A Radical Alternative? A Re-Evaluation Of Chantal Mouffe's Radical Democratic Approach

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Contents

Abstract

The catalyst for this thesis is the current debate addressing the nature and practice of liberal democracies. Many critics have argued that liberal democracies are failing their constituents, and in order to revitalise the key features of "robust" democracies, a number of alternatives have been proposed. Chantal Mouffe's radical democratic approach offers one such alternative. Mouffe has written extensively on this subject and is considered an eminent proponent of a left, democratic, alternative and it is her body of work that I take as my explicit focus.

This thesis examines to what degree Mouffe's alternative can be considered *radical*. There are three important elements to this evaluation, all of which relate to the different definitions of the term. Specifically, these criteria are embodied in the following questions: "How *different* to the other alternatives is Mouffe's approach?"; "How *left* is it?"; and "How *democratic* is it?". While it is clear that some of Mouffe's work has progressive, disruptive, democratic, and therefore "radical" elements, this thesis argues that this radicalness does not reach its full potential. The lacunae in Mouffe's work, which relate to a lack of detail and theoretical clarification on many important concepts, mean that Mouffe is unable, at this point in time, to present a comprehensive, useful, and radical alternative to rival the other approaches.

Laden within her work, however, there is the *potential* for radical democracy to become a paradigm changing approach to democracy. Central to this thesis is the claim that Mouffe should capitalise on the most radical aspects of her work – expanding the areas of re-theorisation, utilising them to inform the principles

of liberty and equality, and disrupting the paradigm of liberal democracy. In doing so, radical democracy could rival other alternative models of democracy, and present an important new approach in democratic theory and practice.

Declaration

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I thank my brother, Andrzej Skrzypiec, and my sister, Karina Skrzypiec, for also encouraging my thirst for knowledge by being available to engage my thoughts, challenging some of them, but always being proud of me. To my dad and my extended family, as well as Maria Fiorito and Toby Rice, I am eternally grateful for your encouragement, practical support, love and friendship, which reinvigorated me when things were difficult. My friends and family have never questioned the worth of this project, nor doubted my ability to complete it, and it is for this that I am sincerely thankful.

Introduction

"Democracy is spreading around the world…yet in the mature democracies, which the rest of the world is supposed to be copying, there is widespread disillusionment with the democratic process. In most Western countries, levels of trust in politicians have dropped over the past years. Fewer people turn out to vote than used to…More and more people say that they are uninterested in parliamentary politics, especially among the younger generation. Why are citizens in democratic countries apparently becoming disillusioned with democratic government, at the same time as it is spreading around the rest of the world?"[1]

This thesis is certainly a response to the malaise toward democracy that is exemplified in the above quotation by Anthony Giddens. However, rather than examining the causes of this trend through an empirical analysis, this thesis provides an evaluation of a possible alternative to the current paradigm – Chantal Mouffe's version of radical democracy.[2] Through her work Mouffe aims to reinvigorate the *demos* and provide a left model of democracy. The objective of this thesis is to evaluate how successful Mouffe is at achieving these goals. Is it really a radical alternative? Despite the various lacunae, which are pinpointed in this thesis, Mouffe's work can offer a new future for democratic theory and provide much needed reinvigoration in terms of possible alternatives. By examining the current gaps within Mouffe's approach, this thesis aims to highlight where Mouffe's version of radical democracy can be further developed. In doing so, the evaluation of Mouffe's work that is provided in this thesis contributes to new ways to consider the field of

[1] Anthony Giddens as quoted by Robert B. Talisse *Democracy After Liberalism: Pragmatism and Deliberative Politics* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 3.

[2] I refer to Mouffe's approach as "radical democracy", but there are other terms that she employs, for example: 'radical and plural democracy' (Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005)); 'radical liberal democracy' (Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 20); 'radical, libertarian and plural democracy' (Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Second Edition, (Verso: London; New York, 2001), p. 4); and 'agonistic democracy' (Chantal Mouffe *On the Political* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 51.)

democratic theory. Although there are significant lacunae in her work, this thesis concludes that Mouffe's approach is useful and has the potential to revitalise current democratic theory.

The above sentiments by Giddens also highlight that, despite the emergence of new democracies around the world, in the West there is growing dissatisfaction. There are many factors that contribute to this development, but this thesis takes the dominance of neoliberal governmentality as a key factor. I strongly accept the argument offered by Mouffe 'that the unchallenged hegemony of neo-liberalism represents a threat for democratic institutions.'[3] This is because, increasingly, neoliberal objectives are used to justify a move away from socially located policies to those more in line with the laws of the market so that 'most crucial decisions concerning social and economic relations have been removed from the political terrain.'[4] High profile investor and *Forbes* columnist Ken Fisher exemplifies this neoliberal dogma, and its effect on democracy, in an extract from a speech he gave to the world's leading CEOs. He stated that,

> 'I believe in capitalism…Democracy just gets in the way. Democracy is annoying. Let them buy stuff and eat cake. Where I come from if you don't believe in capitalism you're going to hell.'[5]

Given this context, this thesis assumes that the pervasiveness of neoliberalism that is slowly becoming the norm is detrimental to democracy.

In response, part of the impetus for this study is to examine a democratic approach that bucks this trend and offers a decidedly left version of democracy. Mouffe's radical democratic approach offers such an alternative. Therefore, in spite of the inclination toward democratic antipathy, this thesis rejects a fatalistic thinking about democracy and argues that Mouffe's work can provide a useful alternative. Through its critical analysis of liberal democracy and other political

[3] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000), p. 6.
[4] Chantal Mouffe 'The 'End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', in Francisco Panizza (Ed.) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 54.
[5] Ken Fisher in Sue Lannin 'China to Drive Global Economic Recovery', *PM*, ABC Local Radio, September 28, 2010, first accessed October 2010 at http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2010/s3024287.htm.

models, Mouffe's radical democratic approach[6] offers a strengthening of democratic theory and practice. Her work offers new ways to reconceptualise democracy and many of its essential components, making it an attractive alternative for the field of democratic theory in the twenty-first century.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Francis Fukuyama's thesis[7] regarding the "triumph of liberal democracy" was readily accepted, and the omnipotence of liberal democracies has maintained a position of hegemony within Western tenets of political philosophy. It is within this context that liberal democracy has become synonymous with democracy. Following the work of Mouffe, however, this thesis disentangles liberalism and democracy so that each can be addressed separately. For Mouffe this is an important task because liberalism and democracy are from two distinct traditions and have contrasting purposes.[8] Where liberalism focuses on human rights and individual liberty, Mouffe writes that 'one should not make them part and parcel of the democratic tradition whose core values, equality and popular sovereignty, are different."[9] Within the radical democratic approach it is important to distinguish between liberal and democratic elements so that each can be critiqued, re-worked and utilised where appropriate. Such a division enables a clear analysis of the two dimensions of liberal democracy and ensures that the important differences are not overlooked.

The careful and separate examination of liberalism and democracy also helps to displace the misnomer that '[e]ndorse it or resist it, we all think we know what democracy looks like and what it entails.'[10] The ubiquity of democracy

[6] I am careful within this thesis to deliberately use the term "approach" when referring to Mouffe's work, rather than "theory" or "model". As will be discovered, Mouffe's work does not follow the traditional pattern of empirically based theories of democracy and so it is important to distinguish her method from alternatives that do. Employing the term "approach" is useful in that it conveys that Mouffe's radical democracy is more of a lens of critical analysis that involves multiple opportunities for application – it is not designed to be a "one size fits all", replacement model or all encompassing theory of democracy.
[7] Francis Fukuyama *The End of History and the Last Man*. (H. Hamilton: London, 1992).
[8] Chantal Mouffe 'The 'End of Politics', p. 52.
[9] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 2.
[10] Jane Mummery 'Rethinking the Democratic Project: Rorty, Mouffe, Derrida and Democracy to Come', *borderlands e-journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2005, first accessed January 2006 at http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol4no1_2005/mummery_rethinking.htm.

contributes to its vagueness, requiring us to consider whether we are merely witnessing the 'triumph of democratic *rhetoric*',[11] rather than a realised democratic project. As Stuart Hall explains,

> [t]he meaning of the word *democracy* is now so proliferated, so loaded down with ideological freight, so indeterminate where it stands at the nexus on different, often mutually exclusive paradigms – liberal democracy, participatory democracy, popular democracy – that it is virtually useless…Increasingly emptied of real content, as the gap between real and ideals widens, it is progressively weighed down by the plentitude [sic] of its unfulfilled promises.[12]

Responding to this failure of liberal democracies to materialise its promises and 'professed ideals',[13] this thesis, through the work of Chantal Mouffe, is driven to provide an alternative approach that can strengthen democratic theory and practice. As Mouffe articulates,

> [m]any of the problems facing liberal democracies today – the so-called "crisis of liberal democracy" – stem from the fact that politics has been reduced to an instrumental activity, to the selfish pursuit of private interests. The limitation of democracy to a mere set of neutral procedures, the transformation of citizens into political consumers, and the liberal insistence on a supposed "neutrality" of the state have emptied politics of all of its subsistence.[14]

Importantly, to challenge this, Mouffe's approach looks critically at liberalism and its connection to democracy, highlighting where the theory of liberal democracy can be re-worked and re-theorised. Taking this approach allows Mouffe to advocate that there are liberal elements that beneficially contribute to modern democracies. Therefore Mouffe uses her critiques of liberal democracy to rework and strengthen it. Rather than rejecting liberalism and its form of democracy outright, Mouffe sees it as playing an important role in the development of her radical democratic approach.

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[11] Robert B. Talisse *Democracy After Liberalism*, p. 2, emphasis added.
[12] Stuart Hall 'Democracy, Globalization, and Difference', in Okwui Enwezor, Carols Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya (Eds.) *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta11_Platform1* (Hatje Cantz: Germany, 2002), p. 21.
[13] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 2.
[14] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 22.

This adherence to liberal democracy is common to most theories that fall under the umbrella term of radical democracy. These other approaches include participatory, gender equality and deliberative forms of democracy.[15] What is common to all of these alternatives is 'first, a commitment to a critique of liberal democracy, and, second, an attempt to further democratise it.'[16] The democratising, or "radicalising" of liberalism, is the reprioritising of the *democratic* elements of liberal democracy. It involves extending the principles of liberty and equality (after they have been reinterpreted through the discourse of radical democracy) to more spheres of life,[17] and ensuring that the political is recognised as a central component of all social activity.[18]

Although there are numerous theorists working under the banner of radical democracy,[19] the choice to use Mouffe's work comes about because, firstly, Mouffe is regarded as one of the most pre-eminent writers within the field, and it is her work that is most associated with radical democracy.[20] Secondly, the ability of Mouffe's work to inform a new, left version of democracy is particularly attractive, as the necessity to provide an alternative to neoliberalism becomes more pressing. Finally, although Mouffe follows in the tradition of radicalising liberalism, her approach also incorporates post-Marxist and poststructuralist elements that recognise the constant presence and constitutive nature of power and difference, thereby challenging modernist conception of political theory.

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[15] Aletta J. Norval 'Radical Democracy', in Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (Routledge: London, 2001), p. 587.
[16] Ibid, p. 587.
[17] Chantal Mouffe in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Hegemony and Socialism: An Interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe', *Palinurus*, I. 14, 2007, first accessed November 2010 at http://anselmocarranco.tripod.com/id68.html.
[18] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Caroline Bayard, Sev Isajiw and Gary Madison 'On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 49, Spring 1996, p. 144.
[19] Steven Wall 'Radical Democracy, Personal Freedom, and the Transformative Potential of Politics', in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller Jr., and Jeffrey Paul (Eds.) *Democracy* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2000), p. 226, footnote 2.
[20] Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', in Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little (Eds.) *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2009), p. 3.

Using the work of poststructuralist writers as well as (controversially) Carl Schmitt, Mouffe details that societies are never fully homogenous or harmonious. Instead, there is always the presence of the political because the formation of our subjectivity relies on difference. According to Mouffe, rather than stemming from essentialist or *a priori* foundations, identity is *constructed* through discourse and the presence of the other. Such elements prevent the total closure of identity and they can also challenge it. Therefore, the relationship is one that always has the potential to become antagonistic. Using Schmitt, Mouffe shows that these antagonisms 'are the evidence of the frontiers of social formation.'[21] Following this, the role of democracy, according to Mouffe, is to tame (not eliminate) this antagonism. Such an approach fundamentally alters the way that democracy can be conceived and Mouffe's work is antithetical to consensus-based models that stress unity and harmony. Mouffe's radical democratic approach shows, importantly, that democracy is undermined when consensus becomes the goal, and her work provides an alternative that facilitates the political as well as power and difference, thereby promoting democracy.

Within the field of poststructuralist radical democracy, Mouffe's work falls clearly into the stream that is based on the ontology of "lack" rather than "abundance". Here Mouffe's work differs from prominent writers, like Gilles Deleuze and William E. Connolly, in that she acknowledges the role that difference plays, not only in constructing identity, but in subverting its full closure.[22] Like other radical democrats who utilise the theory of lack, Mouffe's adoption of psychoanalytic and semiotic concepts illustrates that identity and society are not *a priori*. Rejecting the notion of a positive foundation, Mouffe sees

[21] David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis 'Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', in David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, (Eds.) *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2000), p. 9.
[22] Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen 'Introduction: Rethinking Radical Democracy Between Abundance and Lack', in Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (Eds.) *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2005), p. 6.

> the subject as a place of lack which, though represented within the structure, is the empty place that at the same time subverts and is the condition of the constitution of any identity.[23]

This conception of the subject as constituted by difference has profound implications for democratic theory and represents one of the most radical aspects of Mouffe's approach. In addition to disrupting *a priori* notions of the subject and society, and therefore rights, citizenship, and identity, Mouffe's utilisation of the theory of lack reconstructs the democratic project.

Rather than being based on rational arguments on the suitability of the system of governance, or appeals to universal ideals, following Mouffe's approach, the discourse of democracy, like all discourses, is seen as operating as a hegemon. This indicates that democracy is a relatively constructed term.[24] As David Trend explains, '[l]ike any other expression, its meaning is a matter of interpretation, debate, and context.'[25] Therefore, radical democratic (or other alternative approaches) will not be put in place because they represent the "best" alternative. Instead, the struggle to secure the hegemonic position depends upon the ordering of social meaning. Alternative approaches will vie to make their discourse the "common sense", despite the fact that the sub-hegemonic will always be present to disrupt this order. It is because there will never be complete closure that the pursuit of democracy will be ongoing, or in Derridian terms "to come". Although the particular will try to stand in and represent the totality, ultimately

> pluralist democracy becomes a "self-refuting ideal", because the very moment of its realization would coincide with its disintegration. This is why…it is vital for democratic politics to acknowledge that any form of consensus is the result of hegemonic articulation, and that it always has an "outside" that impeded its full realization.[26]

[23] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 76.
[24] Benjamin Barber 'Democracy, Justifications For', in Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (Routledge: London, 2001), p. 165.
[25] David Trend 'Democracy's Crisis of Meaning', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 7.
[26] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. xviii.

However, this does not prevent Mouffe from advocating a radical democratic project. Indeed the re-conceptualisation that her work provides illustrates that the political is always an inherent part in the formation of identity and hegemonic stabilisations precisely because there can never be a final, or total closure. This means that there will always be a struggle to "fill" the site of the lack, the empty signifier of democracy, and radical democracy is one such approach. Competing with other alternatives for this filling role does not undermine democracy, rather, it is 'its very condition of possibility.'[27]

Mouffe's radical democracy thereby presents an important alternative that challenges the zeitgeist of deliberative democratic models, which ultimately 'privilege 'reason over power".[28] Although popular, these models perpetuate the misconception that just, fair, and legitimate outcomes can be reached through rational debate and consensus. They base this argument on the idea that reason and rationality can mitigate power and difference to produce outcomes that are neutral and objective. However, what these theories fail to recognise is that power is always involved and it is a dangerous fallacy to assume that it can be overcome. In contrast to these reason and rationality based approaches, Mouffe's work provides a theoretical perspective that enables an analysis of the role of power and a deeper understanding of how it can be democratically accommodated. Mouffe's radical democracy and her use of poststructuralist discourse theory sheds light on the problematic assumptions laden in consensus-based approaches to democracy that, ultimately, are unable to facilitate power, the political, and difference. The benefit of Mouffe's approach is that power can always be traced and, although it is recognised as effective and sometimes prohibitive, power is also seen as having an important constitutive role. By providing such an analysis, Mouffe's approach represents an important contribution to the ongoing development of democratic theory. It vigorously challenges other popular alternatives, and so the re-examination of

[27] Ibid.
[28] Iris Marion Young as quoted by Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', p. 3.

