

Chapter 3

Two models of Political Action: Agonistic Pluralism and Deliberative Democracy. Implications for the Study of Politics and Identity

In the previous two chapters, I have examined the traditional understanding of the concept of the political inherent in most traditional IR theory as the realm of social sciences dedicated to the study of relations between states. I have stressed the impact of the liberal and realist projects in providing a hegemonic view on world politics. These approaches, I have argued, tend to marginalise the political by operating with a variety of fixed versions of several discourse-orientated concepts like that of sovereignty and national identity. The constraints that these approaches exert upon the study of politics lie in the presupposition that the political meaning of these concepts is ultimately derived from statehood. I have reiterated that such approaches however, cannot account for the emergence of certain political phenomena such as collective identity formation. Numerous political identities in the contemporary world emerge across the boundaries of the state and as a result, the presence, the limits and location of transnational political communities is problematised.

The broad argument of this thesis establishes that despite the liberal tendency to construct otherness through discourses that establish difference, this practice is not sufficient on its own to address the nature of the conflict between opposing collectivities. This inability to mediate conflict, I argue, stems from liberalism's misunderstanding of the concepts of politics and identity. Contrary to the traditional realist and liberal constructivist understandings of politics in IR theory, both the poststructuralist and the Schmittian understanding of the political, see collective identity as developing via the distinction of self and other relationships, or for Carl Schmitt, human groupings of the friend-enemy type.

Conceptualizing collective identity is a prerequisite for strengthening the driving force of a democratic politics which seeks to encourage political action as a means to exercise the equal distribution of power in society through public participation. The conceptualization offered so far in this thesis reveals that conflict and antagonism are ineradicable aspects of human life and are constitutive elements in the construction of collective identities. This conflictual dimension, Schmitt insists, is constantly brushed under the carpet by the liberal predilection for endless discussions in parliamentary debates and short-lived party politics.¹ These liberal mechanisms employed to embody political action eclipse the disclosure of collective identities which is forthcoming of a confrontation between collectivities in the democratic process. As a response to the shortcomings in most democratic theories which restrict action to a limited understanding of liberal democracy as an aggregation of interests,² a revival in the interest of how political action is carried out has challenged the traditional ways in which public participation is conceived of. I wish to suggest here that the link existing between collective identity formation and political action ought to be recognized in order to aspire to a more fair democratic system.

While collective identity formation primarily results from political action *qua* the construction of antagonism in the Schmittian sense, the liberal understanding of political action often inhibits the construction of antagonism by turning political conflict into a moral affront to be negotiated in parliament or by other democratic devices. In such arenas, the conflict supposed to emerge from political activity is confined to the private sphere of liberal individuals' lives and hence the construction of identity is not fully seen as

¹ See the famous critique of Carl Schmitt against the liberal understanding of politics in Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

² See for example Joseph Schumpeter's seminal work of 1947, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947). Other conceptions of democracy are invoked within the liberal framework such as the participatory conception of democracy. See C. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

something that is at least partially accomplished politically in the way I have been using this term. If correct, it follows that acknowledging the construction of collective identity as resulting of antagonism should encourage political theorists and international relations scholars to reformulate in theory and practice the challenges of “justice and legitimacy that have become acute in societies characterized by the fact of pluralism.”³

There are many reasons why it is important to recognize the construction of identity in contemporary political processes. This concept comes to materialize on a daily basis in human groupings (which often go unrecognized) with different demands, interests and proposals, these identities range from corporatist groups to social movements demanding individual and collective rights. In this chapter, I review two particular perspectives on democratic politics that take issue with locating the role of identity in the democratic process. One commonly known as ‘Deliberative Democracy’⁴ of which the main promoters have been Jürgen Habermas⁵ and John Rawls.⁶ The other is the model of ‘Agonistic Pluralism’ espoused by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau.⁷ I have chosen these two models in particular because they both share a strong interest in dealing with collective identity, though they approach the issue in two very distinct ways.⁸ It should be clear from the previous chapter that the concepts of politics and identity are fundamentally related and this chapter explores the following subhypothesis. If a model of political action based on

³ Maurizio Passerin d’Entreves, “Legitimacy and Democratic Deliberation” (paper for the 50th Annual Conference on Political Science, Manchester, April 3, 2006), <http://www.theoria.unp.ac.za/ed0012.htm> (accessed on December 3, 2005).

⁴ There are many different versions of deliberative democracy but they can roughly be classified under two main schools: the Rawlsian and the Habermasian Schools. Whilst there are notorious differences in these approaches, the convergences remain more conceptually salient.

⁵ See for instance Jürgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁶ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 187.

⁷ See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), chapter 4.

⁸ I chose to leave out of my analysis other approaches to political action, like consociational democracy for the restrained freedom of the demos to act that its representational features entail.

the agonistic pluralist approach discloses collective identity formation by allowing the confrontation of incommensurable values and systems of belief, then this model can also show that the confrontation of *concepts* in agonistic terms is what liberal thought needs to scrutinize the identity of its own concepts.⁹

The models presented in this chapter offer certain elements of the most cutting-edge literature on matters regarding public participation and problematise the notion of public sphere as the site to exert political action, a site that becomes the apparent scenario in which collective identities will make their public appearances. Linking the literatures on identity and the debates on political action, then, must mean to reflect on how action is implicated in establishing friend and enemy.

