

## **Concluding Remarks**

### **General Argument and Findings**

This thesis is a conceptual critical inquiry into the liberal tradition and an attempt to unpack the concepts of politics and identity in order to show their mutual yet not-fully-recognized relation. Acknowledging that liberalism is an often abused term since it comprises numerous traditions, I have directed my criticism specifically to those who attempt to reformulate a classical form of liberal politics taken on board by John Rawls and the new wave of liberal scholars in the late twentieth century. This dissertation set out with an ambitious proposal: To show that the concepts of 'politics' and 'identity' have been misinterpreted since the early stages of liberalism and that such conceptual inaccuracy remains these days the source of a deeper conceptual stagnation. Dealing with concepts is no easy task and attempting to offer a final definition of 'identity' or 'politics' is exactly what this thesis is trying to avoid. In this respect I have elaborated on independent research on the centrality of language and semiotics for political theory and arrived at several conclusions about the scope of human language to interpret certain images of thought.

Poststructuralism has been a valuable methodological resource useful to shake, rebuild and offer an alternative view of current conceptualizations of politics, sovereignty and identity in order to critically make the necessary distinctions between discourse-constructed meanings and function-generating meanings. The relationship between meaning and historical context makes many concepts anachronistic over time, in which case a certain degree of reformulation is obliged, whereas some concepts denote aspects that pertain to the very nature of human beings and can be best analysed through the linkages to other concepts. In this thesis, my argument centred on the idea that the concept

of politics, understood as the realm of human relations where men and women organize public life, is constantly showing traces of an existential struggle to establish a sense of collective identity. Unlike liberals who treat the concept of identity as being embodied in a variety of essentialist categories to which the self owes a certain kind of commitment, I proposed the possibility for an epistemological shift in the way identity is considered in political science and international relations theory. In the case of ‘identity’ and ‘politics,’ these concepts require each other in order to be understood in their full complexity and that they are intimately and unavoidably related.

I started with the suggestion that since politics as a phenomenon inevitably involves the struggle to establish collective forms of identification, this struggle for identity can best be captured as the moment of *‘The Political’*, a concept that Schmitt first introduced to political theory. I used this concept as a point of departure as the most important conceptual link between politics and identity. It is important to note that the approach to the Schmittian concept of the political presented in this thesis differs substantially from the way it is commonly used in the literature. In particular, I related the notion of the friend-enemy to the construction of identity which is a theoretical point with strong similarities to the concept of ‘antagonism’ developed in poststructuralist theory. Thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, Giorgio Agamben and Chantal Mouffe elaborate a variety of versions of the concept of antagonism that clearly connects with the Schmittian category of the friend-enemy. The theoretical orientation of the concept of antagonism I have offered here slides down a different conceptual slope than that offered by these authors. Instead of restricting my analysis to the poststructuralist view of antagonism my suggestion is therefore that the poststructuralist conception of antagonism somehow deconstructs the Schmittian concept of the political and *vice versa*. This theoretical move should not be

understood as radically displacing the role of identities as mere fictitious discourses entangled in an ever-lasting quest for the impossibility of identity – rather, identity finds itself compromised with action-as-struggle. This is a point I find particularly pertinent to emphasise these days in the light of emerging forms of social revolutions now spreading quickly around the world. I shall come back to this point later.

However, developing this heuristic conceptual relatedness between politics and identity resulted in a far deeper interconnection between the two concepts than I originally thought. By relating the struggle for identity on ‘agonistic’ terms to the very content of politics, a more profound aspect of the nature of the political was elucidated: fixed understandings of concepts can limit the possibility of developing alternative forms of human action and this is a problematic inherent in liberal thought. And oddly enough, it is action (a concept that is intrinsically unfixed) – understood in the Arendtian sense as agonistic confrontation– that the possibility for rearticulating concepts also becomes by nature political. Schmitt conceptualized the political “within the totality of human *thought* and *action*”<sup>1</sup> not to simplistically imply that a particular form of rationality could enable more effective ways of political action, but to convey the idea that the connection between thought and action is “always already”<sup>2</sup> political when engaged in relations of the friend-enemy type. This is, to a large extent, what this thesis has done by agonistically confronting liberal and traditional IR theory concepts in opposition to the Schmittian and poststructuralist views on identity and politics. This thesis enters a struggle for conceptual clarification in an affront that is already political in character. My methodological strategy

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, [1932], Trans. George Schwab. Foreword by Tracy Strong, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), 16, [my emphasis].