Mouffe's work that is presented in this thesis provides a timely addition to the debate about democracy.

In addition to challenging the consensus-based approaches to democracy, Mouffe's work offers a potential *left* approach to democracy. This is a vital and timely objective for Mouffe because her work illustrates that the new left alternative of the Third Way is ultimately unfulfilling, and unable to challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism.[29] In contrast, Mouffe's approach works to re-establish socialist ideals and provide a new, democratic strategy for progressive politics. Indeed, in the United States, "radical democracy" is the new discourse for left politics,[30] so it is this context that urges the re-examination of Mouffe's work that this thesis offers. The evaluation of how successful Mouffe is at providing a new left paradigm for democracy thereby becomes a crucial point of analysis in this thesis.

Mouffe's socialist beginning is a key feature that continues to influence her work, but it is through her insistence on linking socialism to democracy that it becomes especially relevant. Many of the criticisms of socialism come from the perception that it is not conducive to democracy and that it is antithetical to the notion of the individual. Through Mouffe's radical democratic approach, however, there is potential to balance socialist goals in a way that also accommodates democracy. To achieve this, Mouffe advocates re-articulating socialism through a discourse of liberal democracy, arguing that socialism can only be realised within the framework of liberalism, so that 'a democratic socialism is thus bound to be a liberal one.'[31] In doing so, Mouffe sets out to provide a comprehensive, left alternative to rival other democratic and political approaches.

[29] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 6.
[30] Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', p. 1.
[31] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', in Judith Squires (Ed.) *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1993), p. 70.

As stated, it is Mouffe's ability to provide a new left version of democracy that forms part of the evaluative analysis of this thesis, though it does not provide the complete picture. In assessing how *radical* Mouffe's approach is, the question is asked in the following three ways: is it radical in terms of providing a *left* alternative; is it radical in terms of providing a *different* (and therefore *disruptive*) alternative; and is it radical in terms of providing a *democratic* alternative? These three points of evaluation stem from the various interpretations of the term "radical". Beginning with the etymology, "radical" stems from the Latin word *radix*, meaning root. As an adjective, something is radical when it pertains 'to the root or origin',[32] or more commonly, an extreme version of an object or action.[33] Within democratic theory, an approach is radical if it provides the essential or extreme elements of democracy. Within this thesis, and following the trend of Mouffe and others, this core feature is determined to be the principle of equality.[34] Therefore, "radical" can be equated 'with "going to the roots of an issue, examining it thoroughly, questioning everything, and leaving no stone unturned in the quest for respect and justice."'[35]

Connected to the understanding of radical, as being the root or extreme form, is the definition of radical as being something *different*. As David Robertson explains,

> a radical is one who proposes to attack some political or social problem by going deep into the socio-economic fabric to get at the fundamental or root cause and alter this basic social weakness.[36]

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[32] A. Delbridge, J. R. L. Bernard, D. Blair, P. Peters and S. Butler (Eds.) *The Macquarie Dictionary* (The Macquarie Library: New South Wales, 1991), p. 1452.
[33] Wendy Brown in Wendy Brown, Christina Colegate, John Dalton, Timothy Rayner, Cate Thill 'Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown', *Contretemps 6*, January 2006, p. 28.
[34] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects: Toward a New Concept of Democracy' (translated by Stanley Gray), in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1988), p. 96; Larry Diamond 'Democracy, Fat and Thin', in Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (Routledge: London, 2001), p. 149; Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999), p. 249; and Immanuel Wallerstein 'Democracy, Capitalism, and Transformation', in Okwui Enwezor, Carols Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya (Eds.) *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta11_Platform1* (Hatje Cantz: Germany, 2002), p. 105. The principle of equality also becomes important to the left element of Mouffe's approach because she argues that the socialist dimension is characterized as being economic equality (Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 90).
[35] John Button *The Radicalism Handbook: A Complete Guide to the Radical Movement of the Twentieth Century* (Cassell: London, 1995), p. xiii.
[36] David Robertson *A Dictionary of Modern Politics*, Third Edition, (Europa Publications: London; New York, 2002), p. 414.

To be radical in this sense then, Mouffe's approach must be *disruptive*. As Mouffe argues, a core goal of radical democracy is 'a profound transformation of the existing power relations and the establishment of a new hegemony.'[37] For Mouffe to fulfil this aspect of being radical, her approach must be determined to be different from the other alternatives and disruptive to the status quo. Wendy Brown uses similar definitions in her employment of "radical", arguing that '[r]adical democracy is extreme democracy, extreme power to the *demos*, as opposed to what we get in liberal democracy.'[38] Lastly, radical can also be used to describe left-wing politics and, given that part of Mouffe's objective is to provide a left version of democracy, this also forms an important feature of the evaluative process in this thesis.

Mouffe employs these three definitions implicitly and explicitly in her work, and they directly relate to the objectives she outlines for her approach. In this context, the evaluative criteria have essentially been determined by Mouffe, and thereby represent a fair framework in which to judge her contribution. The only contentious element will be the argument that I put forward regarding the move beyond the liberal paradigm of democracy. As will be detailed in the ensuing discussion, Mouffe advocates that her approach is indeed different to the other political and democratic models, but she makes it clear that she does not want to put forward an alternative that is separate to liberal democracy. As explained, like the other forms of radical democracy, Mouffe argues that her approach is part of the liberal democratic regime, not a replacement. Throughout this thesis, however, I will illustrate that there are numerous ways in which Mouffe's radical democracy challenges liberal democracy, so that, in the end, radical democracy can and should be seen as an important alternative. In doing so, Mouffe's approach offers new ways of conceiving democracy and, potentially, a way forward from the current malaise.

[37] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 52.
[38] Wendy Brown in Wendy Brown, et al 'Learning to Love Again', p. 29.

The purpose of the evaluation offered in this thesis is not to police Mouffe's work and force it into a tightly controlled semantic categorisation of "radical". Rather, the framework is useful in determining whether Mouffe is successful in reaching her goals, and if she is not, where adjustments can be made. Following this purpose, and in addition to the three major points of evaluation, this thesis also examines whether Mouffe's approach fulfils the basic tenets of political philosophy; specifically, is it consistent and coherent; is it well argued, justified and explained, and does it provide the necessary detail to inform a useful approach to democratic theory?

In determining the usefulness and radicalness of Mouffe's radical democratic approach, this thesis is divided into three parts. In Part One Mouffe's work is discussed in relation to other political alternatives, specifically Marxism and socialism in Chapter One, deliberative democratic and Third Way theories in Chapter Two, and liberalism is Chapter Three. The purpose of this part is to provide a framework in which to read Mouffe's approach, and it illustrates where she situates her work. Within the first three chapters it becomes clear that Mouffe's work is considerably different from the other alternatives. Furthermore, Mouffe's critiques of the alternatives, as outlined in these chapters, will provide an introduction to the key features of radical democracy.

When discussing the other alternatives, this thesis does not engage with the wider debate regarding the veracity of Mouffe's arguments or analyses of the theories, although it recognises that there may be faults in Mouffe's readings.[39] Instead, the examination of the alternatives recreates the framework that Mouffe herself works in. In doing so, this thesis limits the arguments to those that relate directly to Mouffe's approach, allowing an evaluation to take place within her parameters. Limiting the discussion of the alternatives to how they relate and contrast to Mouffe's approach also enables a clear trajectory for

[39] Clive Barnett 'Deconstructing Radical Democracy: Articulation, Representation, and Being-With-Others', *Political Geography*, Vol. 23, I. 5, 2004, pp. 505-506.

detailing the important concepts of radical democracy, helping to clearly illustrate how Mouffe's vision of democracy differs from others.

Part Two builds on the concepts of the first three chapters and provides a detailed exploration of the key elements of Mouffe's work. In this part, Chapter Four looks specifically at the theoretical re-working that Mouffe provides and highlights the uniqueness and potential laden within her approach. In order to conceptualise these theoretical components, Chapter Five applies Mouffe's ideas to the concept of citizenship – a key feature of any democratic theory. Through Chapters Four and Five, Part Two clearly identifies the most radical aspects of Mouffe's approach. Not only does she provide something different from the alternatives discussed in Part One, but also Mouffe's re-theorising causes important disruptions to how we understand key elements of political and democratic theory.

Although Part Two offers the most radical aspects of Mouffe's approach, it is also within these chapters that the gaps in Mouffe's work begin to surface. These lacunae are made the explicit focus of Part Three. Here the thesis returns to the three fundamental criteria that are used to determine the radicalness of Mouffe's alternative. In Chapter Six of this part, I look at Mouffe's ability to provide for both the *democratic* and *left* elements, while in Chapter Seven I examine whether Mouffe successfully capitalises on the *different* and *disruptive* elements of her work. There are many elements within Mouffe's approach that are marked as requiring further theorising, in this part of the thesis, however, I ultimately conclude that these gaps do not have to be paralysing. Instead, Mouffe's work is seen to hold profound potential in terms of providing a radical democratic alternative. What is urged though, is further work and expansion beyond the paradigm of liberal democracy. The issues highlighted in these final chapters illustrate that Mouffe's approach can take democratic theory to a new place, if the lacunae are addressed. Indeed, the critiques levelled against Mouffe are more the result of unfinished work rather than inherent problems with radical democracy. I therefore argue that Mouffe's radical democracy represents

a pinnacle opportunity to re-direct democratic theory, and its potential for providing a new theoretical paradigm is as exciting as it is radical.

In conclusion, this thesis is inclined to not completely subscribe to the school of thought that refers to the current political environment as being "post-democracy".[40] Part of the usage of this prefix is to imply that, due to the current political and social environment of disengaged citizens and politicians, for example, we have outgrown democracy.[41] Such a view perpetuates a pessimistic outlook for the future of democracy. On the contrary, this thesis situates itself solidly in the hope of a new paradigm for democratic theory that still maintains the promises associated with the ideals of democracy. As this thesis will show, there is much to be achieved in reformulating, rather than abandoning, democratic theory, and work like that of Mouffe's can provide the necessary trajectory towards change. In the words of Mouffe,

> the democratic project is still alive, even if it is not in very good shape…it needs to be reformulated today with the help of postmodern theory. We need to redefine it in a way that puts into question the universalism, the rationalism and the individualism in which it has been formulated. Radical democracy is a way to reformulate the democratic project in another theoretical framework which makes room for the centrality of antagonism, of power relations, and therefore implies a different type of understanding of the principle of legitimacy of liberal democracy.[42]

Building on Mouffe's work, this thesis will clearly articulate that there is still much room for expansion and development of the democratic field, and radical democracy is a useful place from which to extend new discussions. Not only does it provide a theoretical framework for re-conceiving democracy, it also pushes for a new political project. Utilising the critical analysis of Mouffe, this thesis contributes to new ways of conceptualising the discourse of democracy and offers direction for new areas of theorisation. Embedded within this thesis is the desire to provide a reinvigoration of democratic theorising and also to

[40] Colin Crouch *Post-Democracy* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA, 2004).
[41] Ibid, pp. 20-28.
[42] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', p. 145.

possible mechanisms to achieve this. Thus, while there are many criticisms levelled at Mouffe's work outlined in this thesis, the ultimate objective is to provide possible future directions for the field of radical democracy. The aim is to highlight the potential that exists within Mouffe's work in order that this is seized upon. The critiques and points of lacunae that are identified simply show where this new work can begin.

Part One

The Other Alternatives

Part of the criteria in the evaluation of the degree and nature of "radicalness" in Mouffe's approach, involves determining how different it is from other alternatives within the field of political theory. To facilitate this, Part One of this thesis consists of three chapters, each of which looks at different political models in the context of radical democracy. Rather than making each individual model the target of analysis, these alternatives are always discussed *in relation to* Mouffe's work. This is a common technique employed by Mouffe, and it allows her to draw out the specifics of her approach by contrasting it to other theorisations. Given this context, these first three chapters do not examine the specifics of the alternative models, nor do these chapters look at whether Mouffe's judgement of them is necessarily sound or exact. Instead, this first part of the thesis uses the alternative models as a setting against which to place Mouffe's work. By examining the arguments that Mouffe lays against the alternatives, it will be clear where Mouffe sees her approach as differing. This will also help to introduce some of the core concepts of the radical democratic approach, laying the foundation for the detailed exegesis of these elements that follows in Part Two.

In Chapter One, some of the basic elements of Mouffe's approach to identity, discourse, hegemony, and the political, will be introduced. This is facilitated by her juxtaposition to Marxism and socialism. The key elements to be drawn out

from this chapter are Mouffe's desire for her approach to promote a left dimension of democracy that also facilitates pluralism and the political. As will be shown in the final section of the first chapter, Mouffe argues that the most democratic and useful way to assure this is through the radical appropriation of liberalism.

In Chapter Two, Mouffe's critique of consensus based political models is outlined. The main focus here is on Jürgen Habermas's deliberative democratic model, and the Third Way, post-political, approaches detailed by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. Throughout this chapter, Mouffe's critique of these alternatives will be discussed in order to highlight the problems Mouffe attributes to consensus based models of political theory. In contrast, the radical democratic approach will be shown to be more capable of dealing with, and facilitating, the pluralism that Mouffe sees as inherent to modern democracies.

The final chapter within this first part examines the relationship between liberalism and radical democracy. Essentially this third chapter builds on Chapter One, but extends the analysis to the problems that Mouffe sees within liberalism. Although Mouffe is adamant that radical democracy can only be achieved through the utilisation of liberalism, this third chapter will pinpoint the important differences between Mouffe's approach to democracy and the liberal one. Chapter Three also introduces some of the implications, contradictions and tensions of this relationship, which will be critically examined later in Part Three of the thesis.

Taken together, the first three chapters laid out in Part One provide an overview of the key elements of Mouffe's radical democratic approach, offering a foundation for the exegesis of Mouffe's work that follows in Part Two. Similarly, setting her work against the alternative models is important because it highlights the field of debate within which Mouffe sees herself as being situated. This sets the tone for the discussion regarding Mouffe's frames of reference, her contextualisation, and what she sees as the key elements on offer in the debate

about democratic and political re-theorising. Finally, in explaining where Mouffe situates herself, Part One also helps to highlight how radically *different* Mouffe's approach is, in comparison to the other alternatives, and this forms a key element of the evaluation process of the thesis.

1 Marxism & Socialism

One of the key principles of radical democracy and a core objective for Mouffe is for her approach to provide a radical, *left* project of democracy. To try and facilitate this, Mouffe situates her work within the tradition of Marxism and socialism. However, as this chapter will show, Mouffe finds many problems with the usual understanding of both these theories. To overcome this, Mouffe offers a critique of Marxism and socialism, which then provides an avenue for Mouffe's re-conceptualisation of some of the core aspects of democratic and political theory. This chapter provides an introduction to Mouffe's re-theorising, drawing out the radical conception of the subject, discourse, and hegemony, and highlighting the importance of pluralism and the political to the radical democratic approach.

In the first section of this chapter, the core concepts of Mouffe's approach will be introduced through their juxtaposition to Marxism. The concepts relate mainly to Mouffe's poststructuralist understanding of discourse, hegemony and identity, and they highlight major conceptual differences between Mouffe and the other alternatives discussed throughout this thesis. While relevant elements will be drawn out through a discussion of Mouffe (and Laclau's[1]) critique of Marxism, no discussion on the accuracy of their evaluation is explored. This is

[1] Within the section on Marxism, I often refer to both Laclau and Mouffe, rather than just to Mouffe because the arguments against Marxism were established within their co-authored work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. The remainder of the chapter, which looks at the relationship between socialism, liberalism and radical democracy, however, is typically considered Mouffe's work (Mark Anthony Wenman 'Laclau or Mouffe? Splitting the Difference', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 29, No. 5, 2003, pp. 581-606; and Jules Townshend 'Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemonic Project: The Story So Far', *Political Studies*, Vol. 52, 2004, p. 279), and so in later chapters I return to referring only to Mouffe.

because, firstly, many other authors have covered these critiques,[2] and secondly, such an examination takes the focus away from the key features of Mouffe's approach. As will be shown, by re-analysing Marxism through the lens of poststructuralism and postmodernism, Mouffe and Laclau are able to outline a new strategy for leftist politics through a focus on discourse and a reconstruction of the notion of identity.