This chapter also builds on my earlier argument made in chapter one that international politics should not be understood as exclusively relations among states. Rather, the argument in this thesis so far suggests it is more fruitful to see internal politics as increasing the diverse relationships that human groups strike up across the world regardless of the state. My objective in this chapter is to evaluate which of these two models of democratic politics can respond more appropriately to the challenges posed by what I call *international pluralism* of emerging identities and draw some of the implications that the significant influence of understanding identity through radical agonism has for international public sphere.¹⁰ The valuable critique of Carl Schmitt will be a point of critical reference. This evaluation explores the degree to which each prospect of

⁹ See Emma Norman, 'Agonism', *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001): 8.

¹⁰ The notion of radical pluralism challenges the view of conventional pluralism that works on the assumption that identities enter the public realm with essentialist identities and then confront each other. Radical Pluralism echoes the poststructuralist approach to identity by arguing that identities can never be fully established because they are relational. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (London: Verso, 1985).

democratic politics can disclose and recognize that the ontological characteristic of conflict is the core of the political. Acknowledging that these two models emerge from the liberal tradition, it is necessary to recognize that the tenets of both theories also represent a response to it. Throughout this chapter I make a case for showing that the model of agonistic¹¹ pluralism suggested by Mouffe and Laclau, which draws explicitly from Schmitt's concept of the political, can successfully accommodate the claims that antagonistic forms of identity make within civil society and how pertinently these approaches can be applied to the international arena. While the strength of the agonistic pluralist approach is to enhance the conflictual dimension inherent in the democratic project, it also represents an alternative to the rationalistic framework endorsed by deliberative democrats, which overlooks the fact that "power is constitutive of social relations."¹² My argument proceeds to include a model of agonistic pluralism in the international arena that is sensitive to the discourses with which antagonistic relations become established.

I argue that while the agonistic pluralism¹³ espoused by Mouffe has a strong conceptual support to divest power relations not only in civil society but enormously on the international level, its central framework contains conceptual elements to make this approach extremely useful for IR theory to reformulate a great deal of concepts in the international arena. My contribution here consists in testing out the use of agonistic pluralism for future application on the international level, a terrain which has not been explored or at least proposed by the main promoters of this approach yet, and to incorporate

¹¹ The concept of agonism here is understood as a form of political expression which echoes the Greek *agon* popularized recently by Hannah Arendt in her *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), and later used by many others.

¹² Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?," *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (1999): 745.

¹³ 'Agonistic pluralism' as defined here is an attempt to reformulate the basic self-understanding of the liberal democratic regime, one which acknowledges its conflictual dimension.

its basic tenets in IR theory. To do this, this chapter is informed heavily by Carl Schmitt's critique of the liberal parliamentary system with the aim of identifying the shortcomings of the fundamental principles of the deliberative democratic model –use of reason and public discussion- in coping with political phenomena occurring at a level that transcends the state.

First, I will delineate the main ideas of both deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism, particularly the views of Jürgen Habermas and Chantal Mouffe regarding the degree to which each position can handle the challenging and often contradictory expressions of identity. While my task here is not a comparative study of these regimes' strengths and weaknesses, I indicate the limits of each in fulfilling the task of reinvigorating democratic politics along with its international dimension. Throughout this chapter and particularly in the second section, I draw from Carl Schmitt's critique of the liberal parliamentary system to suggest that Schmitt's thought can be applied to critique the deliberative model in a similar fashion as when he criticised the parliamentary system of the interwar years. It seems to me that his criticism can be further extended to democratic models grounded on practical reason and public discussion, the outcomes of which are abided by the alleged liberal neutrality of procedures. Since purely procedural conceptions of politics often make no room for adjusting to social change, Schmitt's critique of liberalism is useful in elucidating why the deliberative approach often falls prey to liberalism's deficiency to deal with difference.

1. Deliberative Democracy and the Limits of Politics

The model of deliberative democracy emerged as an alternative to the dominant aggregative approach based on the Schumpeterian model which reduced the stakes of democracy to a competitive electoral process.¹⁴ For the scope of this chapter, I restrict my analysis of deliberative democracy to the issue of how politics and collective identity formation are related through political action. Throughout this section I bring to light the positive aspects that can benefit the analysis of collective identity formation via means of deliberation. Nevertheless, I argue that the main shortcoming of the deliberative approach is the misguided notion of politics as construed discussion which hinders the elucidation of antagonism under the rather suspect shadow of an all-inclusive consensus. Contrary to Habermas' emphasis on the legitimacy of power via public discussions, public deliberation falls short in the task of legitimizing power if power is not understood as emerging in the numerous identities conforming society in an antagonistic manner.

The chief aim of deliberative democracy, in the words of Joshua Cohen is to form an association "whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members and where political debate is organized around alternative conceptions of the public good."¹⁵ What this model challenges is the traditional practice of popular sovereignty exercised by the state through participatory devices such as elections and referenda. The different models of deliberative democracy, particularly the Rawlsian and the Habermasian attempt

¹⁴ Such a model was initiated by Joseph Schumpeter's seminal work of 1947, *Capitalism Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947). In this model voting is the primary political activity because it maintains that policy formation should be based on the preferences of the majority.

