the

social orders in which they erupt might be organized or shaped. The fact that the Bosnian Spring

did happen, for example, and made such a forceful impression on Bosnian society and the

political elite, if only for a short while, proved that Bosnians could overcome the discourses that

divide and oppress them. The individuals involved in the Bosnian Spring were enacting what

was missing from formal democratic politics: a different, competing discourse. Put another way,

those engaged in extra-institutional movements opposed to the reigning order are continuing the

political conflict between competing discourses on a different terrain. When formal politics has

slid towards a consensus of the centre, extra-institutional movements become the catalyst that re-

activate or continue the struggle between competing hegemonic projects that should define an

agonistic democratic struggle, albeit in a different space: between the institutions of formal

politics and extra-institutional movements. In this sense, dissent against the reigning order should

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[208] Wolin, Sheldon. "Fugitive Democracy," *Constellations.* 1,1 (1994): 18.
[209] "The loss of the political is a clue to its nature: it is a mode of experience... the thing about experience is that we can lose it and the think about political experience is that we are always losing it and having to recover it. The nature of the political is that it requires renewal." Wolin, Sheldon. "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and The Political," *Salmagundi*. 60 (1983): 18.
[210] Wolin, Sheldon. "The People's Two Bodies," *Dimensions of the Current Crisis*. 1,1 (1981): 20.

be viewed as an end in itself in an agonistic conception of democracy, and does not necessarily have to be viewed in terms of simply a means to an end, i.e. of directly influencing formal politics.

If political agents that engage in the institutions of a democracy cannot claim to be purely hegemonic projects, as they are always at risk of lapsing into a consensus with its political opponents, and if those institutions are nevertheless important, as the real challenge to dominant discourses via these institutions is a hallmark of a properly agonistic democracy, then there needs to be some way for the political agents that engage in formal politics to be continually goaded into maintaining a counter-hegemonic stance. As I have argued, the influence or energy required for this can only come from extra-institutional movements that have dissented from those very same institutions. However, that there is no guarantee that extra-institutional movements will successfully influence the actors engaged in formal politics because of the lack of any formal synergy between the movements and the institutions of the social order is a necessary antinomy to maintain in order to envision a truly dynamic agonistic conception of democracy. If agonistic democracy is characterized by robust conflict between different discourses aiming at hegemony, then that should also characterize the relationship between an agonistic democratic order and the various extra-institutional movements that will inevitably crop up in it, regardless of what concrete effects they may or may not have on the institutions of formal politics. At worst, theorists that advance a civil approach to extra-institutional movements simply miss this point. They view these movements as mere disrupting outbursts pointing to a flaw in the system that, once addressed, can resume functioning largely unchanged. At best, they do not examine what role these movements might play in a democratic society when they fail to engage with the institutions of the reigning order. Rancière's treatment of politics does just this, contributing to a

conception of democracy in which there is a vibrant and strong tug and pull both between those

engaged in formal politics and between regular members of society and the powers that dominate

that society.

CONCLUSION

"It is likely that the postdemocratic order has entered a terminal state. The way this will be administered remains of course to be seen—and a reactionary or neoauthoritarian course is as probable as a progressive one. Any outcome, though, will obviously be politically decided and offers the best chance for a reinvigoration of political participation and real social transformation, the best chance in decades for a reinvigoration and expansion of democracy. At any rate, politics and democracy seem to be back on the agenda."[211]

Fortunately, the post-democratic era encapsulated by the quote by Fukuyama with which I began this thesis seems as though it might be coming to an end. Many liberal democratic societies today are experiencing a shift towards deeper and wider political polarization, with fringe parties on both the right and left of the political spectrum enjoying a rise in popularity. Whether it is with the stunning popularity of Donald Trump in the United States, the triumph of Syriza in Greece, the appointment of a neo-fascist as Croatia's culture minister,[212] or support for the radical leftist Jeremy Corbyn as the UK Labour Party's leader,[213] it is clear that people are demanding access to real choices and with them a break with the status-quo consensus that has characterized formal democratic politics in each of the respective countries in which these events have taken place. In addition to this, various forms of extra-institutional political movements with varying content (they are left or right wing, democratic or anti-democratic, etc.) continue to be a regular part of liberal democratic societies, despite the proliferation and entrenchment of formal democracy around the world since the end of the Cold War. While normally taken to be a part of a healthy democratic society, insofar as they manifest to expose deficiencies to be

[211] Stavrakakis, Yannis. "PostDemocracy." *Atlas of Transformation*, 2011, http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/p/postdemocracy/postdemocracy-yannis-stavrakakis.html.

[212] Hockenos, Paul. "Croatia's Far Right Weaponizes the Past." *Foreign Policy*. 6 May 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/06/croatias-far-right-weaponizes-the-past-ustase-hasanbegovic/.

[213] Eaton, George. "Jeremy Corbyn set to win landslide victory - what now for his opponents?" *New Statesman*. 31 Aug. 2016, www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/08/jeremy-corbyn-set-win-landslide-victory-what-now-his-opponents.

rectified by the existing system, their proliferation during the past couple of decades can be regarded as exposing a deeper dissatisfaction with formal democratic politics in general.

Post-democracy, as I have described it in this thesis, is the description of a democracy in which formal democratic procedures and institutions exist at the same time as there is a lack of real choice available for people to choose from to temporarily occupy the empty seat of power. I have argued that this can take place when particular discourses become hegemonic in society, influencing the various political actors engaged in formal politics and effacing deep differences between them in the process. I have shown that democratic theories focused on rational engagement and consensus, specifically Habermasian deliberative democracy, do not adequately address the post-democratic situation. A focus on reaching consensus leaves out the possibility of envisioning a political space open to opposed hegemonic political projects fiercely vying for power. Habermas' conception of deliberative democracy envisions disagreement or conflict to be bound by reason and a particular political framework, which I have identified as liberalism, and so only accepts a controlled kind of political contest. I have argued a democratic theory that instead focuses on fierce conflict and the ways in which robust political antagonisms can be sustained and contribute to a democratization of society is better suited to facing the ills of post-democracy; agonistic democracy is just this theory.

Focusing on Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy, which is a view of democracy as the robust conflict between competing political projects aiming to gain power through democratic means and make hegemonic particular discourses, I have advanced a slightly modified version that eschews an insistence on some kind of normative framework by which such political conflicts might be bound. I argued that an agonistic democracy could subsist in the absence of such a framework, as basic democratic institutions would be enough to ensure robust

political conflicts do not endanger democratic politics. I have also engaged in a positive appraisal of the role of extra-institutional movements that dissent from the institutions of formal politics for an agonistic democracy. I argued that when formal democratic politics slides towards consensus, the conflict engendered by counter-hegemonic extra-institutional movements against the institutions of the democratic order result in the rejuvenation of democratic politics, putting into question formal institutions as the privileged space of politics.

The conception of agonistic democracy that I have articulated and defended throughout this thesis is a messy, porous, and deeply conflictual one. It is normatively neutral, structurally unstable, and is precariously positioned between the promise of radical political freedom and the necessity of order. Yet, defending an agonistic conception of democracy, and taking its conclusions further even than Mouffe in some very important respects, is absolutely necessary in the face of post-democracy. Democracy requires a serious jumpstart, and envisioning it in the way I have defended it is a better theoretical jolt than theories revolving around or reliant on notions of consensus and cooperation, including Mouffe's insistence on what she calls the "ethico-political principles of liberty and equality for all."

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