In the following chapters of this thesis, Mouffe's work (which spans a range of decades) is explored via its themes, rather than being examined chronologically. However, Mouffe's earliest work is mainly referenced in the first section of this chapter. This is because, while the (post)Marxist element that was developed in her earliest work is still an important feature of Mouffe's approach, the reference to it recedes in her later work. This has prompted authors like Mark Anthony Wenman to conclude that the post-Marxist work in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* should be attributed to Laclau rather than to both authors, and he writes that Mouffe's work 'retains little if anything from the Marxist tradition.'[3] However, while I agree that in Mouffe's later work the reference to Marxism is relatively mute (and I will argue in Chapter Six, the left element is also unsatisfactorily dealt with), I nevertheless find that the critiques of Marxism form an essential foundation to Mouffe's approach and they continue to implicitly inform her work. More importantly, the critiques of Marxism, as will be shown, facilitate a radical restructuring of concepts that are fundamental to Mouffe's approach, so it is reasonable to assume that the post-Marxist elements are still important features for Mouffe's radical democratic approach.

In the second section of this chapter I will examine Mouffe's ideas regarding the necessary relationship between socialism, liberalism and radical democracy. Where the first section draws out the new radical concepts of Mouffe's

[2] See for example Norman Geras 'Post-Marxism?', *New Left Review*, I. 163, May-June 1987, pp. 40-82; Norman Geras 'Ex-Marxism Without Substance: Being A Real Reply to Laclau and Mouffe', *New Left Review*, I. 169, May-June 1989, pp. 34-61; and Daniel T. McGee 'Post-Marxism: The Opiate of the Intellectuals', *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 2, June 1997, pp. 201-225.
[3] Mark Anthony Wenman 'Laclau or Mouffe?', pp. 581-606.

approach, and so focuses more on the theoretical aspects of radical democracy, the second section explains Mouffe's argument for achieving the *project* of radical democracy. Despite her Marxist and socialist history, Mouffe argues that the leftist goals of radical democracy can only be achieved by utilising the most radical elements of the liberal tradition. For Mouffe pluralism is the fundamental element of modernity and it is only through liberalism that it can be adequately addressed. While, in order to utilise liberalism within radical democracy, there are important elements that require re-theorising, this will not be discussed until later chapters. Instead, the final section of this chapter looks at explaining why Mouffe sees liberalism as being important for her project, and why she sees socialism as being unable to provide for the democratic aspects of her approach.

- THE CRITIQUE OF CLASSICAL MARXISM -

Mouffe's critique of classical Marxism is extensively outlined in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which she co-authored with Ernesto Laclau. The first edition,[4] published in 1985, detailed the problems associated with the application of traditional Marxist theory and thus the authors argued that the Left needed a new strategy to ensure that socialism was made relevant for the closing 20th and approaching 21st century. What was unique about their work at this time was not only their foresight, but also their decision to re-develop Marxism rather than abandon it altogether. In spite of the critiques the authors lay against Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe maintained that Marxist principles, like 'the hope of egalitarian emancipation for all from the exploitation and subjection attendant to capitalist production',[5] were still relevant to modern democracies. At the time of writing *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Mouffe and Laclau were highly critical and somewhat disappointed with the forms of governance that

[4] The second edition of *Hegemony* published in 2001 includes a new preface but is otherwise the same as the original published in 1985. Therefore, while all the subsequent references from *Hegemony* come from the 2001 edition, beyond the preface, the ideas are still representative of their thoughts in 1985.
[5] Paul Bowman 'Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Post-Marxism', in Julian Wolfreys (Ed.) *The Continuum Encyclopedia: Modern Criticism and Theory* (Continuum: New York, 2002), p. 800.

were found under the banner of socialism. Indeed they referred to them as 'mutations' of classical Marxist theory.[6] Hence Mouffe and Laclau aimed to bring legitimacy to the Marxist tradition through political re-theorising, utilising postmodern and poststructuralist ideas.

Much of the first third of *Hegemony* is spent tracing the history of leftist theory and practice, and Laclau and Mouffe state plainly that they

> have tried to recover some of the variety and richness of Marxist discursivity…which tended to be obliterated by that impoverished monolithic image of "Marxism-Leninism" current in the Stalin and post-Stalin eras and now reproduced…by certain forms of contemporary "anti-Marxism".[7]

It is for this reason that Laclau and Mouffe are post-Marxists rather than anti-Marxists. They advocate that the "richness" of Marxism is indeed the source of its potential and survival[8] and hence they want to build on Marxist concepts in order to provide for a 'radical, libertarian and plural democracy.'[9] That being said, Laclau and Mouffe's critique is focused on a homogenised view of Marxism that they label "classical" Marxism.[10] They write that 'we are now situated in a post-Marxist terrain' because of the theoretical failures of classical Marxism,[11] and despite the richness that they attribute to the tradition, they nevertheless conclude that the problems can be reduced to 'three basic theses of classical Marxist theory'.[12] Laclau and Mouffe define the theses as being

> the condition regarding the endogenous character of the laws of motion of the economy [which] corresponds to the thesis of the neutrality of the productive forces; the condition of the unity of social agents at the economic

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[6] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* Second Edition, (Verso: London; New York, 2001), p.1.
[7] Ibid, p. 4.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Within *Hegemony,* Laclau and Mouffe usually employ the term *classical* Marxism when discussing their critiques (for example, see pages 3, 5, 69, and 77), though there are some examples where they refer to *orthodox* Marxism (for example on pages 23 and 38). While some writers on Laclau and Mouffe also use the referent *classical* to describe a homogenised view of Marxism (for example, Mark Anthony Wenman 'Laclau or Mouffe?', pp. 581-606, although he also uses *traditional*), other writers differ. For example, Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (Routledge: London; New York, 1998) uses *eschatological*; Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999) uses *structural* and *classical*; and Jules Townshend 'Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: A New Paradigm from the Essex School?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 2003, pp. 129-142, uses *orthodox*. In order to maintain consistency however, this thesis will use the term *classical Marxism*.
[11] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 4.
[12] Ibid, p. 77.

> level, [which relates] to the thesis of the growing homogenization and impoverishment of the working class; and the condition that the relations of production should be the *locus* of "historical interests" transcending the economic sphere, [which relates] to the thesis that the working class has a fundamental interest in socialism.[13]

They similarly conclude that 'these three theses are false.'[14] The criticisms of these three tenets will be discussed in more detail below.

-ECONOMISM-

For Karl Marx capitalism was *the* driving force of exploitation in society and it was only through its complete abandonment that emancipation could be achieved. According to Laclau and Mouffe, classical Marxism presents capitalism 'as acting upon an external social reality, yet the latter simply dissolves upon entering into contact with the former.'[15] Therefore, classical Marxists believed that capitalism was part of a historical process[16] which, because of its exploitative nature, would inevitably lead the working class to revolt against capitalism, thus bringing about the ultimate communist end.[17] Marx had a 'reductive belief that socioeconomic changes explain the historical evolutions of capitalist society' and therefore that a 'communist revolution…restores the human or social powers of society.'[18] However, this economic determinism proved unsatisfactory for Laclau and Mouffe, especially as they witnessed the rise of the new social movements (NSMs), which challenged the idea that inequality existed purely because of the capitalist structure.[19] Although capitalism does often create inequality which perpetuates gender, racial or sexual inequalities, it is no longer accurate, following Mouffe and Laclau, to attribute *all* forms of inequality back to the economic because '*[t]here are not*, for example, necessary links between anti-sexism and anti-capitalism'.[20] Instead, we need to

[13] Ibid, emphasis in original.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, p. 16.
[16] Ibid, p. 3.
[17] Ibid, p. 178.
[18] Philip Goldstein 'Introduction: From Marx to Post-Marxism', in Philip Goldstein *Post-Marxist Theory: An Introduction* (State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, 2005), p. 9.
[19] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 87.
[20] Ibid, p. 178, emphasis in original.

transcend the view that class subordination is the key area of transformation and incorporate other struggles. Mouffe's radical democracy offers precisely this opportunity.

Laclau and Mouffe argued that the scientific approach in Marxism, which saw the economy as an historical force acting on the social, was guilty of the essentialism which postmodern and poststructuralist analysts found problematic in other Enlightenment thinking, and argue that, '[j]ust as the era of normative epistemologies has come to an end, so too has the era of universal discourses.'[21] Therefore, utilising the work of writers like Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, Mouffe and Laclau argue that the nature of capitalism is misrepresented in classical Marxism. Through an analytical lens of historical materialism, classical Marxism sees capitalism as a homogenous, natural, and purely macro level transition of historical progress, rather than a hegemonic ideology secured through a diverse range of institutions and practices. Mouffe, by contrast, asserts that

> [t]he distinction between infra- and superstructure needs to be questioned because it implies a conception of economy as a world of objects and relations that exist prior to any ideological and political conditions of existence. This view assumes that the economy is able to function on its own and follow its own logic, a logic absolutely independent of the relations it would allegedly determine.[22]

Following the re-theorisation of Mouffe and Laclau's, as detailed below, it is made clear that capitalism in fact operates as a discourse rather than a completely static structure.

DISCOURSE

Mouffe and Laclau reject the base/superstructure dialectic of classical Marxism and instead argue that capitalism should be understood as a discourse. By discourse, Mouffe and Laclau mean 'a differential ensemble of signifying

[21] Ibid, p. 3.
[22] Chantal Mouffe 'Hegemony and New Political Subjects: Towards a New Concept of Democracy' (Translated by Stanley Gray), in Cary Nelson Lawrence and Grossberg (Eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1988), p. 90.

sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated.'[23] Using the work of poststructuralists, notably Derrida, Mouffe and Laclau show that it is inaccurate to view structures of power as complete and totalising, and capable of standing in for the whole. Instead, through their analysis of socialism's political and activist history detailed in *Hegemony*, they decentre structures of power, illustrating that these systems cannot give predetermined, prescriptive and predictable results. The failures of the political projects of socialism, according to Mouffe and Laclau, are directly linked to the fact that socialist parties continued to try to present their goals as universal, while relying on an essentialist critique of the economy.[24]

In decentering structure, Mouffe and Laclau do not reject the affect that discourses have. Discourses, as modes of power in a Foucauldian sense, still act upon and limit the subject.[25] What is different from the classical Marxist understanding, however, is that these "structures" do not *determine* modes of being, nor do they follow a scientific, linear logic. Instead, discourses operate as ideological apparatuses in a located environment so their effects are contingent rather than completely prescriptive and predictable. For Mouffe and Laclau, all acts are acts of discourse. However, while they argue that there is no meaning outside of discourse, this does not equate to them saying that *existence* relies on the discursive. Laclau and Mouffe write that

> [t]he fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of "natural phenomena" or "expressions of the wrath of God", depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different

[23] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 85.
[24] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 7-91.
[25] Although Mouffe and Laclau follow Foucault in his theory of discourse and power, they reject his distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic elements of discourse (ibid, p. 107).

> assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.[26]

In relation to capitalism, such an understanding means that capitalism cannot be seen as an objective referent; rather it is an ensemble of practices and institutions that constitute meaning in a certain way. For example, under a discourse of neoliberal capitalism, illegal migrants may be seen as a good thing because they supply cheap labour and pose little threat of unionising or demanding better working conditions. However, through a discourse of ultra-nationalism these same people are constructed as a threat to the status quo because they are deemed to impinge on the rights of "ordinary" citizens, and fail to assimilate. Different again is the construction under a discourse of universal human rights for, while the migrants may not be defined as equal according to a legalistic discourse of citizenship, appeals to equal working conditions under the rights model could be warranted. This example clearly illustrates that it is through discourse that meaning is constituted. The discourse theory of Mouffe and Laclau therefore fundamentally challenges the economism of classical Marxism, which sees capitalism as a natural progression with unequivocal results. Instead, Mouffe and Laclau set up a clear argument against theories premised on centred structures with necessarily determined consequences.

HEGEMONY

The poststructuralist account of discourse concludes that there is no centre to social, political, or economic structures; therefore, nothing can assume to stand in for the whole. However, this does not prevent discourse trying to fill this lack. According to Mouffe and Laclau, all discourses will attempt to stabilise power relations and portray its construction as the natural order. In doing so, the discourse becomes hegemonic. This hegemony is achieved by continually embedding practices, acts, intuitions, etc. with meaning such that the meaning becomes normalised. As Mouffe writes,

[26] Ibid, p. 108.

> [i]n capitalism, these are the relations of production, but this fact should not be explained as an effect of structure; it is, rather, that the centrality of production relations has been conferred by a hegemonic policy…A constant struggle must create the conditions necessary to validate capital and its accumulation. This implies a set of practices that are not merely economic but political and cultural as well.[27]

The often-cited example of this was Margaret Thatcher's discourse of economic reform. As Stuart Hall has outlined Thatcher's ability to "sell" the ideals of her new (neoliberal) economic agenda came about because she was able to link cultural and political practices with economic ones.[28] Thatcher was unrelenting when it came to espousing that there was, due to new globalised forces, a cultural imperative to implement these changes. Indeed her catch phrase that "*There is no alternative*" perfectly embodies the power of her hegemonic discourse. By characterising the economic reforms as a necessary response to outside forces, Thatcher erased the political and ideological dimensions and was able to portray the changes as a rational and *neutral* set of policies. As this example shows then, when hegemony is established, the constitutive nature of the discourse is portrayed as natural and therefore neutral. As Mouffe points out, '[w]hat is at a given moment accepted as the "natural order", with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices'[29] and unlike the way Thatcher attempted to portray her policies, they are actually 'never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity outside of the practices that bring it into being.'[30]

In securing hegemony, discourses attempt to hide the political elements and the power relations of its constitution. Indeed, Mouffe and Laclau's analysis shows that it is through the process of hegemonic formation, which attempts to erase the political acts of its establishment, that discourses appear natural and neutral.[31] Such discourses therefore also try and hide their vulnerability to alternative, sub-hegemonic challenges that threaten their positions. By

[27] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', pp. 90-91.
[28] Stuart Hall *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (Verso: London; New York, 1988).
[29] Chantal Mouffe 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', *Open*, No. 16, 2009, p. 36.
[30] Ibid, pp. 36-37.
[31] Ibid, pp. 37-38.

understanding the construction of social relations as occurring through hegemonic discourses, rather than natural, objective or neutral effects, Mouffe and Laclau come to the conclusion that such a process is always antagonistic. This is because the sub-hegemonic is always capable of challenging the established order so that 'hegemony is never established conclusively.'[32] As will be seen in the following chapters, the taming of this antagonism (as the 'relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are *shown*'[33]) is the major goal for Mouffe's approach to democracy. The fact that every social relation has the potential to be antagonistic is a key feature of Mouffe's approach and it is a radical element highlighting the constitutive role of power. On another level, this understanding of hegemony also contradicts *a priori* explanations of identity, which argue that there is an essential element to identity – a centre that can produce a whole and complete subject. As will be shown in the following section, Mouffe and Laclau's abatement of *a priori* foundations facilitates their critique of classical Marxism's class essentialism.

-CLASS ESSENTIALISM-

The economism of classical Marxism further perpetuated problems in the theory, according to Mouffe and Laclau, through the reduction of analysis to class relations. The classical Marxist position that all forms of oppression existed because of the natural capitalist system necessarily led to the assumption that the working class was an essentialised group, affected by capitalism in a uniform fashion and should therefore be the privileged site of analysis. However, by rejecting the conception of capitalism as a natural progression and completely determining factor, and seeing it instead as a discursive struggle to achieve hegemony, Mouffe and Laclau challenged these assumptions. Through their analysis and re-theorising, Mouffe and Laclau were able to show that economic oppression was not the only or most important type of oppression, and that the categories of classes were not homogenised and clear-cut. In doing

[32] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', p. 91.
[33] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 125, emphasis in original.

so they transformed Marxist theory and became '*post*-Marxist' and 'post-*Marxist*.'[34]

In classical Marxist theories, the classes are divided along the means of production – the working class proletariat as the source of labour, and the owners of this labour, the bourgeoisie – and each has an essential position under capitalism. According to classical Marxism, because the bourgeoisie own the means of production, they also control the working class, leaving this group to be exploited and oppressed, and with the capitalist system as the historical force, class oppression became the key concern. However Mouffe and Laclau rejected this. They argued that classical Marxism was problematic because this type of analysis: based itself on an *a priori* understanding of the subject; saw the working class as a homogenised group; made class oppression the privileged focus of analysis; and relied upon the worker as the agent of change and revolution. Their post-Marxist alternative, on the other hand, manoeuvred around these issues, as will be detailed below.

CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES

Laclau and Mouffe's reformulation of identity is based on linguistic theory. Using the work of Saussure, Mouffe and Laclau argue that the meaning attributed to identity is arbitrary in the sense that it does not rely on an essential characteristic or natural element. According to Saussure's linguistic theory, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not dependent or predictable because there is nothing inherent in the signified that informs what the signifier should be. For example, the letters "c-a-t" can just as easily be replaced by "g-a-t-o" because both convey the same meaning and there is

[34] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 4. The use of italics here is used to describe their transition from Marxism and also the transition from just a class based analysis. Laclau and Mouffe are *post*-Marxist in the sense that they are moving on from the economism and class essentialism inherent in classical Marxism. They also reject the idea communist revolution espoused by Marx. However, Laclau and Mouffe argue that they are post-*Marxist* in the sense that they maintain some features originating in Marxist discourse (despite their reworking), like hegemony and economic analysis. (See also Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism without Apologies', *New Left Review*, I. 166, November/December 1987, pp. 79-106.) In their words, their post-Marxist label conveys that they are in a 'process of reappropriation of an intellectual tradition, as well as the process of going beyond it' (Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. ix).

'nothing in extra-linguistic matter [that] motivates this process.'[35] However, this meaning can only have relevance within a certain context. Saussure gives the example of a chess game, arguing that it is only within the rules of the game that the identity of the pawn, for example, can be understood.[36] Throughout the game the physical piece could be replaced by a stone and continue to have the same meaning and perform as such. Outside of these rules, however, the physical piece lacks context and identity and remains merely a stone. Mouffe and Laclau build on this theory to argue that, in the same way as the chess piece, identities act as signifiers whose meaning cannot be based on essentialised characteristics and rather 'every identity is the result of a constituting process.'[37] It is important to note, however, that the process of constructing meaning is not a matter of *choosing* to apply value, as it is the *discourse* that sets the limitations. As a set of practices and acts, discourse informs how we use language and thus stresses some meanings over others. Furthermore, throughout this process of identity formation, there will always be lines drawn as to what the signifier does *not* represent – a cat is not a dog and the pawn piece is not the queen. In this fashion, an identity is set against an "other" or what is referred to as the "constitutive outside".[38] For Mouffe and Laclau, this constitutive outside highlights the political nature of identity construction because the process is antagonistic – the other, in being other, disrupts the fullness of my identity, and yet at the same time, it is by being set against this other that my identity is given meaning. As Torfing explains,

> if complete totalisation, and thus closure, is impossible, it is because the absence of a fixed centre extends the process of signification within the structure infinitely. In the absence of a complete totalisation a structure exists only as a field of signification within which an ambiguous and temporary order is established by a multiplicity of mutually substituting centres. The creation of a relative structural order is conditional upon the exclusion of a constitutive outside which threatens the relative order of the structure and prevents an ultimate closure.[39]

[35] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 85.
[36] Ibid, p. 86.
[37] Chantal Mouffe 'Decision, Deliberation, and Democratic Ethos', *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Spring 1997, p. 27.
[38] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 2.
[39] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 86.

Therefore, through a positive disassociation of what the identity does not represent, the signifier conveys meaning, and 'the presence of something always has the *traces* of something else which is absent'.[40] For Mouffe and Laclau, this means that difference is always a constitutive feature and must be facilitated.

This challenges the essentialism underlying classical Marxism, which relies on a centred view of the economy to necessarily create *a priori* categories of classes with predetermined interests. The constitutive outside means that 'an object has inscribed in its very being something other than itself; [and] as a result, everything is constructed as difference, its being cannot be conceived as pure "presence" or "objectivity".'[41] Instead, Mouffe and Laclau use the term "subject positions" to illustrate the different ways that the subject can be positioned (affected) by discourse. As Smith explains,

> [e]ach of the subject positions are like "floating signifiers": their meaning is never entirely fixed but always remains open to change. The meaning of a subject position is constructed through its differential relations with the other subject positions that are found in a given discursive formation.[42]

This re-conceptualisation allows Mouffe and Laclau to highlight that it is not just economic discourses that construct the subject; nor can the subject's identity be considered completely static or the result of one determining factor. Instead, a subject may be positioned according to discourses (decentred structures of power) that construct gender, sexuality, and race relations as well as of class. Therefore,

> [t]he struggles of the proletariat – understood as signifier – can never *ground* social relations, because class struggles only ever have meaning in a contingently articulated relationship to a series of other subject positions – or signifiers (ethnic, counter-cultural, gender and environmentalist struggles, for example).[43]

This also allows Mouffe and Laclau to show that each subject position may be *articulated* in different ways. An articulation is the contextualised practice or act;

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[40] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism without Apologies', p. 89, emphasis in original.
[41] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', in George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (Eds.) *Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective* (Routledge: London; New York, 2009), p. 333.
[42] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 87.
[43] Mark Anthony Wenman 'Laclau or Mouffe?', p. 587, emphasis in original.

the way that the subject responds to the discourse. However, this response should not be seen as an act of complete autonomy or choice of act for, while there is agency, this is affected by the discursive whole, and as such the subject is never completely free from this relationship. So, just as the rules of the chess game constitute how the chess piece is valued, they also limit this value because the meaning must fit within the framework of the rules of the game.

By challenging the *a priori* existence of subjects, Mouffe and Laclau highlight an important gap within classical Marxist analysis. While the authors insist that class positioning within the discourse is an important element to be considered, they also argue that considering class identity as *a priori* misses the constructed nature of these relations and erroneously makes class the key point of analysis. It also fails to see the different positions *within* the signifier of "working class". For example, Mouffe and Laclau write that

> [w]ithin a given country and within the same company, a distinction may be drawn between central and peripheral workers, belonging to different labour markets, whose wages and working conditions reflect their unequal capacity for resistance…The divisions within the working class are therefore more deeply rooted than many wish to allow…They are political, and not merely economic divisions.[44]

Therefore, Mouffe and Laclau instead argue that the constructed nature of identities necessarily means that the subject can be positioned in multiple ways, according to multiple discourses, and under the influence of the presence of the "other". They conclude then that the relationship to the means of production is just one type of relation. However, by viewing classes as homogenised, and by making the working class the privileged locus of analysis, classical Marxism misses these important *political* differences. Reconceptualising the formation of identities is one of the most radical aspects of Mouffe and Laclau's approach because it challenges all notions of *a priori* existence. This helps to open up Marxist analysis so that more modes of subordination can be examined. It also facilitates a deeper understanding of these power structures because it shows

[44] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 82.

that power is constitutive not just oppressive. Their challenge to essentialism does not, however, negate the validity of a subject's claims. Instead, Mouffe and Laclau argue that

> [t]o deny to the "human" the status of an essence is to draw attention to the historical conditions that have led to its emergence and to make possible, therefore, a wider degree of realism in the fight for the full realization of those values.[45]

In doing so, Mouffe and Laclau allow space for the Left to consider relations outside of those related to the means of production and incorporate the issues highlighted by the new social movements. These will be discussed in the following section.

CHAINS OF EQUIVALENCE

In classical Marxism, the stress on economism necessarily led to the idea that every struggle is necessarily a class struggle. However, by challenging the notion of *a priori* and essentialised subjects, 'the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe forcefully undermines the hegemonic ideologies whereby ruling blocs depict their values and interests as natural or universal'.[46] Seen as an *a priori* group, the working class represented the common and most significantly oppressed, thereby becoming the subject of Marxist analysis. According to Mouffe and Laclau's analysis however, the new social movements along with poststructuralist re-theorising, gave strength to the view that there were inequalities that could not be framed by the subjects' position in relation to the means of production. Witnessing the emergence of these groups, Mouffe and Laclau argued that classical Marxism's analysis was seriously flawed, and essentialising classes in this way undermined the possibility for real change. The authors assert that, in classical Marxism,

> the basic obstacle…has been *classism*: that is to say, the idea that the working class represents the privileged agent in which the fundamental impulse of social change resides – without perceiving that the very orientation of the working class depends upon a political balance of forces and the radicalization

[45] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism without Apologies', p. 102.
[46] Philip Goldstein 'Post-Marxism and Democracy', p. 54.

> of a plurality of democratic struggles which are in good part *outside* of the class itself.[47]

Mouffe and Laclau used the growth of the new social movements to argue that, in order to be truly progressive, the new Left would need to address these inequalities and move beyond the traditional Marxist prioritisation of class oppression. For Mouffe and Laclau the new social movements evidenced that it was no longer possible to limit reform to the sphere of the economic. For example,

> [h]ow…when we are dealing with such universal, trans-class problems as those of resource attrition, the depletion of the ozone layer, Arctic pollution, the greenhouse effect, and so forth, can it be thought appropriate to approach them purely in class terms or to suggest that we must see through the class struggle to its goal of proletarian emancipation before we can hope for any satisfactory resolution of the ecological crisis?[48]

Such challenges go right to the heart of the Marxist notion that the interests of the working class can be seen as universal interests. Similarly, following their rejection of *a priori* essentialism, Mouffe and Laclau would say that 'interests never exist prior to the discourses in which they are articulated and constituted; they cannot be the expression of already existing positions on the economic level',[49] or any other level. Therefore, the homogenisation of class interests is not only inaccurate but also dangerous as it assumes that fundamental interests are possible, and that those of the proletariat can speak for the whole.

In order to accommodate the diversity of inequalities highlighted by the new social movements, Mouffe and Laclau propose establishing "chains of equivalence" that can "integrate" multiple subject positions. It is important to note however, that by constructing these chains, Mouffe and Laclau are not creating a coalition of different interests; they are not simply providing for new demands that are added to a list. Instead, the chains form links between the

[47] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 177, emphasis in original.
[48] Kate Soper 'Greening Prometheus: Marxism and Ecology', in Peter Osborne (Ed.) *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism* (Verso: London; New York, 1991), p. 275.
[49] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', p. 90.

subject positions, such that they are necessarily altered by each other, but their differences are also simultaneously preserved. This ensures that no demand can be sacrificed for the sake of others, and no "interest" can be pursued at the cost of another's.[50] Through the chain, the forms of oppression experienced by each subject position are highlighted so that what "unites" the chains is the establishment of a common "enemy". This is the 'structural limit' or 'critical frontier'[51] – the discursive structure of power affecting the subjects' positions. In order to challenge the discourse, however, the chains of equivalence need to ensure that the equality they are demanding is never at the expense of other groups within the chain. Mouffe and Laclau's theory regarding chains of equivalence facilitate progressive transformation by allowing pluralism within social struggles, highlighting that subordination is experienced in a range of ways. Unlike the classical Marxist approach, Mouffe and Laclau argue that addressing class positions is not enough to rectify oppressive forces. Where classical Marxism argues that once the proletariat have been liberated, the major source of inequality has been resolved, Mouffe and Laclau show that it is only through addressing the inequalities highlighted by the new social movements that the Left can establish a new political project. Therefore, in order for change to be truly progressive, a left alternative needs to address more than economic relations. As the following section will show, this new strategy of Mouffe and Laclau's challenges the traditional Marxist appeal to anti-capitalist revolution.

-REVOLUTION-

Where classical Marxism sees the complete overthrow of the capitalist system as the ultimate, revolutionary goal, Mouffe and Laclau argue for a new type of political project. For Mouffe and Laclau, the Marxist concept of revolution fails to adequately address the needs highlighted by the new social movements. For example, Mouffe says that

[50] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 19.
[51] Chantal Mouffe in David Castle 'Hearts, Minds and Radical Democracy' (interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe), *Red Pepper*, June 1, 1998, first accessed March 2008 at http://www.redpepper.org.uk/article563.html.

> [a] restricted conception of oppression and struggle has limited socialist politics in the past…It tried to absorb them [different struggles] into the model of class struggle rather than respecting them as inherently different forms of resistance arising from different modes of oppression…You are not going to solve the question of sexism by transforming or even ending the capitalist system. The same is true for racism.[52]

Therefore, Mouffe and Laclau argue that a new method of transformation is required, and it must ensure that it is able to deal with the different forms of subordination highlighted by the new social movements, as well as the postmodern and poststructuralist re-conceptions of power witnessed in their reformulation of identity construction. In this context, Mouffe and Laclau offer a new way to conceive of the left political project through radical democracy.

The first point of departure from classical Marxism's understanding of revolution that Mouffe and Laclau take is in relation to the "worker" as the agent of change. As has been explained throughout this chapter, Mouffe and Laclau reject the essentialised conception of the subject, arguing that classical Marxism's focus on class misses other important dimensions. For Mouffe and Laclau the focus on the transformation of the means of production was no longer adequate and economic relations could no longer be viewed legitimately as the priority. Instead, Mouffe and Laclau

> argued that struggles against sexism, racism, sexual discrimination, and the defence of the environment needed to be articulated with those of the workers in a new left-wing hegemonic project. To put it in terminology which has recently become fashionable, we [Laclau and Mouffe] insisted that the Left needed to tackle issues of both "redistribution" and "recognition". This is what is meant by "radical and plural democracy".[53]

In order to do this, Mouffe and Laclau argued that a radical transformation should occur through *democratic* rather than economic means, because their rejection of the economism and essentialism inherent in classical Marxism meant that they also rejected the idea that economic revolution could be the source of all emancipation. As Smith outlines,

[52] Chantal Mouffe in ibid.
[53] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. xviii.

> [i]n the eschatological dimension in Marxist thought, it is assumed that the socialist revolution would resolve all fundamental antagonisms, give birth to a whole new human being and establish a power-free social space. Eschatological Marxism also claims that the working class is the only subject that can emancipate all of humanity from virtually every form of domination, because it alone is destined to become a universal subject, a pure human essence without a trace of particularism. For Laclau and Mouffe, these eschatological assumptions are dangerous illusions.[54]

For Mouffe and Laclau the new social movements highlighted these illusions and provided the potential for democratic struggles to transform social relations. This would be achieved through the formation of chains of equivalence linked by appeals to radical democracy. It is important though to note here that Mouffe and Laclau's understanding of change and transformation differs from the Marxist one on another level. Rather than propose a completely new society that could replace the exiting one, Mouffe and Laclau see their project as a *process* of transformation. For Mouffe and Laclau the social is not a static and complete structure, and instead it operates as a series of power relationships which are always fluid. They 'consider "the social" an indeterminate or irreducible discourse, rather than a predetermined context or structure, and deny, therefore, the traditional guarantees of a revolutionary social transformation.'[55] It would be impossible, under this conception, to view revolution as a final act and so, for Mouffe and Laclau, 'there can never be total emancipation but only partial ones.'[56]

This re-conceptualisation of revolution and society does not, however, undermine Mouffe and Laclau's project and, on the contrary it enables them to address the problems they associate with classical Marxism. By understanding capitalism as a discourse, for example, Mouffe and Laclau show that

> far from being the only natural or possible societal order, [economic globalisation] is the expression of a certain configuration of power relations. It is the result of hegemonic moves on the part of specific social forces which

[54] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 23.
[55] Philip Goldstein 'Post-Marxism and Democracy', p. 60.
[56] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', *Social Research*, Vol. 66, No. 3, Fall 1999, p. 752.

> have been able to implement a profound transformation in the relations between capitalist corporations and the nation-states.[57]

Most importantly, '[t]his hegemony can be challenged.'[58] However, without a new understanding of transformation, the complexities of this power formation cannot be fully understood and thus adequately challenged. It is only by recognising that "structures" operate discursively to secure hegemony that a useful alternative can be proposed, and this is where Mouffe and Laclau's project for securing the hegemony of their new socialist strategy (of radical democracy) comes in. For Mouffe and Laclau it is '[t]he multiplication of political spaces and the preventing of the concentrations of power in one point [that] are, then, [the] preconditions of every truly democratic transformation of society.'[59] The formation of radical democracy as the project for the new Left, which will be discussed in the following section, thereby becomes the means of achieving this transformation.