¹⁵ Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State*, eds. A. Hamlin and P. Pettid (Basil: Blackwell, 1989), 17.

to reformulate the principle of sovereignty in intersubjective terms,¹⁶ that is, by granting the capacity to make collective decisions on the *demos* itself. This is what Habermas calls ‘communicatively generated power.’¹⁷ It is not clear, however, whether Cohen is willing to make a liaison between the notion of alternative conceptions of the public good and collective assertions of will-formation. In my view, the latter informs us much of how alternative conceptions of the good come to flourish because any substantial talk of the good reinforces collective identity through the conflict that any talk of the good can generate.

Despite the often notorious differences between the approaches advanced by Rawls and Habermas, Mouffe points at one very important point of convergence, both theorists aim at “circumscribing a domain that would not be subject to the pluralism of values and where a consensus without exclusion can be established.”¹⁸ By compromising their approach to an all-inclusive consensus, deliberative democrats consider it necessary to find a frame of justification which secludes the irreconcilable values of pluralism to the private sphere.¹⁹ This is the point where deliberative democrats offer an anti-perfectionist or neutral frame of justification,²⁰ which seeks to slough off the presence of any particular dominant moral dimension in the process of deliberation. The objective of such a frame of justification is to provide the process of democratic deliberation with the widest range of possibilities to agree on common issues. However, numerous claims have been raised against the ideal of

¹⁶ See John Dryzek *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*, Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ See for instance, Jurgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 29.

¹⁸ Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?,” 745

¹⁹ This is one the strongest criticisms against Deliberative Democracy. See Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?,” 745

²⁰ Neutrality between conceptions of the good is designed to meet the demands of justice as fairness, that is, it is designed to respect the equal freedom of individuals to pursue a conception of the good of their choosing.

setting up a regime whose foundations rest on an alleged “neutral” decision-making apparatus. The upshot of this claim is that neutralist liberalism, as represented by such thinkers as Rawls, Ackerman, Larmore, and Dworkin,²¹ rests upon a theory of the good in which the value of autonomy, understood as the free and (relatively) independent pursuit of one’s plans and preferences, is so central that it very often conceals other values such as the value of personal moral improvement and communal goods. The ideal of neutrality is thus undermined in principle.²²

Both Habermas and Rawls converge in the idea that the only way to reach a legitimate sovereign politics of deliberation is through the voice of practical reason embodied in democratic institutions. There are however, discrepancies as to how the voice of public reason should speak in the making of a rational consensus. The differences in the use of reason can be described in the following terms: Should reason be used to decide on the form in which a democratic consensus is conducted? Or should reason be used, instead, to shape the content of the debate? The former perspective corresponds to the view of Habermas, who emphasises the use of procedural forms of politics to regulate and promote moral impartiality in the creation of an ideal way to deliberate.²³ This is specifically what is salient in Cohen’s theory of deliberative democracy, which strikes me as very normative in character precisely because it articulates the conditions under which a fair debate among collective identities and conflicting conceptions of the good can be conducted. On this end,

²¹ The principle of neutrality has been argued for by thinkers like Charles Larmore, “Political Liberalism,” *Political Theory* 18, no. 3 (1990): 339-360; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Ronald Dworkin, “Liberalism,” in *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1985), 181-204.

²² For a comprehensive analysis of this subject, which falls out of the scope of this dissertation, please see the works of Emma Norman, “The Political Self” (Ph.D. diss., University of Essex, 1999), chapter 5, 130-142, and Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). The idea that liberal neutrality is undermined in principle is also shared by these authors.

²³ This is what Habermas has termed ‘the ideal speech situation’.

Cohen's perspective on procedures works as a basis for establishing equality in the process of deliberation.

The reliance on the practical rationality assigned to the institutions of liberal democracy by both Rawls and Habermas calls for a renewal of the traditional understanding of fundamental civil rights and of popular sovereignty. A procedural theory of democracy is deemed necessary in the face of a wide range of antagonistic and often mutually exclusive conceptions of the good life. Habermas insists that the liaison between individual and communitarian values can only be attained via a rational consensus and when this is reached "then one can understand how popular sovereignty and human rights go hand in hand, and hence grasp the co-originality of civic and private autonomy."²⁴ The relatively smooth transition from collective to individual will in the thought of Habermas suggests that collective decisions on individual rights will inevitably follow a utilitarian framework to achieve a common good. However, the persistent emphasis on enhancing both liberal and democratic values without recognizing the tension existing between them is likely to subvert the result of such a deliberation. Following Habermas, Seyla Benhabib elaborates the habermasian position indicating that

[a]ccording to the deliberative model of democracy, it is a necessary condition for attaining legitimacy and rationality with regard to collective decision making processes in a polity, that the institutions of this polity are so arranged that what is considered in the common interests of all results from the processes of *collective* deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal *individuals*.²⁵

Benhabib acknowledges the tension existing between democracy and liberal values, though she is convinced that the deliberative model can transcend the dichotomy between

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 127.

²⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *Towards a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 69.

collective self-government versus individual rights and liberties.²⁶ However, deliberative democrats tend to neglect the fact that such a tension between liberalism and democracy cannot be entirely transcended because it means contravening the conflictual dimension of politics I talked about earlier. Hence the need to find procedures that can guarantee the more equal and impartial debate in moral terms remains a central part of deliberative democracy that continues to be informed by hegemonic liberal values. The reason why is spelled out in detailed by Norman,

Procedures are introduced to first, preclude or discourage illegitimate (partial/arbitrary) uses of political power, second to disperse the concentration of political power so that illegitimate use is less possible or less likely, third to measure and thus visibly display how far political activities and decisions are successfully legitimate. The liberal separation of individual and state, of governed and government, evidently underpins the shift away from earlier participatory notions of democracy, sovereignty remain with the demos in that those wielding political power are made accountable to the demos for their actions.²⁷

This logic elucidates the characteristic liberal way to misunderstand politics for ethical affronts, and thus their attempts at neutrality remove ethics from ‘the political’ also removes politics from ‘the political.’ As a result, liberalism leaves politics as an empty vacuum detached from antagonism and filled with endless discussion, on which Norman discusses that,

If, Larmore argued, disagreements over conceptions of the good appear irresolvable, that should be removed from the political to allow the continuation of neutral and thus ‘safe’ political conversations. “In the face of disagreement, those who wish to continue the conversation should retreat to neutral ground, with the hope either of resolving the dispute or of bypassing it... One wants to keep the conversation going, in order to achieve some reasoned agreement about how to solve the problem at hand.” In other words, “liberalism believes that by confining the divisive issues to the sphere of the private, agreement on procedural rules should be enough to regulate the plurality of interests in society.”²⁸

²⁶ Benhabib cited in C. Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?,” 745-758.

²⁷ Emma Norman, “The Political Self”, 101.

²⁸ Emma Norman, “The Political Self”, 106, citing respectively in this order Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). 53 and Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, (London: Verso, 1993), 111.

I have stressed the inextricable relationship existing between politics and ethics and how Carl Schmitt demarcates ethics as a sphere of life which can be subsumed to the political category of friend and enemy.²⁹ Deliberative democrats, in stark contrast, build their theory on the traditional, particularly, the Rawlsian version of liberalism whereby the ethical dimension of politics is strictly divided accordingly between the sharply demarcated public and private realms. In the eyes of deliberative democrats, political action is translated into deliberation of moral disagreements, the outcome of which is “the object of a free and reasoned agreement among individuals.”³⁰ In this model, the aim of politics is to achieve the greatest degree of inclusion (similarity or sameness) by reaching a consensus among the participants in the process of deliberation. Such a process requires the creation of diverse mechanisms or procedures to enable deliberation to include all the possible disputes, be they moral or not.

The proceduralist conception of deliberative democracy is thought to be a reliable instrument to tame the tension existing between liberalism and democracy. Deliberative democrats share a perspective on procedures which bears strong parallels with most liberal theories of procedures. Whereas Habermas attempts to advance a strictly proceduralist approach in which no limits are put on the scope and content of deliberation, his account, as voiced by Thomas McCarthy, “weaves negotiations and pragmatic deliberations together with ethical and moral discourses, under conditions that warrant a presumption that procedurally correct outcomes will be ones with which free and equal citizens could

²⁹ See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976), 26.

³⁰ Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,” in *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State*, eds. Al Hamlin and P. Pettit (Basil: Blackwell, 1989), 17.

reasonably agree.”³¹ It is not difficult to concede that a process of deliberation should require an appropriate mechanism to channel the voice of the people into one consensus. However, those procedures employed for reaching equality among the participants could well be designed to engage the participants to face the challenge of difference. A procedural theory of democracy should allow for deliberation in matters of locating collective identity formation as a key element to understand politics. In this way, deliberative democracy would not be blind to ‘the political’ and would be willing to deal with how discourses on identity can affect the way deliberation is conducted. Cohen’s model of democracy, if refined in this direction, would probably capture the constant shifts that identity-based claims impose in the course of the debate, He suggests that

[t]he ideal deliberative procedure is meant to provide a model for institutions to mirror a system of ideal deliberation in social and political institutions and not to characterize and initial situation such as the original position] in which the terms of association itself are chosen.³²

together with Habermas, Cohen suggests that such a procedural deliberative democracy should flourish in a public sphere that is semi-detached from the state, independent from the economic and administrative apparatus. In this sense, total power is decentred from the state and popular sovereignty is exercised by detecting and discussing the actual problems of society by the society itself.

It is now time to delineate the limits of the deliberative approach to deal with the experience of collective identity formation, which as I have stated in the introduction of this thesis, is analysed independently from the concept of politics. Also the merits of this approach need to be highlighted in the sense that deliberative democracy is concerned with keeping the debate on several issues going. However, instead of providing a model to bring

³¹ Thomas McCarthy, “Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue,” *Ethics* 105 (1994): 48.

³² Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,” 20.

the confrontation of concepts to the fore, it does exactly the opposite and contributes to the perpetuation of metanarratives over issues that remain largely debated over a liberal framework of freedom and human rights.

This is the point where the work of Schmitt is most relevant. His criticism to parliamentarism was motivated by the emerging pluralism that conform the contemporary societies of his days. Schmitt's attack on the fundamental principles of parliament – practical reason and public discussion- consists in showing how parliament cannot accommodate the divergent interests of the multiple groups in society because these principles are impossible to reconcile. In a similar line, this section will inform us on how deliberative democracy falls prey to the impossibility of these principles in attempting to reach a rational consensus through public deliberation which is expected to forge identities.