<sup>2</sup> The term is widely used but originally associated with the work of Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London . New Left Books, 1971): 164.

consists in connecting the political value Schmitt sees in human thinking and action with Mouffe's agonistic enterprise. This thesis expands further on the potentialities of agonistic confrontation by stressing that thinking is political<sup>3</sup> when is pushed and reinforced through the agonistic stimuli that we obtain from 'sheer human togetherness.'<sup>4</sup> So the claim so far put forward here is that agonistic confrontation of concepts is political and thus self-revelatory, in other word it discloses identities.

So what is it that makes liberals uncomfortable with the confrontation of concepts foreign to their own tradition? Put briefly, liberals see conflict as a negative aspect of human relations that needs be eradicated once some form of rationality is accorded. However, as the ontological value of conflict remains largely underanalysed as a concept, this assumption leads liberals like John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin and Charles Larmore to impose a conception of procedures that in one way or another *restrains the freedom* to deal with conflict. This is the point where my small yet important contribution to the field can be honestly identified. The liberal tradition as I have used the term here, remains largely unscrutinized on the conceptual level and it is eroding its own identity for shying away from a comprehensive confrontation *vis-à-vis* 'conceptual otherness.' The liberal tendency for universalising the meaning of most of concepts now faces the challenge of unpacking a universalised conception of difference that cannot be different to itself. None of this is to suggest that liberal thought has dug itself a hole from which it cannot be timely rescued

If liberal thought and its related camps in the social sciences like IR theory acknowledge that failing to engage in conceptual scrutiny through agonistic forms of political action puts at stake the identity of the core principles that underpin their traditions,

---

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt devoted a large part of her last work *The Life of the Mind* to establish the links between thinking and judging as being political by nature.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 64

then a greater concern for broadening the scope of its conceptual foundations can at least be considered an option. What makes my approach to identity distinct in many ways from radical pluralists like Mouffe and Connolly is that I visualize a huge correlation between concepts and action in the making of identities that is linked by sharpening conceptual precision. Due to this lack of conceptual precision, this point is bypassed in liberal thought because there are no clear conceptual foundations that foster the development of alternative forms of political action in which difference and antagonism play a role. The liberalism embraced by Rawls, Dworkin and Larmore has restricted the concept of political action around the organization of procedures that create the optimal conditions for an ‘overlapping consensus’<sup>5</sup> that sets conflict aside temporarily. This liberal predilection for procedures downplays significantly the possibilities for action that inevitably displace action for agreement upon the procedure.

### **Misreading Carl Schmitt**

At the time of an explosive academic revival of this thinker it is not surprising to see a great deal of literature around that unfortunately tackles the Schmittian problematic by putting forward the totalitarian endorsement of his ideas.<sup>6</sup> Although it is not possible to say that one author has the right interpretation of Schmitt’s work, it is by contrast a more discernible task to point at those who attempt to intentionally relate his

---

<sup>5</sup> See Matthew Specter, “Perpetual War or Perpetual Peace? Schmitt, Habermas and Theories of American Empire.” *Political Theory Daily Review*, (April 26, 2004, [accessed on Jan 2005]). Barbara Boyd, ‘Carl Schmitt revival designed to Justify Emergency Rule.’ *Executive Intelligence Review*, (April 19, Arato, Andrew. 2002. The Bush Tribunals and the Specter of Dictatorship. *Constellations*, 9, 457-76. Caldwell, Peter. 2005. Controversies over Carl Schmitt: A Review of Recent Literature. *Journal of Modern History*, 77, 357-87.

<sup>6</sup> See Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt, Theorist for the Reich*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

work in a negative way to the current policies endorsed by the administration of George W. Bush in the war on terror. Only a superficial reading of Schmitt could bring forth an interpretation of the friend-enemy distinction as being mirrored in George Bush's doctrine to distinguish between those who stand with America and those who align against it. "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. [Applause]."<sup>7</sup> the point was made famously by Bush on 20 Sep 2001. Although it can be argued that this mode of designating of the enemy fails to be Schmittian in that the enemy is not properly identified, what bears more conceptual relevance about the Bush administration and Schmitt's thought is the role of the sovereign as "he who decides on the state of emergency."