For Mouffe and Laclau, it is the challenge to and transformation of power relations that is the most radical part of their project. However, with a new postmodern conceptualisation of power, that sees it as constitutive instead of top down and always oppressive, for Mouffe and Laclau the traditional understanding of revolution is no longer adequate. Similarly, the economism and essentialism that they see as inherent in classical Marxism, fail to address the issues brought to the fore by the new social movements, or the challenges resulting from poststructuralist re-theorising. Seeing oppression as coming from a centred structure sheds no light on the diversity of subordination and power relations, or the process of hegemonic formation. Capitalism cannot be seen as simply a phase in history and Mouffe and Laclau's discourse analysis allows for this understanding. In this context, the *Socialist Strategy* outlined by Mouffe and Laclau in their title book, highlights the need to create a new *hegemony* of radical democracy. For the authors, this can only be achieved by making *discursive* changes that enable radical democracy to be implemented as

[57] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. xvi.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid, p. 178.

the new hegemonic *discourse*, thereby challenging the classical Marxist conception of physical revolution. As will be shown in the following section, the means for achieving this change is vastly different from the Left objectives of the times.

- MOUFFE'S (LIBERAL) SOCIALIST STRATEGY -

Mouffe is clear on the problems that she sees in Marxism, but this does not lead her to reject the socialist objective. Instead, she sees socialism 'as a process of democratization of the economy…[and as] a necessary component of the project of radical and plural democracy.'[60] However, because of the problems associated with the essentialism that Mouffe and Laclau see in the left-wing projects of the twentieth century, they argue that '[w]hat is now in crisis is a whole conception of socialism'.[61] The rejection of the economism and class essentialism outlined by Mouffe and Laclau means that it is no longer enough for socialism to address only issues related to the means of production. Therefore, in order to make the socialist project relevant for a modern society, Mouffe instead proposes a restructuring of the socialist strategy. In order to facilitate this change, however, Mouffe turns to an unlikely theoretical partner for socialism – liberalism. This partnership is contentious because, as Mouffe herself notes,

> capitalist relations constitute an insuperable obstacle to the realization of democracy. And it is true that liberalism has generally been identified with the defence of private property and the capitalist economy. However this identification is not a necessary one, as some liberals have argued. Rather, it is the result of an articulatory practice, and as such can therefore be broken. Political liberalism and economic liberalism need to be distinguished and then separated from each other. Defending and valuing the political form of society specific to liberal democracy does not commit us to the capitalist economic system.[62]

[60] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 90.
[61] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 2.
[62] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), pp. 2-3.

Therefore, in the end, Mouffe sees little problem in advocating liberalism as the means of achieving the new socialist strategy and indeed she argues that it is '*only*' by using the elements of liberalism that the socialist goals, through radical democracy, can be realised.[63]

For Mouffe socialism represents the pinnacle of anti-capitalism, which for her, is a necessary *but not sufficient* element of the radical democratic approach. Mouffe and Laclau write that

> every project for radical democracy implies a socialist dimension, as it is necessary to put an end to capitalist relations of production, which are at the root of numerous relations of subordination; but socialism is *one* of the components of a project of radical democracy, not vice versa.[64]

Therefore, the left (socialist, and post-Marxist) element of radical democracy becomes only *one* dimension within Mouffe's approach, and it cannot be pursued at the cost of the other elements. Mouffe argues that it is only by reorientating socialist goals that the left element can become relevant to the times and to her project.

In a similar fashion to the poststructuralist critiques that Mouffe and Laclau lay against Marxism, the key problem that Mouffe finds in socialism is its inability to facilitate pluralism and therefore democracy. For Mouffe, pluralism is the defining feature of modernity, and it is the 'greatest contribution of liberalism to modern society', so she argues that it is only by facilitating this element that a political project can be declared democratic.[65] As discussed earlier in this chapter, Mouffe argues that the traditional focus of the Left on issues relating only to class misses other inequalities brought to the fore by the new social movements. Likewise, Mouffe feels that socialism tends to homogenise these differences, trying to assimilate them under the banner of class so that the plurality of these struggles is erased. Mouffe and Laclau argue that

[63] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 105, emphasis added.
[64] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 178, emphasis in original.
[65] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 20.

> the crucial limitation of the traditional left perspective is that it attempts to determine *a priori* agents of change, levels of effectiveness in the field of the social, and privileged points and moments of rupture.[66]

With the collapse of Communism Mouffe argues that her position, that the Left requires a new strategy, has been 'vindicated' because this indicates that 'socialism can only have a future if it is envisaged as a deepening of the *pluralist conquests* made by liberal democracy, in other words it must become "liberal socialism".'[67] For Mouffe, liberalism embodies the respect and facilitation of pluralism and she believes that these goals are indebted to the liberal tradition.[68] Therefore, a radical democratic approach, which incorporates socialist goals, democracy, and pluralism, must also *necessarily* incorporate aspects of liberalism, so that 'a democratic socialism is thus bound to be a liberal one.'[69] Mouffe does not completely accept all facets of liberalism though, and in Chapter Three I will outline some of her critiques of the theory. Suffice to say however, Mouffe is adamant that 'there is an urgent need to advocate a "liberal socialism"'[70] if the Left is to be reinvigorated.

Mouffe's decision to make liberalism an element of radical democracy is not new or unique and theorists like C.B. Macpherson have long advocated this position.[71] In order to outline her argument for a radical *liberal* democratic approach, Mouffe turns to the work of Norberto Bobbio.[72] According to Mouffe,

> Bobbio has for a long time put forward the thesis not only that socialist goals *could* be realised within the framework of liberal democracy, but they could *only* be realised acceptably within such a framework.[73]

For Mouffe, as for Bobbio, the liberal democratic regime provides the best mechanism for ensuring a respect and facilitation of the principles of liberty and

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[66] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 178-179.
[67] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', in Judith Squires (Ed.) *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1993), pp. 69-70, emphasis added.
[68] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 7.
[69] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism', p. 70.
[70] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 90.
[71] Aletta J. Norval 'Radical Democracy', in Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (Routledge: London, 2001), p. 587; and Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 102-103.
[72] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 90-97; and Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism', pp. 70-79.
[73] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism', p. 70, emphasis in original.

equality. As Bobbio writes, "if liberalism provides those liberties necessary to the proper exercise of democratic power, democracy guarantees the existence and persistence of fundamental liberties'."[74] Therefore, a socialist alternative must include fundamental aspects of the liberal democratic tradition like 'constitutionalism, parliamentarism and a competitive multi-party system.'[75] Furthermore, Mouffe argues that

> [f]ar from covering up the class divisions of capitalist society…they [liberal political institutions] guarantee the protection of individuals' rights against the tyranny of the majority or the domination of the totalitarian party or state.[76]

In order to make use of the liberal tradition in radical democracy, however, Mouffe argues that it needs to be re-theorised. In Mouffe's view, the radical democratic approach 'requires us to abandon the abstract universalism of the Enlightenment, the essentialist conception of a social totality, and the myth of a unitary subject',[77] which are common in the liberal tradition. This is because such conceptions mask the role of power. This perpetuates the problems associated with an essentialised view of the subject that she and Laclau critique in Marxism, and overlooks the inherent presence of the political. Mouffe is particularly cautious about over-privileging liberalism's 'atomistic' individualism[78] because, while Mouffe recognises its role asserting pluralism and liberty, she 'now question[s] whether such an individualist conception has not become an obstacle to the extension of democratic ideals.'[79] In her re-theorising then, Mouffe advocates rethinking the concepts of human rights and citizenship so that they become inscribed with the dimension of the social. Mouffe's poststructuralism means that she rejects *a priori* notions of the subject that result in an appeal to universal human rights. Instead, she sees both the subject and rights as constituted through social relations. In this context then, any liberal elements that are utilised by the radical democratic approach need to

[74] Norberto Bobbio as quoted by ibid, p. 70.
[75] Chantal Mouffe, ibid, p. 71.
[76] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 21.
[77] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 21.
[78] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism', p. 84.
[79] Ibid, p. 76.

be re-considered through the lens of Mouffe's poststructuralist, discourse analysis. An explanation of this re-theorising occurs later in Chapter Four.

Ultimately, Mouffe argues that by working within the paradigm of liberalism, utilising its respect of autonomy that is embodied in a variety of political institutions,[80] radical democracy can ensure that pluralism and difference are not sacrificed for the sake of socialist goals. Following a poststructuralist understanding of the construction of subjectivities, Mouffe believes that pluralism and difference are essential and therefore need to be provided for in a democratic model. However, because of its tradition of viewing oppression and change through the lens of economism, socialism requires liberalism in order to bring the importance of pluralism to the fore.

Mouffe's understanding of pluralism is, however, different from liberalism's in an important way. Where liberal pluralism espouses a "tolerance" of difference, which neutralises the conflict caused by diversity, Mouffe's pluralism recognises the *political* dimension.[81] As discussed in relation to identity formation, relations of difference are always antagonistic according to Mouffe, because the constitutive outside can always disrupt and challenge. While the outside contributes to identity construction through its juxtaposition to the subject, this same positioning highlights the limits of what the identity can account for; by not being able to fully incorporate the outside, the completeness of the identity is questioned. As such, identities are always "overdetermined" in that meaning is always renegotiated and so is never fully fixed,[82] and the temporary stability of meaning is only ever sutured.[83] In this way, the presence of difference is not merely an element to be tolerated but rather, following Mouffe's approach, it contributes the political dimension of all social relations. Although, as will be

[80] For example, 'the defence of pluralism, the idea of individual liberty, the separation of church and state, [and] the development of civil society' (Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 62).
[81] Ibid, p. 152.
[82] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 111.
[83] As Mouffe and Laclau explain, "suture" refers to the element of lack within an identity and the simultaneous "filling-in" caused by discourse. For instance, while an identity can never be fully grounded in an essence that can prescribe meaning, the process of identity formation nevertheless creates (temporary) meaning such that an identity is conveyed (ibid, p. 88, endnote 1).

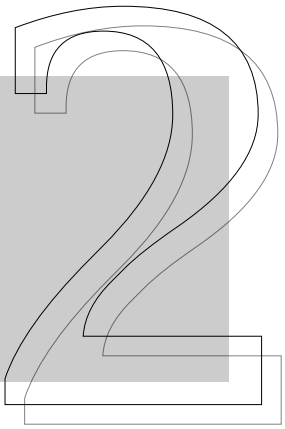
shown in Chapter Three, Mouffe does not believe that liberalism adequately addresses the issue of the political, she nevertheless feels that, in comparison to socialism, liberalism is still better equipped to deal with pluralism. For Mouffe, liberalism has an established tradition of institutions and principles that facilitate pluralism, and thus they can provide the means for the new socialist strategy.

- CONCLUSION -

By challenging the essentialist features of classical Marxist theory, Mouffe is able to highlight the important elements that this theory necessarily misses. However, instead of rejecting Marxism completely, Mouffe is able to use her poststructuralist and postmodern understanding to re-orient this analysis. In doing so, she helps to secure a new strategy for left objectives. Seeing the emergence of the new social movements as a catalyst for re-examination and strengthening, Mouffe is able to provide for the pluralism of these needs without sacrificing diversity or the goals of the Left. Similarly, by incorporating the institutions of liberalism to provide for this pluralism, Mouffe is ensuring that her radical democratic approach tackles any claims of inherent totalitarianism directed at the Left. The facilitation of difference is a key democratic element in Mouffe's approach, and radical democracy ensures that this feature is not subordinated for the sake of capitalist critique; or vice versa. Indeed for Mouffe, '*the possibility of deepening the anti-capitalist struggle itself depends on the extension of the democratic revolution.*'[84] As such, Mouffe presents her approach as a process of *deepening* and *extending* liberal democracy rather than replacing it completely. As a strategy for the Left, this is indeed a radical proposal, the success of which will be discussed in following chapters.

[84] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism without Apologies', p. 103, emphasis in original.

Deliberative & Third Way Theories



The field of deliberative democracy and Third Way approaches are the zeitgeist alternatives to traditional liberal approaches to democracy and politics, although for Mouffe, both theories are fundamentally flawed. In drawing out Mouffe's radical democratic approach through her critique of the two alternatives, little attention will be paid to the different strains that exist in both deliberative and Third Way models. Rather, key concepts and notable theorists will be identified and used to illustrate the important principles of each of the models. In the section on deliberative democracy I will focus specifically on the ideas of Jürgen Habermas, as he is considered the principal theorist in this area, and his work is often the one to which Mouffe refers. With regard to the section on the Third Way, I will analyse the themes within the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, as these are the two authors with whom Mouffe takes issue. In this regard, this chapter does not aim to provide a detailed exegesis of the models, but rather it uses them to highlight where Mouffe thinks her approach offers important differences. By limiting the discussion to Mouffe's generalisation of the theories, I am aiming to illustrate more clearly Mouffe's frames of reference, which bring context to her approach. It is also important to note that both the deliberative democracy and Third Way approaches are responses to different things (deliberative democracy aims to provide a deeper form of liberal democracy while the objective of the Third Way is to provide a new model for the Left); however Mouffe tends to discuss them together. For Mouffe they are both examples of what she refers to as the "post-political" terrain in that they

focus on consensus and the elimination of antagonism. As will be shown throughout this chapter, however, antagonism is the essential component of the political, according to Mouffe, and thus informs every dimension of a radical democratic approach. Mouffe argues that the political occurs at the ontological level and thus any attempt to mitigate it results in undemocratic processes. This forms one of Mouffe's most radical conceptions and it is this feature to which she contrasts herself in the post-political approaches discussed below.

- HABERMAS -

The work of Jürgen Habermas is dense and complex, and over time he has made numerous changes in response to critiques.[1] However, in order to allow continuity in the discussion and the arguments relevant to the work of Mouffe, I have limited my focus to four main components; namely Habermas's approach to reason, the common good, the public sphere, and his model of the "ideal speech situation". While these four elements contribute to the overall model that Habermas proposes, underlying all of his work and forming the foundation for these four aspects, is the notion of consensus. For Habermas, reaching consensus is the sure way to achieve democratic legitimacy and fairness, and hence his work can be seen as antithetical to Mouffe's approach. While Mouffe and Habermas share the belief that democracy provides the best means to accommodate pluralism, their approaches are markedly different. As we saw in Chapter One, Mouffe believes that pluralism is the constitutive element of modernity and thus it is the facilitation of this that radical democracy needs to ensure. For Mouffe this can only occur by allowing a democratic outlet for antagonisms, which she takes to be 'ineradicable in politics.'[2] While Habermas similarly sees pluralism as an always-present feature of society, he argues that deliberative democracy, with its objective of consensus, offers the best method for dealing with difference. For Habermas, and unlike Mouffe, pluralism needs

[1] Andrew Edgar *Habermas: The Key Concepts* (Routledge: London; New York, 2006), p. xiv.
[2] Chantal Mouffe 'Which Public Sphere for a Democratic Society?', *Theoria,* June 2002, p. 57.

to be tempered so that it does not interfere with the democratic process. He writes

> '[i]f questions of justice cannot transcend the ethical self-understanding of competing forms of life, and existentially relevant value 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.'[3]

As will be shown in the following chapter however, Mouffe utilises Schmitt to inform her radical democratic approach precisely because of his focus on antagonism.

Much of Habermas's work is stimulated by the problems he perceives within liberal democracy. These, according to Habermas, lie in liberal democracy's tendency to overlook the process of participation by the people.[4] However, according to Mouffe, Habermas's 'aim is not to relinquish liberalism but to recover its moral dimension.'[5] Liberal democracies maintain that the principles of liberty and equality are facilitated adequately through the legal system, constitutions and democratically elected governments, and that these systems have legitimate power to make decisions on behalf of the polity. For Habermas, however, this process is too removed from the community and tends to cater more for the needs of elites rather than a broad spectrum of society,[6] and it leaves legitimacy to be claimed through governmental apparatuses rather than direct procedural involvement. Habermas writes that

> [h]ere [in a liberal democracy] politics (in the sense of the citizens' political will-formation) has the function of bundling together and pushing private interests against a governmental apparatus specializing in the administrative employment of political power for collective goals.[7]

[3] Jürgen Habermas as quoted by ibid, p. 56.
[4] Ilan Kapoor 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? The Relevance of the Habermas-Mouffe Debate for Third World Politics', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political,* Oct-Dec 2002, Vol. 27, No. 4, p. 468.
[5] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000) p. 83.
[6] Mouffe has a similar critique of liberal democracies. See for example Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox,* pp. 95 and 96. This discussion of liberalism is explored in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis.
[7] Jürgen Habermas 'Three Normative Models of Democracy', in Seyla Benhabib (Ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1996), p. 21.