Amy Gutmann sustains that 'reciprocity' is the core value of any model of deliberative democracy,³³ which parallels what Rawls calls "fair terms of social cooperation."³⁴ This can be understood as the action to give one another credit and acceptable explanations to enforce a particular conception of the good, be it via a new law or a public policy.³⁵ However, since this reciprocity remains valid only in the public sphere, the terms of the debate tend to be conducted based on ethical differences in which a fair consensus can be reached in spite of those, like Larmore, who argued the contrary. While reciprocity entails mutual understanding and makes room for disagreement at least temporarily, this does not slough off the presence of conflict which in deliberative democracy is an issue to be done away with. To reduce the scope of antagonism to an

³³ Amy Gutmann and D. F. Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 2-3.

³⁴ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 150.

³⁵ Joshua Cohen, "Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 102.

ethical competition of preferences in the public realm echoes one of Schmitt fundamental criticisms of liberalism in which he notices that

[i]n a very systematic fashion liberal thought evades or ignores state and politics and moves instead in a typical recurring polarity of two heterogeneous spheres, namely ethics and economics, intellect and trade, education and property. The critical distrust of the state and politics is easily explained by the principles of a system whereby the individual must remain *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*.³⁶

Because all issues discussed in deliberation require fair terms of social cooperation among *individuals*, the collective dimension of the decision-making process is not apparently expressed in either Habermas' or Rawls's accounts of collective will formation. In Mouffe's main argument against individualism she includes her charge against deliberative democrats for "operating with a conception of the subject, which sees the individual as prior to society....in all cases they [the individuals] are abstracted from social and power relations, language, culture and the whole set of practices that make the individuality possible."³⁷ If Mouffe's claim is correct, the ideological weight of individualism hinders the capacity of individuals to identify with human groups as communities, then the argument that the process of public deliberation generates a sense of community or solidarity is contestable. The emphasis on the community-generating power is shared by Habermas, Benhabib and Cohen.³⁸ These authors conceive of deliberation as a process in which participants discuss, reach a consensus and give one another reasons for why the consensus arrived at is superior to the other alternatives.

³⁶ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 70.

³⁷ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 95.

³⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 147-148; Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 71-72; Joshua Cohen, "Democracy and Liberty," in *Deliberative Democracy*, ed. J. Ester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 100-121.

Considering Cohen's statement that one of deliberative democracy's aims is to achieve a sense of community, for it "expresses the equal membership of all in the sovereign body responsible for authorizing the exercise of that power."³⁹ It becomes clearer that, while he is attempting to grant sovereignty on the decision made by the collective body, along with an ideal procedure to make the result of the deliberation fair, it is apparent that the sense of community he tries to get across is ultimately a gesture to appeal to democratic communitarian critics. For his account of polity is conformed by a variety of human groupings (identities) which he treats as homogenous under the law of a deliberative democratic procedure. So the value given to the multiple communities as diverse and often antagonistic embraced on this model is rather symbolic. At best, one can say that difference is not wholeheartedly embraced on this model. At worst, it is avoided politically as far as possible.

Furthermore, deliberative democrats' understanding of identity is misguided. John S. Dryzek finds antagonistic assertions of collective identity as "the toughest kind of political issue." His position is held based on his assumption that "[t]he basic problem in all these cases is that one identity can only be validated or, at worst, constituted by suppression of another."⁴⁰ It seems, though, that the actual problem in this approach is the very conception of identity with which this model of deliberative democracy works. By conceiving the presence of antagonistic assertions of identity in the public sphere as problematic in the sense that these groups can only live without 'the other', Dryzek is apparently oblivious of the fact that such antagonism is, in fact, a requisite to forge and

³⁹ Cohen, "Democracy and Liberty," 102.

⁴⁰ John S. Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies Alternatives to Agonism and Analgesia," *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005): 218-242.

strengthen group's identities. Any attempt to downplay or remove it, therefore, downplays or removes the very mechanism whereby identities re-create in the political.

The consequences of working with an understanding of identity that downplays the role of antagonistic relations results in a form of deliberation that attempts to accommodate difference without discussing *how* difference is created in the first place. In this sense, deliberative democrats can be charged for exercising a 'politics as action' which substitutes the decision of friend-enemy with a decision between the individual and the community. However, as Dominique Leydet has suggested, "[i]f the reality of politics makes deliberation unrealizable in the strict sense of the term, that is, as a collective process of will formation, this does not necessarily render meaningless parliamentary exchange or rational arguments. What it means is that we should understand its significance differently."⁴¹ When applying this claim to deliberative democracy, the significance of deliberation is partly undermined, yet not to be totally discarded. Schmitt's radical critique of parliamentarism is directed at the impossibility of implementing the outcome of discussions in public policy for the presence of self-interested competing party politics. What deliberative democratic models are lacking is the adequate forms of deliberation that offer a compelling account of collective identity formation as prior to the process of collective will formation.

So far, I have shown that the deliberative democratic model of political action offers very useful accounts of procedural forms of deliberation through which competing disputes can be settled. The intrinsic value of deliberation should not be dismissed in the attempt to reinvigorate democratic politics as it has been successful in formulating an account of

⁴¹ Dominique Leydet, "Pluralism and Parliamentary Democracy," in *Law as Politics*, ed. David Dyzenhaus (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1998), 123.

politics that reintroduces a form of politics as action. However, this approach does not fulfil the task of disclosing collective identities to its fullest degree. This is so because deliberative democrats restrain the high stakes of politics through liberal procedures, the purpose of which continues to attempt to make politics safe. In the next section, I discuss in detail how the model of agonistic pluralism fares a little better in the task of disclosing collective identities and I will attempt to apply its basic tenets to international relations theory to exemplify the reality of an agonistic pluralism of identities.