The argument of 'the exception' or 'state of emergency' (*Ausnahmezustand*), against Schmitt has certainly a solid foundation to suggest that the Schmittian sovereign resembles current American anti-terrorist actions. Nonetheless, this thesis has insisted on the possibility to accept some of Schmitt's theoretical claims without endorsing his authoritarian conclusions. For example, President George W. Bush insists on the legality of exceptional executive power in times of war. America was declared in a 'state of emergency' immediately after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Paradoxically, this state of emergency has become the permanent state of affairs and it is used to justify a number of abuses to the legal order. For example Agamben writes that "the deliberate creation of permanent emergency powers is an essential tool of all contemporary states, including those that are democratic."<sup>8</sup> He specifically cites President Bush's "military order" of Nov. 13, 2001, entitled "Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War Against Terrorism." With this military order, the president exercised his authority to

---

<sup>7</sup> George W. Bush, Addresss to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People. 21 Sep, 2001. available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> (Accessed on 4 Feb, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2005), 33.

suspend the constitutional rights of "certain non-citizens." He was able to do this not as the Chief Executive but as the Commander in Chief in the War against Terrorism.<sup>9</sup> It must be noted that the legal preamble that endorses the state of emergency as a sovereign act that rests within the rule of law is not analyzed in this thesis in that way. Rather, this thesis is more oriented towards the insights that Schmitt theory of the exception throws on the construction of collective identity formation.

### **Theoretical Added-value**

This thesis has assessed several positions within and outside the liberal tradition in a critical way. Deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism have, I hope been evaluated on fair grounds evaluated on fair grounds and I have acknowledged the positive aspects that should definitively be rescued from deliberative democracy, most of which remain largely a legacy of the liberal tradition. However, something that be considered a weakness in the theoretical sense is the little engagement with the starkest critics of Schmitt like Heinrich Meier. He argues against *Political Theology* as an alternative for Schmitt to find a divine solution to the problem of political philosophy. It is noticeable that Schmitt is a thinker influenced by Christianity and that his friend-enemy distinction can be charged with containing an ultimate ethical claim to decide between good and evil. However, this criticism is left out of this thesis for it does not alter the conceptual weight of Schmitt's idea upon the construction of collective identities and its inextricable relation to politics.

---

<sup>9</sup> For the full text of this declaration visit Office of the Spokesman, White House Release Press, "Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War Against Terrorism." (Nov 13, 2001 [accessed on April 13, 2006]). Available at [URL:http://www.state.gov/coalition/cr/prs/6077.htm](http://www.state.gov/coalition/cr/prs/6077.htm)

However, while this could be seen as a weakness of this thesis, I think it is by far outweighed by its strengths.

A major strength of this thesis is the theoretical underpinning that links two important yet often radically opposed schools of thought: liberalism and the postmodern schools of radical democratic thinkers. The benefit of the former consists in recognizing the need for methodological shifts in the way debates about difference are conducted. Although I have borrowed heavily from the critique of the concept of identity in poststructuralist thought, I provided a critique of Carl Schmitt's notion of the political grounded on the claim that Schmitt's ideas could serve as an indicator of the intimate relations between politics and identity. In this way I hope to have made a strong case for my main hypothesis which is *there is a correlation between the way liberal thought avoids dealing with concepts foreign to its own tradition and the forms of political action liberal thought employs that restrain the freedom of action necessary to disclose collective identities*. I have consistently shown evidence to support that Schmitt's theoretical endeavor had not been set underway in this manner, which shed light on the nature of political action and its potential value to integrate the contestation of concepts in the discipline of IR. I showed how different to mine other approaches were, particularly in IR theory viewed politics and identity.

Most importantly I would like to suggest that the theoretical framework of collective identity offered here has practical relevance in contemporary debates on the simultaneous fragmentation of the social world, such as nationalist movements, civil rights and minority rights. It is just sufficient to look at the protests against the immigration bill in the United States. The bill, introduced by House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner is another 'enforcement only' legislation that seeks to criminalize illegal presence in the

U.S. by illegal entry or overstaying or violating the terms of a visa, making such an act a felony barring the criminal from legally reentering the U.S.<sup>10</sup> The upshot that proposing this bill has awakened resulted in the simultaneous creation of a transnational public sphere where agonistic confrontation by the demos is made public against the proposal to criminalize unlawful presence. This is, I think, a very illustrative case that clearly signals the unavoidable relation between identity and politics.

---

<sup>10</sup> Kathy Keely, *Key House Republican Vows to Opposed Immigration Measure*. USA Today. 7 april, 2006 Available at: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-04-07-sensenbrenner\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-04-07-sensenbrenner_x.htm) (Accessed on 11 april, 2006).