To mitigate this, Habermas suggests a deliberative democratic approach where decisions are made directly by citizens, through discussion within the public sphere. The "deliberative turn", as John Dryzek calls it,

> represents a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged with by competent citizens.[8]

Based on the idea that decisions gain legitimacy through public deliberation, this model of democracy reprioritises collective consensus as an alternative to the liberal concept of balancing private interests. Following a deliberative model, the political is conceptualised as being contained in a public sphere where every citizen is required to participate and political authority is gained through "rational" agreement.

-REASON-

Reason is at the core of Habermas's model of deliberative democracy because '[t]he defence of reason is, for Habermas, inseparable from the project of promoting a democratic social order.'[9] However his conception is somewhat different from the traditional Enlightenment approach. Habermas argues that reason can no longer be located in privileged, *a priori* subjects or concepts, as it is in say Marxism or Kant's humanism. In both examples there were deemed to be external, moral imperatives and impartial truths that were static and absolute. In contrast, Habermas's normative structures come purely out of communication because for him,

> in post-metaphysical and pluralist societies, where no particular subject can claim privileged access to Truth or Right, only communicative rationality can legitimately integrate social action.[10]

Therefore, rather than appeal to some pre-existing, external, supposedly universal truth, Habermas argues that universality and reason are *created* through the process of deliberation. Society can no longer rely (if it ever could) on a

[8] John S. Dryzek 'Introduction: The Deliberative Turn in Democratic Theory', in John S. Dryzek *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), p. 1.
[9] Steven Seidman 'Introduction', in Steven Seidman (Ed.) *Jürgen Habermas On Society and Politics: A Reader* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1989), p.1.
[10] Lasse Thomassen 'Habermas and his Others', *Polity,* Vol. 37, No. 4, October 2005, p. 549.

homogenous and unifying notion of the common good. Instead, through deliberation and the consequential consensus that is reached, "rationality", that is the "good", is secured because

> the guarantee of rationality is grounded in the potential testability and criticizability of all validity claims. The cognitive use of language demands of us that we supply reasons for assertions, and these can be checked by the experience of the listener. The interactive use of language[11] compels us to provide justification.[12]

However, rationality is a narrow concept that can minimise rather than provide real debate because it focuses simply on achieving consensus. Therefore, any ideas or opinions not accepted by the majority are deemed "irrational". This has the effect of excluding alternative viewpoints from the political sphere, which helps to perpetuate the status quo. According to Iris Marion Young,

> [r]ational totalising thought reduces heterogeneity to unity by bringing the particulars under comprehensive categories. Beneath these linguistic categories, totalising thought posits more real substances, self-same entities underlying the apparent flux of experience. These substances firmly fix what does not belong within the category, what the thing is and is not.[13]

This essentialising process thereby privileges certain approaches; however, it does so under the guise of rationality and neutrality, and erases the political aspect. Unlike Mouffe, Habermas relies on clearly defined categories in relation to what is deemed rational (and thus acceptable) and what is considered insignificant (with regard to the public, so it is left to the private sphere) the result of which is a consensus driven conception of politics. Mouffe sees this approach as a 'phenomena…indicating the triumph of a moralizing liberalism which pretends that antagonisms have been eradicated'.[14] This is unacceptable for Mouffe because, as we saw in Chapter One, for her, antagonism is the

[11] It is important to note here that Habermas's understanding of language is not the same as Mouffe's concept of discourse. In Habermas's model language is just that – speech, discussion and debate. However, in Mouffe's approach discourse includes speech acts *as well as* practices, institutions, principles, etc.
[12] Robert C. Holub *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (Routledge: London; New York, 1991) pp. 14-15.
[13] Iris Marion Young 'Together in Difference: Transforming the Logic of Group Political Conflict', in Judith Squires (Ed.) *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1993) p.126.
[14] Chantal Mouffe 'Which Public Sphere', p. 56.

essential element of the political. Therefore, any attempt to silence it misses this vital dimension and thus situates itself within the post-political terrain.

Deliberative democrats like Habermas instead require us to be persuaded by communicative, rational argument, and to compromise our interests through the pursuit of consensus. However, for Mouffe, this endangers the democratic polity. She writes that

> [a] well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation of democratic political positions. If this is missing there is always the danger…that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identifications. Too much emphasis on consensus, together with aversion towards confrontations, leads to apathy and to disaffection with political participation.[15]

Mouffe argues that in a pluralist society, antagonism is an essential component, and thus efforts to thwart it through a push for consensus, result in a disabling of the democratic model. For Mouffe it is precisely this antagonism that makes democracy possible and therefore, it needs to be valued and facilitated, not rationalised or deliberated out of sight.

-THE PUBLIC SPHERE & COMMON GOOD-

Habermas's understanding of the public sphere stems from his historical examination of the structure of the public sphere, specifically the bourgeois public of the 17th century.[16] Craig Calhoun describes Habermas's findings:

> Structural transformation [of the public sphere] came about…as private organizations began increasingly to assume public power on one hand, while the state penetrated the private realms on the other. State and society, once distinct, became interlocked. The public sphere was necessarily transformed as the distinction between public and private realms blurred, the equation between the intimate sphere and private life broke down with a polarization

[15] Ibid, pp. 57-58.

[16] While many of Habermas's early works focus on this transformation, he has noted that, upon further reflection, there are changes he would have made. For an explicit discussion of such changes, see Jürgen Habermas 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', in Craig Calhoun (Ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 421-461.

> of family and economic society, rational-critical debate gave way to the consumption of culture.[17]

Habermas believes that this change resulted in a citizenry that was no longer linked specifically and exclusively to the state, and subjects were not simply autonomous, private individuals. Rather, the fundamental transformation of the public sphere facilitated "people's *public* use of their reason."[18] Instead of asserting their power against state authority or trying to pursue their individual interest, a sense of "public" concern was created. However,

> Habermas' [sic] concept of the public sphere is not to be equated with that of "the public", i.e. of the individuals who assemble. His concept is directed instead at the institution, which to be sure only assumes concrete form through the participation of people. It cannot, however, be characterized simply as a crowd.[19]

Therefore, Habermas's public sphere is not simply a set of citizens nor is it simply a set of individuals "congregating" in a space, all with their private interests in tow. Rather, it is a "space" whereby people "rationally" discuss issues related to the *public* concern. Unlike a liberal aggregative model, Habermas's model is only concerned with the 'general interest'.[20] Under a liberal model, claims are made on the basis of interests and follow, for example, the rules of the market. Here pluralism refers to the individual interests of subjects, or the aggregative needs of different groups. In this case, individuals, lobby groups, or activists fight to have their interests recognised and protected. Their success is only achieved through the acquisition of power. It is a constant competition and individuals or groups are always pitted against each other. However, under Habermas's deliberative model,

> the paradigm [of politics] is not the market but dialogue. This dialogic conception imagines politics as contestation over questions of *value* and not simply questions of preference.[21]

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[17] Craig Calhoun 'Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere', in Craig Calhoun (Ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 21.
[18] Jürgen Habermas as quoted by ibid, p. 9, emphasis added.
[19] Peter Hohendahl in Jürgen Habermas 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)', *New German Critique*, No. 3, Autumn 1974, p. 49, footnote 1.
[20] Jürgen Habermas, ibid, p. 231.
[21] Jürgen Habermas 'Three Normative Models of Democracy', p. 23, emphasis added.

Habermas moves away from interest or identity based political debate and rather argues that the focus is about the quality of the argument that needs to be made in relation to the general interest. Similarly, deliberative theorist Seyla Benhabib argues that the idea that we have preformed conceptions of our interests is in fact a fallacy. She writes that

> it is incoherent to assume that individuals can start a process of public deliberation with a level of conceptual clarity about their choices and preferences that can actually result only from a successful process of deliberation…the formation of coherent preferences cannot precede deliberation; it can only succeed it.[22]

Under a deliberative model then, the pluralism of individual interests is not problematic because they only become visible after deliberation. At this point they can then be "transcended" by reaching a rationally achieved consensus (through argument) in the interest of the new public concern.

Republican notions of the public sphere and common good heavily influence Habermas's ideas here, and he sees them as alternatives to the liberal "private interest", aggregative, model. According to Habermas, liberal democracies function through the state and the market and hence individuals are constantly battling these hierarchies to achieve and protect their interests.[23] In contrast, the republican understanding of politics creates a 'horizontal political will-formation aimed at mutual understanding [and] communicatively achieved consensus'.[24] However, while Habermas likes the republican notion of common good, he wants to temper its "'ethical overload"'[25] by providing a proceduralist model of democracy whereby the common good or right action are determined by consensus reached through deliberation rather than as an appeal to a pre-existing, governing ideal. Therefore, Habermas appeals to deliberative rationality (and consensus) in order to determine the public good.

[22] Seyla Benhabib 'Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy', in Seyla Benhabib (Ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1996), p. 71.
[23] Jürgen Habermas 'Three Normative Models of Democracy', p. 21.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

Habermas wants the common good to be more democratic and not rely on a preconceived idea of what the "good" is. Rather under his model

> authority emerges from the citizens' power produced communicatively in the praxis of self-legislation, and it finds its legitimisation in the fact that it protects this praxis by institutionalizing public liberty. So, the state's raison d'être lies not primarily in the protection of equal private rights but in the guarantee of an inclusive opinion- and will-formation in which free and equal citizens reach an understanding on which goals and norms lie in the equal interest of all.[26]

To gain legitimacy in Habermas's approach, the notion of the public good should come directly from the people but not in a utilitarian sense where it is simply majority interests that are served. Rather, through deliberation consensus can be reached on what is beneficial for *all*, because 'instances which claim obligatory power do so on the presumption that their decisions represent an impartial standpoint which is equally *in the interest of all*.'[27]

For Habermas there is a difference between mere agreement and rational consensus, and the latter is defined through a moral component. This requires that moral rationalisation is privileged. This means that it is not simply about consensus through persuasion and compromise; rather citizens must agree that the proposals are morally acceptable to all involved. Hence there is a degree of universalism, but it is not an *a priori* claim. The universalism is *created* through deliberation and the consequential rational agreement.

> The fundamental principle [of deliberative democracy] is that citizens owe one another justifications for the laws they collectively impose on one another…The reasons are not merely procedural ("because the majority favors it") or purely substantive ("because it is a human right"). They appeal to moral principles (such as basic liberty or equal opportunity).[28]

Habermas explains that, rather than appeal to some pre-existing moral imperative, the deliberative process requires that the respondents engage in a type of transference whereby 'the addressees of the norms must be able to see

[26] Ibid, p. 22.
[27] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox,* p. 87, emphasis added.
[28] Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson 'Why Deliberative Democracy is Different', in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller Jr. and Jeffery Paul (Eds.) *Democracy* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2000), p. 161.

themselves simultaneously as the authors of the norms.'[29] This process appears to mirror Mouffe's use of Derrida's constitutive outside in that the other directly affects the subject. However, Habermas's approach is simply a cerebral, rational, process rather than one which acknowledges power. The recognition of the processes of power (in a Foucauldian sense) is an essential element of Mouffe's approach and contributes to the radicalness of her model. Mouffe recognises that power is constitutive and therefore cannot be eliminated. She therefore contends that models like Habermas's, which believe they can neutralise power, are based on false assumptions about the nature of power within the polity.

In some instances, however, Habermas is like Mouffe.[30] For example, Habermas recognises the pluralistic nature of the modern polity and thus his model is an attempt to deal with this. However, Habermas relies on reason as the means to "temper" differences and secure a homogenised, unified society, because

> only in a society in which a general notion of reason can be invoked can we hope to sustain a good society. Without an appeal to general standards of truth and goodness, social life gravitates towards an endless power struggle among antagonistic interest groups.[31]

In contrast, Mouffe argues that in trying to regulate pluralism and antagonism, Habermas is in fact eliminating the political element of politics. According to Mouffe, antagonism is an essential part of the political. Here she differentiates between "politics" and "the political" by stating that the political is 'a discursively constructed ensemble of social relations'.[32] Simply, it is the space in which power, difference, and antagonism are entangled. Politics, on the other

[29] Lasse Thomassen 'Habermas and his Others', p. 549.
[30] For example, Habermas was influenced by Marxism, however this was more in the tradition of the Frankfurt School and thus he is considered more of a critical theorist than an orthodox Marxist or post-Marxist thinker. (Steven Seidman 'Introduction', p. 6; and Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', in Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little (Eds.) *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2009), p. 2.)
[31] Steven Seidman 'Introduction', p. 1.
[32] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 11.

hand, is 'the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created'.[33] Unlike Habermas's view of politics, Mouffe states

> that the domain of politics – even when fundamental issues like justice or basic principles are concerned – is not a neutral terrain that could be insulated from the pluralism of values and where rational, universal solutions could be formulated.[34]

For Mouffe the political informs every facet of a truly democratic project and hence this becomes the foundation for radical democratic theory. She states that the political 'must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition.'[35] Therefore, Mouffe sees antagonism and the political as axioms that inform every facet of her approach. For Mouffe, in order to really facilitate the political, the organisation of society (i.e. a democratic model) should ensure that antagonisms are not eliminated or tempered, or relegated to a separate, private sphere, but rather given a public, democratic space to be explored. It is only through this process that we can ensure a truly political and democratic society.

Through her theory of antagonism, Mouffe challenges one of the most pervasive assumptions of democratic theory. In many models of democracy, theorists tend to focus on finding ways to establish consensus, believing that through this, the will of the public is achieved. This parallels more utilitarian conceptions of democracy, which tend to focus on the will of the majority rather than accommodating challenges to the status quo. It is this oversight of the minority that prompted the liberal approach to be partnered with democratic theory. As Alexis de Tocqueville and J.S. Mill warned, we need to ensure against the "tyranny of the majority" and this is exactly the warning which motivates Mouffe to stress the importance of the liberal approach in her project of radical democracy, that she sees as protecting the notion of the individual. For Mouffe, antagonism is the principal element of political interaction, but it is also intimately linked to our ontology. Due to the

[33] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 9.
[34] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 92.
[35] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 3.

constructed nature of the subject, antagonism is always possible and therefore needs to be accommodated. At its core, the political is a recognition of the affective role of power because it is the dimension which makes space for antagonism – the acknowledgement of the fact that there will always be an us/them relationship in a diverse society. A further explanation of this us/them distinction and formation is detailed in later chapters.

In her radical democratic theory Mouffe, while acknowledging the difference imperative, does concede that some concessions need to be made with regard to consensus. Mouffe warns against advocating a position that stresses total pluralism without recognising the constructed nature of such differences and positions. As explained in Chapter One, Mouffe argues that the construction of identities and hegemonic positions occur through discursive interactions which always involve power. Therefore, theories that essentialise differences and grant them absolute equality (read as sameness) simply overlook the power matrices involved. She writes,

> by putting an exclusive emphasis on heterogeneity and incommensurability, it impedes us to recognize how certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination and should therefore be challenged by a radical democratic politics.[36]

Mouffe argues that it is important *not* to *over* privilege pluralism so that it turns into an absolute relativist or 'extreme postmodern' position.[37] Rather, Mouffe recognises the power interactions involved, and refuses to grant these differences supremacy. If she did not, then her approach would result in a static conception of difference and force a kind of tolerant co-existence. In contrast she writes that,

> [t]he perspective I [Mouffe] maintain *consistently* rejects any kind of essentialism – either of the totality or of the elements – and affirms that

[36] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', in George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (Eds.) *Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective* (Routledge: London; New York, 2009), p. 334.
[37] Chantal Mouffe 'Democracy, Power, and the "Political"', in Seyla Benhabib (Ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1996), pp. 246-7; Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 7; Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 13; Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 129.

> neither the totality nor the fragments possess any kind of fixed identity, prior to the contingent and pragmatic form of their articulation.[38]

Instead, Mouffe sees differences as being constituted and thus ever changing. This means that they are not seen as moral foundations unable to be transcended (as in absolute relativism), or interests to be fought for (as in liberalism) because she says,

> [s]uch a pluralism misses the dimension of the *political*. Relations of power and antagonisms are erased and we are left with the typical illusion of a pluralism without antagonism…To deny the need for a construction of…collective identities, and to conceive democratic politics exclusively in terms of a struggle of a multiplicity of interest groups or minorities…is to remain *blind to the relations of power.*[39]

However, this does not mean that taking *a* position is problematic as this only becomes dangerous when a position (always laden with bias and subjectivity), is deemed to be neutral or free from power dimensions, like in Habermas's notion of consensus. Mouffe therefore argues that

> in order to radicalize the idea of pluralism, so as to make it a vehicle for a deepening of the democratic revolution, we have to break with rationalism, individualism and universalism. Only on that condition will it be possible to apprehend the multiplicity of forms of subordination that exist in social relations and to provide a framework for the articulation of the different democratic struggles[40].