2. Agonistic Pluralism.

In this section I review the central ideas of agonistic pluralism as a model of democratic politics which seeks to deal with the issue of conflict as an ineradicable feature in social relations. The way agonistic pluralist theorists approach the notion of conflict in social relations consists in transforming antagonism into agonistic forms of politics.⁴² The concept of agonism has long been contested in political theory and can be traced back to its Greek origins. Throughout the twentieth century the term ‘agonistic politics’ has been reinserted in political theory to revive a form of political activity that resembles the Greek *agon* in which the citizens of the polis can make public appearances and participate in common affairs.⁴³ I make a case here for showing that an agonistic model of democracy could foster more efficient forms of political action through which the construction of collective identities can be successfully elucidated. The relevance of this approach to the study of

⁴² For a detailed account of the radical democratic approach see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

⁴³ See Emma Norman, “The Political Self,” chapter 6. Also Hannah Arendt in her *The Human Condition*.

international relations-as-world politics lies in the fact that this approach promotes an alternative vision of politics that relates its antagonistic dimension to political identity.

In order to engage critically with the main advocates of this model, Chantal Mouffe⁴⁴ and William Connolly,⁴⁵ I draw on Schmitt's work *The Concept of the Political* and *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* to highlight the deficiencies of current liberal theories of democracy to capture the scope of value pluralism in society as the driving force of democratic politics. I defend a version of radical pluralism promoted by Mouffe, Connolly, Keane and Young⁴⁶ because this view captures the interaction of collective identities in the public sphere through a deep understanding of the poststructuralist critique of the concept of the political in the Schmittian sense.⁴⁷

My intention here is not to discuss the differences existing in the interpretation of pluralism by these radical democratic thinkers. Rather, my objective is to defend the notion of agonistic pluralism in an effort to apply it to the field of international relations with the aim of locating 'the political' as a phenomenon which occurs beyond the spectre of the state. The significance of employing a model of agonistic pluralism in the international public sphere stems from the need to capture the interaction of more political actors, apart from the state, as having a place and voice in the international agon. By expanding the study of world politics beyond the analysis of relations between states to the analysis of smaller, local actors with an international influence, a greater concern for world affairs will be raised in the discipline of IR.

⁴⁴ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political and The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

⁴⁵ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference. Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 23

⁴⁶ See Iris Mairon Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (London: Verso, 1988).

⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion on Radical Pluralism please see Anthony Wenman, "What Is Politics? The Approach of Radical Pluralism," *Politics* 23, no. 1 (2003): 57.

It is important to reiterate at this stage that the contributions made by deliberative democrats to political theory have been extremely useful in providing an alternative understanding of political action. When action is enacted by means of public discussion of ethico-political issues in a sphere semi-detached from the state, a crucial aspect of democratic politics is elucidated. This aspect pertains to the agonistic display of opinions in public appearances on behalf of the demos and by the demos itself. This can only be done, however, so long as the ways to generate public discussion correspond to an agreement upon the procedure.

While one of the objectives of this thesis has been to locate the construction of identities in the public sphere as a result of antagonisms, I have chosen to expand the agonistic pluralist view of politics as a better device to expound the origins of conflict in the world. In this way, relations of power can be traced in relation to the construction of antagonisms. This results in the elucidation collective identities a phenomenon profoundly tied to the concept of politics. This move can bring a new understanding in the legitimization of theories of justice and power in both civil society and the international arena. Therefore, bearing in mind the pluralism of emerging identities across the world, my broadest suggestion is, inverting Benhabib's approach, to pursue an agonistic vision of democratic politics which can also do justice to the deliberative models of democracy so well articulated by its defenders.⁴⁸

The very identity of the agonistic pluralist approach stems from its condition of otherness in relation to the deliberative approach. A chief proponent of this model like Chantal Mouffe who has built her approach heavily upon the foundations of

⁴⁸ Seyla Benhabib, introduction to *Democracy and Difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9.

poststructuralism proposes a model that “requires complexifying the notion of antagonism and distinguishing it from agonism. Antagonism is a struggle between enemies, while agonism is a struggle between adversaries.”⁴⁹ The upshot of this claim consists in locating the political in democratic politics as the situation in which, following Schmitt, human communities continue to group themselves according to the friend-enemy type.⁵⁰ Agonistic pluralists’ conception of politics sets out by emphasising the need for envisaging democratic citizenship from a different perspective which stresses -on the types of *practices* and not the *forms* of argumentation.”⁵¹

There are three notorious points of tension between deliberative democrats and agonistic pluralists. First, I have mentioned that deliberative democrats consider both public reason and public discussion as key elements to attain a non-exclusive consensus. The second concerns the question of the neutrality of procedures as a means to make politics fair and safe. Third, the notion of pluralism in the articulation of power relations differs considerably in each approach. These points of tension become the points of reference for my case defending that the model of agonistic pluralism should be preferred as a way to conceptualize politics and its relation to collective identity formation.

Agonistic pluralists refute any appeal to a rational moral consensus as voiced in Habermas theory of communicative ethics as well as to any overlapping consensus as in Rawls theory. Mouffe sees the notion of rational consensus as a constraint to achieve a genuine and deep pluralism.⁵² Mouffe is at odds with the deliberative democrats’ enthusiasm with making rationality the driving force of democratic politics. Another point

⁴⁹ Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, 755 and see Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, chapter 4.