Mouffe also goes on to explain that

> [t]his does imply the rejection of *any* idea of rationality, individuality or universality, but affirms that they are necessarily plural, discursively constructed and *entangled in power relations*.[41]

The problem with Habermas's theory is that it does not recognise this power matrix and may, therefore, inadvertently perpetuate it. Habermas's position also

> affirm[s] that there is a necessary link between the democratic project of the Enlightenment and its epistemological approach and that, as a consequence,

[38] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 7, emphasis added.
[39] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 20, emphasis added.
[40] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 7.
[41] Ibid, emphasis added.

> to find fault with rationalism and universalism means undermining the very basis of democracy.[42]

For Mouffe, however, it is only by challenging these assumptions that democracy can be ensured. By highlighting the nature of power, Mouffe illustrates that it is always present. Therefore, democratic models need to find ways of accommodating rather than ignoring it.

According to Mouffe, it is only by recognising the nature of power that we can possibly accommodate it. Following poststructuralist thought, Mouffe acknowledges that power is inescapable and that everything is inscribed with meaning through discursive structures. Therefore, any attempt to construct a paradigm or framework contributes to perpetuating some kind of privilege. However, this does not mean that we avoid such constructions and rather we need to participate in the discussion while simultaneously recognising that this process is, by its very nature, unequal. As Mouffe explains,

> [t]he fundamental question for democratic politics is not how to arrive at a rational consensus, that is, a consensus not based on exclusion: this would require the construction of an "Us" that did not have a corresponding "Them"; an impossible feat because – as we have seen – the condition of the constitution of an "Us" is the demarcation of a "Them". The crucial issue for democratic politics, instead, is how to establish this "Us"-"Them" distinction in a way that is compatible with pluralism. The specificity of modern democracy is precisely its recognition and legitimation of conflict; in democratic societies, therefore, conflict cannot and should not be eradicated.[43]

In this context, Mouffe advocates that for an approach to be truly democratic, the recognition of power is vital. While her means for facilitating this will be discussed in Part Two, Habermas's suggestion for mitigating pluralism is discussed next.

-IDEAL SPEECH SITUATION-

According to Seyla Benhabib, in a

[42] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', p. 332.
[43] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy' (Centre for the Study of Democracy: London, 2002), first accessed January 2005 at http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/pdf/Mouffe%PDF%20.pdf, p. 8.

> 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 interest of all results from processes of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free individuals.[44]

In order to ensure such deliberation, Habermas outlines a set of procedures necessary for the public to follow. While the term "ideal speech situation" has, for the most part, been dropped by Habermas, it nevertheless illustrates the key elements of Habermas's discourse ethics. In order to be considered just and fair, Habermas requires that democratic debate must satisfy specific ideals. He writes,

> [t]hese idealizing preconditions demand the complete inclusion of all parties that might be affected, their equality, free and easy interaction, no restrictions on topics and topical contributions, [and] the possibility of revising outcomes[45].

For Habermas, these procedures provide the ideal that we should strive for in the deliberative space, so as to ensure as much objectivity as possible. While it may never be achieved, the ideal speech situation provides a "'regulatory idea"'[46] that can govern how fair each deliberation is. The more the process satisfies the procedure, the more legitimate the outcomes are deemed.

Habermas needs the ideal speech situation precisely because we can never fully detach from our subjectivities, hence we need a structure or set of procedures that can moderate these and promote, more fully, rational debate and consensus. Under his view then, we need a structure or set of procedures that can mitigate bias and promote rational debate and consensus. However, as Mouffe argues, this is a false ideal to strive for. By reinscribing the democratic process into a procedure surrounding rational consensus, Habermas overlooks the complex nature of a diverse polity. Firstly, the notion that there can be neutral sets of procedures is misguided, according to Mouffe. She uses the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein to argue that rules and practices are always embedded

[44] Seyla Benhabib 'Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy', p. 69.
[45] Jürgen Habermas 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p. 449.
[46] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 88.

with values, and thus require an adherence to the principles which facilitate the process to begin with.[47] Therefore, we are never detached from the rules of the game and no procedures are ever objective or neutral.

Wittgenstein shows, according to Mouffe, that practices and procedures, like Habermas's ideal speech situation, are not neutral devices. They are actually, by virtue of being employed, already embodied with a value system that it is trying to isolate. Setting up institutions to ensure justice, for example the legal system, means that there is already an inherent understanding of what justice refers to. In this example one element is equality before the law so that people are judged as innocent until proven guilty. However, it is not because there is a universal, objective essence to the definition of the concept of justice that this element becomes important. Rather, it is because, by the simple act of using language, a meaning of this type of legal justice is constructed and inferred. As Wittgenstein says, "if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definition but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements."[48] This means that, beyond the definition of language, there is a shared understanding of the *meaning* behind the language and as such, it is never neutral. According to Mouffe,

> [t]his reveals that procedures only exist as complex ensembles of practices. Those practices constitute specific forms of individuality and identity that make possible the allegiance to the procedures. It is because they are inscribed in shared forms of life and agreements in judgements that procedures can be accepted and followed…Rules, for Wittgenstein, are always abridgments of practices, they are inseparable from specific forms of life.[49]

Therefore, the principles valued by Habermas are themselves loaded with inequalities and biases, but they operate under the guise of neutrality and moral superiority. However, as Mouffe argues '[t]here is absolutely no justification for attributing a special privilege in this respect to a so-called "moral point of view" governed by impartiality'[50] because such a position cannot exist without some

[47] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', *Social Research*, Vol. 66, No. 3, Fall 1999, p. 749.
[48] Ludwig Wittgenstein as quoted by Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 68.
[49] Chantal Mouffe, ibid.
[50] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', p. 752.

form of subordination. 'Procedures always involve substantial ethical commitments, and there can never be such a thing as purely neutral procedures.'[51]

In his attempt to provide a rationalist account of normative procedure, Habermas is in fact sidelining pluralism as well as its political potential. Furthermore, in some instances it may be important *not* to transcend differences and subjectivities because 'the exercise of seeking a single consensus and overcoming ethical/cultural backgrounds can silence and marginalize some community members.'[52] Habermas fails to acknowledge that any governing principle creates points of closure and privilege. Despite his claims to the contrary then, Habermas's model does not provide a "horizontal" process which truly facilitates equality, because the drive for consensus erases difference and masks the power relations behind the consensus. Unlike Mouffe's approach, which is always aware of the constitutive role of power and the ever presence of the political, Habermas's model misses these dimensions and so fails to adequately address the needs of the modern polity. For Mouffe, such an alternative does not provide for democracy because it does not substantially acknowledge and facilitate the political. As will be seen in next section, Mouffe lays similar critiques against the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck.

- THE THIRD WAY & THE 'POST-POLITICAL' TREND -

Another alternative against which Mouffe sets her radical democratic approach is what she describes as the "post-political" trend. Mouffe sets her arguments, rejecting this model, against the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, the key authors in this field. Given it is their work at which she takes aim, they will form the parameters of this section. The initial part of this section will look at some of the key features of Giddens and Beck's post-political alternative and the critiques levelled against them by Mouffe. The latter part will look at the Third

[51] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 97.
[52] Ilan Kapoor 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?, p. 469.

Way as an example of the post-political trend, and why, according to Mouffe, this is yet another failed attempt to resuscitate the democratic future of the Left.

-GIDDENS & BECK-

The starting point for both Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, like Mouffe, was the perceived failures of socialism to adapt to the changing forces of modernity, and although the work of both writers precedes the collapse of communism, their ideas can been seen as foretelling this trajectory. Like Mouffe's interpretation of the growth of the new social movements, Beck and Giddens argue that socialism fails to account for changes to the political environment, and they argue that these changes thereby necessitate a whole new approach to politics. As will be shown, the core of their approach is a belief that we are beyond the traditional divisions of left and right and, therefore, we are now in a post-political era. They argue that old antagonisms have no place in politics under the new modernity, and only the centre position can provide for the diversity of new demands – an idea which Mouffe sees as no less than a threat to the future of democracy.[53]

According to Ulrich Beck, it is 'the victories of capitalism which produce the new social form',[54] which he and Giddens refer to as "reflexive modernity". Rather than seeing class struggle, or revolution, and political action as securing the end of the traditional class divide, Beck states that it is the 'normal modernization and future modernization which are dissolving the contours of industrial society.'[55] The transition to a post-Fordist era has produced a range of constitutive "side-effects" which have fundamentally changed the political terrain. He cites the example of women in the workforce saying that it

> is welcomed and encouraged by all political parties, at least on the level of lip service, but it also leads to an upheaval in the snail's pace of the conventional occupational, political and private order of things…Precisely *because* such

[53] Chantal Mouffe 'Which Public Sphere for a Democratic Society?', p. 55.
[54] Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 1994), p. 2.
[55] Ibid.

> small measures with large cumulative effects do not arrive with fanfares, controversial votes in parliament, programatic political antagonisms or under the flag of revolutionary change, the reflexive modernization of industrial society occurs on cats' paws[56].

Hence, in a reflexive modernity and due to such "side-effects", rather than being about distributive equality (income, work, welfare etc.), conflicts are now 'over "distributive responsibility" – how to prevent and control the risks accompanying the production of goods and the threats entailed by the advances of modernization.'[57] Furthermore, Beck's "reflexive modernisation" is characterised by the new "risk society", 'in which the social, political, economic and individual risks increasingly tend to escape the institutions for monitoring and protection'.[58] As the traditional forms of political action are no longer relevant (for example trade unions because conflicts are no longer drawn on the traditional binaries of employee and employer), the public/private distinction also loses its relevance, thereby changing the nature of democracy and politics.

In a similar fashion Anthony Giddens believes that we are living in a 'post-traditional society' so that democracy relies on "'active trust'" whereby traditional forms of top-down power and decision making is transferred to 'lay people'.[59] Mouffe writes that,

> [i]n an argument akin to the one made by Beck about the need to transform expert systems in democratic public spheres, Giddens argues for the necessity of democratizing the main institutions of society…The aim is to promote the value of autonomy in the widest possible range of social relations and this requires the establishment of small-scale public spheres where conflicts of interests could be resolved through public dialogue.[60]

Such an idea parallels the work of Habermas and thus Mouffe finds the suggestions problematic for similar reasons. She writes

> [i]f the "reflexive democracy" approach can envisage the democratization of democracy as the smooth extension of the dialogical framework to all areas of society it is because they remain blind to the hegemonic dimension of politics.

[56] Ibid, p. 3, emphasis in original.
[57] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 57.
[58] Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash *Reflexive Modernization*, p. 5.
[59] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 45.
[60] Ibid, pp. 45-46.

> Beck's and Giddens's dismissal of the adversarial model as an outdated way of structuring the political field is the consequence of their incapacity to acknowledge the hegemonic constitution of social relations.[61]

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Mouffe's radical democratic approach is advantageous in that it highlights the power matrices at play in all forms of political and social interaction. Indeed it is precisely these power relationships that go on to inform our social subjectivities. However, as will be shown throughout this section, Beck and Giddens and their post-political approach, fail to account for this process. In doing so they mask hegemonic formations and misrepresent consensus and harmony as being democratic, equal and no longer political.

In addition to the democratisation of democracy, Giddens argues that the focus of politics is now on "life-politics". He writes,

> '[l]ife politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualization in post-traditional contexts, where globalizing tendencies intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realization influence global strategies.'[62]

Therefore, what both his and Beck's approach have in common is their belief that politics can no longer be divided along traditional lines of left/right, public/private,[63] socialism/capitalism, modern/postmodern etc. For Giddens and Beck, the increasing individualisation of society, the process of globalisation,[64] and the new global risks like environmental degradation,[65] together with the victory of capitalism, have ushered in a new time for post-political theorising that is beyond these old dichotomies because '[n]one of these is a clear left/right issue.'[66] Therefore, the old collective identities (like unions and political parties) that rely on these binaries are also irrelevant. Beck also goes so far as to argue, according to Mouffe, that the divisions between left and right operate simply as 'conceptual "crutches of the past"…[unable] to grasp the

[61] Ibid, p. 54.
[62] Anthony Giddens as quoted by ibid, p. 43.
[63] Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash *Reflexive Modernization*, p. 45.
[64] Ibid, p. 14.
[65] Ibid, p. vii.
[66] Anthony Giddens *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 1998), p. 44.

conflicts of reflexive modernity.'[67] While Mouffe agrees that the traditional conceptions of left/right need to be challenged and restructured, she is far from rejecting them altogether. Some of Mouffe's ideas do echo those of Beck and Giddens (for example, Mouffe notes that the new social movements do represent an expansion of traditional political arenas and issues).[68] However, Mouffe still sees the relevance of the left/right distinction. She writes,

> [t]hat the traditional conceptions of both the left and the right are inadequate for the problems we are facing at the eve of the new millennium is something that I readily accept. But to believe that the antagonisms that those categories evoke have disappeared in our globalized world is to fall prey to the hegemonic neo-liberal discourse of the end of politics.[69]

The rejection of the left/right divide by Giddens and Beck and their insistence that we are now in a post-political age is, according to Mouffe, a dangerous argument to pursue. To begin with, collective identities are essential to democratic politics because this relationship forms the constitutive element of our identity. As discussed in Chapter One, the other is essential in the formation of our subjectivity, as it delineates what we are not. This constitutive outside then inadvertently contributes to the construction of our positive identification. However, this is not a neutral process and there is always power and conflict involved; therefore it is always political. In contrast to Mouffe and,

> [d]espite making some gestures towards asserting the discursive nature of the social, they [Beck and Giddens] overlook one crucial aspect of this process: the role of power relations in the construction of all forms of objectivity. Add to that their belief that collective identities have disappeared as a consequence of the individualization processes, and it is not surprising that they are unable to grasp the dynamics of politics.[70]

According to Giddens and Beck, the individual has become the centre of politics because it is 'the questions which concern the self…[that] occupy centre

[67] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 38.
[68] Ibid, p. 53.
[69] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 127.
[70] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 54.

stage'.[71] Therefore, both authors see the old class categorisations as irrelevant, because divisions can no longer be drawn on such grounds. Rather than seeing conflict as defined by left and right, Beck provides new dichotomies – 'safe/unsafe, inside/outside and political/unpolitical',[72] which, argues Mouffe, creates a moralising, rather than political, discourse. In doing so, Beck and Giddens parallel Habermas and shift the debate from the political domain. Unlike political divisions, the discourse of good and evil, according to Mouffe, poses a real threat to democracy. According to Mouffe,

> [p]olitics is always about the establishment, the reproduction, or the deconstruction of a hegemony, one that is always in relation to a potentially counter-hegemonic order. Since the dimension of "the political" is always present, you can never have a complete, absolute, inclusive hegemony.[73]

However, by advocating a harmonious, post-political environment, Beck and Giddens prevent this counter challenge. Moving the debate to the area of morality prevents the conflict from being addressed politically and instead relies on arguments based on rationality and universalism. Such a process inhibits the pluralism of positions because things are viewed as essentially good or bad, right or wrong. This not only limits pluralism, but also in fact hinders the democratic process because '[t]he specificity of modern democracy is precisely its recognition and legitimation of conflict'.[74] Mouffe argues that in not providing political avenues for conflict, the post-political approach poses a great threat to democracy.

Mouffe argues that '[t]he aim of democratic politics is to transform potential antagonism into agonism."[75] Here we see one of Mouffe's most radical elements. In order to facilitate conflict and pluralism democratically, Mouffe theorises that we need to distinguish between the antagonism of enemies and the agonism of adversaries. The difference occurs along the lines of shared principles, and she says that an adversary will agree about the principles but

[71] Ibid, p. 40.
[72] Ibid, p. 38.
[73] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph and Thomas Keenan 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension' *Grey Room*, No. 2, Winter 2001, p. 99.
[74] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions', p. 8.
[75] Ibid, p. 9.

disagree about their interpretation. To distinguish between the two, and to assert the importance of the categorisation for democratic politics, Mouffe writes 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 as an "adversary", that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question…An adversary is an enemy, but a *legitimate* enemy, one with whom we have some common ground[76].