⁵⁰ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 34.

⁵¹ Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, 755.

⁵² Mouffe goes into detail on this subject in *The Democratic Paradox*, 23-43.

worth establishing is concerned with the fact that the rationality that Schmitt criticized in parliamentary democracy can have similar counterproductive effects in reaching a consensus on matters which obliterated the high stakes of politics. Mouffe draws from Wittgenstein's critique of rationality to highlight that there cannot be a rational consensus if it "is not an agreement in opinions but in forms of life."⁵³ There is therefore a contradiction in the way liberalism attempts to prioritize aimless discussions on conflicting opinions over conflicting forms of life. On the one hand, the development of the autonomous individual in the private sphere is prioritized by liberals, and on the other hand, the primacy of contestation of conflicting opinions in the public realm is given a character *a priori* from the experience of identity. In this instance, deliberative democratic politics can be charged, just as Schmitt charged parliament, for being "the place in which particles of reason that are strewn unequally among human beings gather themselves and bring public power under control."⁵⁴ Schmitt's distrust of this kind of rationality exposes the liberal tendency for bolstering and securing relations of power.

The rejection of rationality by agonistic pluralists as a basis to arrive at a consensus that informs the collective process of will formation can be interpreted as follows. A model of politics grounded on the assumed equal rationality of individuals will persist on the idea that conflict and antagonism can be transcended. When conflict and antagonism are thought to be possible to transcend, political questions are replaced by specific needs and politics collapses into ethical or economic questions. In addition, the limits of such rationality are hardly ever contested because rationality is treated almost as an epistemological foundation, although in no place in the liberal literature is recognized as such. Put briefly, western

⁵³ Wittgenstein in Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, 752.

⁵⁴ Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 35.

rationality has taken the role of a figure of discourse to justify a predominant view on what is considered reasonable.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*,⁵⁵ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe claim together that social objectivity is constructed through acts of power.⁵⁶ As I mentioned earlier, the purpose in highlighting the role of antagonism inherent in human relations consists in stressing the potential of it in disclosing collective identities as components in a structure of power within society. In the view of these thinkers, the need to find an alternative to the rationalistic framework can be pushed further by seeking “a new ‘common sense’ which changes the identity of the different groups, in such a way that the demands of each group are articulated equivalently with those of others.”⁵⁷ This common sense refers to an awareness of the antagonistic situation in which identity and difference can be traced. This awareness can only be prompted through an alternative understanding of political action. Political action needs to revolve chiefly on the specific task of recognizing difference as the limits of any specific political identity. While setting up the limits of a community necessarily entails exclusion, agonists pluralists are willing to recognize that such acts of exclusion disclose of more genuine form of pluralism that allows dissent in a democratic way. This move goes contrary to the liberal understanding of political action which is inflexible to give up on its pretensions to a universalism that can find a common ground for every human being to agree on. This inability to grasp the conflictual dimension of politics results in a misunderstanding of collective identity formation for essentialist forms of identification. The result of not grasping the relationship

⁵⁵ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985/1986), 44

⁵⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 24.

⁵⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 183.

of the concepts between identity and politics lays the ground for the rise of the kind of pluralism which finds itself unable to recognize difference and by so doing reinforces the power structure it was originally meant to suppress, or as Mouffe would put it,

[u]nclear dividing lines block the creation of democratic political identities and fuel the disenchantment with traditional political parties. Thus they prepare the ground for various forms of populist and anti-liberal movements that target nationalist, religious and ethnic divides. When the agonistic dynamism of the pluralist system is unable to unfold because of a shortage of democratic identities with which one can identify, there is a risk that this will multiply confrontations over essentialist identities and non-negotiable moral values.⁵⁸

The forms of exclusion entailed by the conglomeration of essentialist identities puts at risk the very project of democracy as it is understood by liberals. The emergence of essentialist conceptions of identity conveys exclusionary practices that are rooted in cultural affiliations. Departing from the view that culture needs to be at the centre of democratic politics, it is precisely the task of democracy to develop new channels to bring cultural claims into a confrontation that is compatible with pluralism. The exclusionary practices that such essentialist identities may enforce could foster the idea that collective identity stems only from, using Paul Hirst's phrase, 'communities of fate.'⁵⁹ For this reason, it is important to put into question the notion of a 'rational autonomous subject' which deliberative democrats uphold as the bearer of multiple identities. The difference between how deliberative democrats and agonistic pluralists treat this notion of 'divided selves' could be best explained in terms of the forms of identification each model proposes. This is the point at which the impossibility of a rational, non-exclusionary consensus can be best understood because it reveals that a rational autonomous subject will have to make a

⁵⁸ Chantal Mouffe, "For a Politics of Nomadic Identity," in *Travelers' Tales. Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. George Robertson et al. (London: Routledge, 1994), 109.

⁵⁹ In Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), he makes a differentiation between communities of fate and communities of choice, the latter representing a form of associationalism which aims at pursuing individual freedoms rather than override them with the stronger claims of community.

variety of choices to determine his/her particular senses of belonging. For deliberative democrats, the weight given to collective forms of identification is grounded on the assumption that the individual's deepest concerns remain secluded from public contestation. By contrast, agonistic pluralism emphasizes the need to "mobilize passions for democratic ends [and] by creating forms of identification around democratic objectives."⁶⁰ From this position, the conceptualisation of a genuine pluralism can be envisaged as the conglomeration of choices for forms of identification. Consequently this multiplicity of senses of belonging can situate the individual in communities that encompass the different spheres of life in which the individual may wish to participate, the public sphere being one of them.

So far, the discussion has intended to show that while both deliberative democrats and agonistic pluralists provide efficient accounts of political action, only the agonistic pluralist approach recognizes the specificity of the political in the Schmittian sense. Greater points of divergence can be traced about the way in which difference is dealt with by both approaches. Neglecting or downplaying the issue of difference and the confrontational tensions from which it emerges has serious implications for the development of a coherent theory of pluralism that acknowledges that power constitutes social relations.

The relationship between pluralism and political action can be easily linked through the process of collective identity formation according to the agonistic pluralist approach. Conventional pluralism, as I mentioned earlier, is conformed by the competition of interest groups and is the touchstone of the deliberative paradigm. It is important to distinguish at this stage that the notion of pluralism I hope to draw attention to corresponds to the acknowledgement of an international pluralism that goes beyond the boundaries of the state

⁶⁰ Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, 758.

– a point from which a concept of an international public sphere will be elaborated in the next chapter. The idea is to advance the models of political action and pluralism from the particular (the local scenario) to the international (beyond the state).

Schmitt's wariness of the idea of a plural society that could incite the disappearance of the state as a total unity can be helpful on both the state and the international level. At the state level, Schmitt warns us against the liberal trend to grant the individual with the capacity to engage in a variety of associations that could be prioritized over the individual's membership to the state as the total community.⁶¹ In this respect, Mouffe's defence of Schmitt's thesis seems to be at odds with her vibrant project of a true democratic pluralism. Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that Schmitt's critique of pluralism should be taken with the ultimate end of formulating a pluralism compatible with models of political action that allow for the emergence of non-essentialist collective forms of identification. Schmitt's main concern with respect to the effects of pluralism in society was strictly related with the possibility of leaving the state devoid of a form of identification with the citizenry. His assertion that "today the individual feels that he is in a plurality of ethical bonds and is bound by religious communities, economic associations, cultural groups and parties, without the possibility of a determinate decision in the case of conflict between the series of these many bonds,"⁶² remains actual today and points at the liberal tendency to conflate collective identity with association. Mouffe has built her theory of radical agonism partly from Schmitt's critique of pluralism. The limits of such pluralism, however, are not developed in detailed in Mouffe account of radical pluralism. What is important for this

⁶¹ Carl Schmitt, "Ethic of the State and Pluralistic State," in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999), 199.

⁶² Schmitt, "Ethic of the State," 198.

thesis is to envisage the similarities for adapting a theory of radical pluralism to the international public sphere.

Radical pluralists like Connolly pertinently elaborate a conception of pluralism which extends the limits of the state. In his recent work *Pluralism*, Connolly launches a critique of conventional pluralism acknowledging the fluidity of collective identities across the globe.⁶³ Although Mouffe and Connolly remain largely at odds with each others' approaches on pluralism, these thinkers agree on the need to formulate a radical pluralism that is able to bridge the public and the private divisions in the individual's life. Since the radical pluralist approach takes into account the process of collective identity formation as articulated in a poststructuralist fashion, the activity of politics penetrates all other spheres of life in the moment at which they become political in the Schmittian sense. Therefore, to borrow an appropriate conclusion from Wenman "radical pluralism can explicate the politics of cultural and lifestyle differences associated with the various forms of counter-culture, the micro-politics of superordination and the subordination within the family, or the subtle shifts of power relations in and between various actors within the school or the workplace."⁶⁴ So far, it should be clear that a model of political action grounded on agonistic pluralist ideas can offer the most suitable conditions to engage in a politics that discloses collective identity as a primordial outcome of the confrontation of ideas. This model is equally useful to allow for the confrontation of ideas and discourses with the aim of tracing the sources of discourse-oriented concepts and systems of belief.⁶⁵ The problem I

⁶³ For a fuller account of the conceptualization of pluralism see William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁶⁴ Wenman, "What is Politics?," 61.

⁶⁵ Simona Goi offers a very interesting example on how agonistic forms of political action can provide more accurate insights than the deliberative model in describing the dynamics in which political disagreement emerges over the issue of abortion. Please see Simona Goi, Agonism, 'Deliberation and the Politics of Abortion' *Polity*, Vol. 37, Number 1, (January 2005): 459-487.

identify with the model of agonistic pluralism is the lack of specificity regarding procedures for agonistic contestation. However, as this model can articulate a variety of discourses in different places under different conditions, the procedures to employ do not abide by a specific procedural theory of politics. This could be considered also as strength in the sense that it shows the flexibility of the procedures each case considers pertinent to employ.

In the next chapter, I explore the possibilities for theorizing a transnational public sphere from an alternative perspective to the bourgeois public sphere formulated by Habermas and reconstructed by Nancy Fraser. Although I admit that some of the conceptual elements used by these authors need to be taken in consideration for imagining a public realm across state boundaries, an alternative framework that allows a rethinking of the political needs to be incorporated. Throughout the next chapter I take the concept of the political as understood by Schmitt to point at the limitations that former models of public realms provide for the elucidation of collective identity formation.