Mouffe takes this notion of the friend (adversary)/enemy grouping from the work of Carl Schmitt and she concludes that this relationship is an ever present element of political engagement. Therefore, it needs to be recognised in democratic models and facilitated in a democratic way. For Mouffe this can be achieved by making space for legitimate, democratic conflict and difference. According to Mouffe,

> the specificity of modern democracy lies in the recognition and the legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it through the imposition of an authoritarian order. A well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation between democratic political positions, and this requires a real debate about possible alternatives.[77]

In contrast, Beck and Giddens present conflict as inhibiting democracy and so debate is usually relegated to a non-political sphere. They view all conflict and disagreement through the binary of right/wrong or good/evil. But this process limits democratic debate because it forces conflict into the realm of morality rather than politics, thereby making all opponents enemies. This minimises political debate and reduces the opportunity for legitimate, democratic conflict.

Mouffe also points out that the arguments regarding modernity that both Giddens and Beck use to support their case actually rely on antagonistic binaries, the type of which she sees as inherent to modern democracy. She says that their argument, which sees the end for the left/right distinction, is based on an opposition between modern and traditional and thus their binary categorisation exemplifies the adversarial model on which radical democracy is

[76] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 101-102, emphasis added.
[77] Ibid, p. 113.

based.[78] Mouffe says that both Giddens and Beck use the rhetoric of modernisation to 'draw a political frontier between "the moderns" and "the traditionalists or fundamentalists"' under the guise of neutral 'sociological evidence' and 'justified on pseudo-scientific grounds.'[79] However, in doing so they confirm Mouffe's claims that the political cannot exist without antagonism and thus it is vital for democracy to ensure that these lines are drawn in the most democratic way possible – through its transition into agonism. For Mouffe there is a clear distinction between an enemy and an adversary, but without this distinction we are led to an undemocratic war in which the enemy is destroyed. In the following section, the Third Way will be used to illustrate the drastic consequences that Mouffe attributes to the post-political approach espoused by Beck and Giddens.

-THE THIRD WAY-

The principles outlined in the Third Way are a response to the perceived failure of the traditional Left to provide a substantive alternative to the prolific neoliberal order of the past few decades. After the fall of the Berlin wall (that cemented the market driven approach as the norm), the Left is seen as failing to provide an alternative that connects to its constituents. Clive Hamilton observes that, as an ideology, socialism has become irrelevant because 'sustained increases in living standards for the great bulk of working people…transformed social conditions [so] as to render social democracy redundant'.[80] This transformation of the working class, to the point where it is seen to be virtually irrelevant, has stimulated the notion that, now with far more in common, there is no reason to maintain the strict left/right divide. Without a clear distinction between constituents, the centrist model, embodied in the Third Way, is deemed to be the most workable solution, 'a "win-win politics" where solutions could be found that favoured everybody in society.'[81]

[78] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, pp. 49-50.
[79] Ibid, p. 55.
[80] Clive Hamilton 'What's Left? The Death of Social Democracy', *Quarterly Essay,* I. 21, 2006, p. 7.
[81] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Second Edition, (Verso: London; New York, 2001), pp. xiv-xv.

This position is one of compromise and, to some extent, it concludes that there really is no alternative and that politics is simply all about the economy. The goal of the Third Way is to provide a "middle ground", comprising of socialist values in the form of encouraging community, and some notion of "welfare" (though the precise implementation of such policies vary from government to government), while simultaneously accommodating the needs of the market. Much like liberalism, the Third Way can be applied to varying degrees, providing a spectrum of different polices. However, what all of these have in common is their endeavour for a "middle" position. As Paul Nursey-Bray and Carol Bacchi point out,

> what characterizes the Third Way thinking in particular, is the desire to find a compromise. There is a search for a middle passage, between a commitment to a socialist concern for equality and community and an acceptance of capitalist market society and private property as the basis for liberal democratic freedoms.[82]

It is for these reasons that Mouffe sees the Third Way as the embodiment of the post-political trend.

Giddens, the principal authority within Third Way discourse is, like Mouffe, hoping to provide a new strategy for socialism because he argues that the critique of capitalism can no longer 'be derived from a cybernetic model of socialism.'[83] According to Giddens, the Third Way encompasses the following three principles:

1) An acceptance of globalisation but a continued challenge against the extreme positions of protectionism and all out free trade.[84]
2) A commitment to social justice, embodied in the motto '*no rights without responsibilities.*'[85]
3) A privileging of democracy so that there is '*no authority without democracy.*'[86]

[82] Paul Nursey-Bray and Carol Lee Bacchi 'Introduction: Socialism and the Third Way', in Paul Nursey-Bray and Carol Lee Bacchi (Eds.) *Left Directions: Is There a Third Way?* (University of Western Australia Press: Crawley, WA, 2001), pp. 4-5.
[83] Anthony Giddens *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 1994), p. 12.
[84] Anthony Giddens *The Third Way*, pp. 64-65.
[85] Ibid, p. 65, emphasis in original.
[86] Ibid, p. 66, emphasis in original.

However in Mouffe's view this means that the Third Way simply 'resign[s] itself to accepting the present stage of capitalism…degree[ing] that there is no alternative'.[87] This failure to address capitalism and challenge neoliberalism therefore prevents the Third Way from providing a real alternative to the current hegemony. In doing so, the centrist position naturalises and thus reinforces the power of neoliberalism. Mouffe says that Giddens's model fails as a renewal for the Left because it

> overlooks the systemic connections existing between global market forces and the variety of problems – from exclusion to environmental risks – that his politics pretends to tackle…Such a consensual, post-political perspective is characterized by a side-stepping of fundamental conflicts and by an evasion of any critical analysis of modern capitalism. This is why it is unable to challenge the hegemony of neo-liberalism.[88]

Mouffe also sees the rise of right-wing parties as a consequence of not providing a substantial alternative. Mouffe attributes the success of the extreme-right, and other conservative positions, to the proliferation of the centrist position and the 'shallowness of the post-political approach'.[89] She argues that the growth of the right-wing parties 'has always taken place in circumstances where the differences between the traditional democratic parties have become much less significant',[90] and that this is not surprising because 'they [the Right] are the only ones denouncing the "consensus at the centre" and trying to occupy the terrain of contestation deserted by the left.'[91] For Mouffe, the centrist/consensus model creates a 'void' that is easily filled by less democratic agendas and ideologies,[92] capitalised on by the right wing parties. According to Mouffe, in order to have a real purchase on the motivations of constituents, parties have to provide real alternatives to the current order. However, in overlooking this fact centrist parties create the perfect opportunities for less democratic parties to reclaim votes. She argues that

[87] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 60.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, p. 64.
[90] Ibid, p. 66.
[91] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 7.
[92] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 69.

> [w]hen democratic politics has lost its capacity to mobilize people around distinct political projects and when it limits itself to securing the necessary conditions for the smooth working of the market, the conditions are ripe for the political demagogues to articulate popular frustration.[93]

The centrist, Third Way position also advocates that there is now little need for collective identities and thus celebrates individualism. However, without the collective identification previously provided for by the Left, there is little room for democratic identification. While some may see this as the triumph of individualism and liberty, Mouffe argues that it leaves conceptions like "the people" vulnerable to manipulations. This is the case in Europe where Mouffe sees right-wing parties co-opting the notion of "the people", as opposed to "the establishment" in order to secure their populism.[94] She argues that centrist parties following the Third Way, are blind to the paradox of their approach. In trying to accommodate constituents on both sides of the spectrum, Third Way approaches tend to avoid advocating any real or substantial position, thereby facilitating the perception that there is no choice. This, however, often leaves the polity frustrated and searching for an outlet for their passions. Mouffe argues that the right-wing has exploited this opportunity and used it to seize power. According to Mouffe, 'one cannot understand democratic politics without acknowledging passions as the motivating force in the field of politics',[95] but this is yet another element ignored by Third Way advocates. By not facilitating people's passions, and in addition to aiding the rise of right-wing parties, Mouffe argues that the centrist position causes apathy and disaffection.[96]

Furthermore, the growth of the right-wing also highlights the moralisation of politics, which Mouffe argues is occurring because of the centrist trend, epitomised in the Third Way. Under a post-political approach the right-wing can be conveniently labelled as immoral or evil without needing to engage with

[93] Ibid, p. 70.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions', p. 8.
[96] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 63.

them politically.[97] This construction does allow the Left to construct an identity of the good "us" as opposed to the evil "them", and use this to unite against the Right.[98] However, this framing, and the resulting debate, often turns into a rationalisation exercise rather than a political debate,[99] so that antagonism is between moral enemies rather than legitimate political positions. As argued in the initial part of this section, the political is an essential element that highlights the power relationships involved in conflict. Rational and moralising discourse tends to overlook this fact. Like in Habermas's approach, such a process establishes the perspective that the debate is between enemies rather than adversaries and thus continues to inhibit democracy.

In short, Mouffe's thesis is that by advocating the notion that we are beyond politics and beyond debate about ideologies, we are creating a space for extremism. By assuming consensus we are actually silencing the difference that occurs within the hegemony, thereby encouraging undemocratic passions. She argues that

> the refusal to acknowledge that a society is always hegemonically constituted through a certain structure of power relations leads to accepting the existing hegemony and remaining trapped within its configuration of forces.[100]

So without actually challenging the neoliberal order, the Third Way ends up reinforcing it. In contrast, the role for a radical democratic approach is to provide a substantial and different alternative, the details of which will be discussed in later chapters. Unlike the post-political perspectives, a radical democratic and

> "agonistic" approach acknowledges the real nature of its frontiers and the forms of exclusion that they entail, instead of trying to disguise them under the veil of rationality or morality. Coming to terms with the hegemonic nature of social relations and identities, it can contribute to subverting the ever-present temptation existing in democratic societies to naturalize its frontiers and essentialize its identities.[101]

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[97] Ibid, p. 73.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid, pp. 73-76.
[100] Ibid, p. 63.
[101] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 105.

A radical democratic approach can provide for difference and pluralism in a democratic way. Instead of seeing them as a threat, in Mouffe's approach they are acknowledged as important dimensions of democracy that need to be facilitated. For Mouffe

> there is democracy as long as there is conflict and that the existing arrangements can be contested. If we arrive at a point where we say "this is the endpoint, contestation is no longer legitimate", this means the end of democracy.[102]

According to Mouffe, politics needs to ensure that it can provide a democratic avenue for people's desires and passions because 'for people to be interested in politics they need to have the possibility of choosing between parties offering real alternatives.'[103] However,

> [i]n all the crucial areas where power structures are at stake, their [Beck and Giddens] non-conflictual political approach is unable to pose the adequate questions. Politics…is not an exchange of opinions but a contest for power[104].

Without a recognition of the complexities of power, the Third Way and post-political approaches sideline difference and portray the centre as the neutral (or best), all encompassing and rational position. This leaves little room for democratic debate about alternatives. As Adrian Little confirms,

> instead of reinvigorating the democratic life of society, the Third Way ignores social divisions and inequalities of power…[The] Third Way doesn't transcend left and right, *it merely obscures the contours of difference*.[105]

- CONCLUSION -

Far from being inclusive and void of power, consensus driven, post-political theories of democracy pose a distinct threat to the pursuit of democracy. These

[102] Chantal Mouffe in Markus Miessen and Chantal Mouffe 'Articulated Power Relations: Markus Miessen in Conversation with Chantal Mouffe', *Roundtable: Research Architecture*, 2007, first accessed March 2008 at http://roundtable.kein.org/node/545.
[103] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 29.
[104] Ibid, p. 51.
[105] Adrian Little 'Community and Radical Democracy', *Journal of Political Ideologies,* Vol. 7, I .3, 2002, pp. 374-5, emphasis added.

alternatives leave little room for the facilitation of legitimate conflict and instead argue that such differences can be transcended. For Mouffe, however, 'harmony is the negation of pluralism.'[106] As such, any model predicating itself on the elimination of difference hinders the pluralism that is so essential in modern democracies.

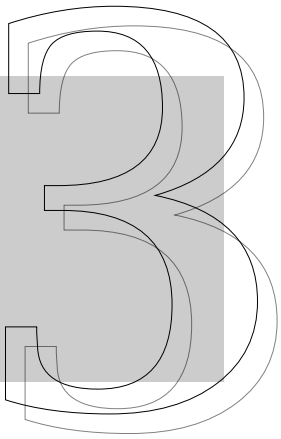
The post-political alternatives espouse a utopian vision of politics that is supposedly free from the traditional left/right divides. However, this understanding simply masks the divisions that exist. According to Wittgenstein,

> [w]e have got on the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk; so we need *friction.*[107]

Therefore, we need democratic mechanisms and outlets for this conflict. It is only by facilitating this that, following Mouffe's analysis, a meaningful model of democracy can be secured. Within Mouffe's approach, and as illustrated in this chapter, antagonism is an essential element in any polity. However, none of the alternatives that she engages with adequately address this dimension. In the next chapter, some of Mouffe's proposals for antagonism are discussed in more detail, demonstrating that her radical democratic approach is very capable of dealing with difference. Unlike the models discussed here, Mouffe's approach does not want to homogenise difference through consensus and rationalisation. Instead, radical democracy values difference, in and of itself, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the democratic project, and providing a radically different way to conceive democracy.

[106] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Caroline Bayard, Sev Isajiw and Gary Madison 'On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 49, Spring 1996, p. 138.
[107] Ludwig Wittgenstein as quoted by Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', pp. 750-751, emphasis in original.

Liberalism & Radical Democracy



Much like "democracy", "liberalism" is a ubiquitous term, which is difficult to define, and it encompasses a broad spectrum of theorists, some of whom have vies that seem quite contradictory, for example those of Robert Nozick and John Rawls. Mouffe also acknowledges the vast array of different perspectives which make up the "'philosophy of liberalism'" and recognises that they 'do not form a single doctrine.'[1] However, Mouffe's analysis does not engage with many of the different nuances involved in the liberal tradition. In spite of the vast body of work that comes under the banner of liberalism, Mouffe's exploration of liberalism is somewhat restricted and the main focus of her analysis is Rawls.

While I do acknowledge that at times Mouffe's understanding and critiques are based on a homogenised rather than rigorous analysis of liberalism, I find it necessary to locate the debate on the same terrain, at least for the start. By using her structure and perspective, I will illustrate Mouffe's argument for staying within the paradigm of liberalism, while also outlining some of the critiques that she lays against it. Essentially this chapter will build on the radical elements discussed in previous chapters in order to explore Mouffe's approach more fully. This will provide the foundation for the more detailed exegesis of Mouffe's work that follows in Chapters Four and Five.

[1] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 20.

Although Mouffe outlines some serious flaws in liberalism, she believes that it is done with the intent of bettering, rather than rejecting the theory. Her aim is to 'force liberal democratic societies to be accountable for their professed ideals'.[2] For Mouffe this is best achieved by reworking liberalism to make it useful for the radical democratic approach. Of all the political alternatives discussed in Mouffe's work and in this thesis, it is liberalism that Mouffe considers to be most worthwhile. She writes that 'political liberalism must be a central component of a project of radical and plural democracy',[3] and radical democracy 'is not an alternative to liberal democracy' because '[a] radical democratic society will still be a liberal democratic society'.[4] Therefore, her dealings with liberalism are very different from her approach to the other alternatives discussed in earlier chapters. While not accepting liberalism wholeheartedly, Mouffe aims to reform liberalism in order to make it useful for her radical democratic approach. Mouffe argues that critiquing liberal theory and then re-working some of its key concepts can achieve this. Throughout this chapter, I will outline Mouffe's critiques of liberalism and then outline some of her radical alternative approaches. Later on in this thesis, in Chapter Seven, I will however argue that Mouffe's approach to liberalism is problematic and somewhat misguided and I will point out some of the unresolvable tensions and contradictions between the liberal and radical democratic approaches.

- LIBERALISM -

Essentially, Mouffe finds that the established philosophy of liberalism is still very worthwhile and indeed, as seen in Chapter One, necessary for her project of radical democracy. Mouffe argues that the notion of pluralism comes directly from the philosophy of liberalism, because society can no longer be defined by a homogenous, singular conception of the good life. Pluralism brings multiple

[2] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 2.
[3] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 21.
[4] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Caroline Bayard, Sev Isajiw and Gary Madison 'On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 49, Spring 1996, p. 145.

conceptions and she states that '[i]n stressing the centrality of the idea of pluralism for modern democracy, I [Mouffe] recognize the latter's debt to the liberal tradition.'[5] It is for this reason that Mouffe argues for maintaining the paradigm of liberalism, as well as its institutions like the judiciary, separation of church and state, human rights, constitutions, and the judicial system.[6] For Mouffe, these are essential components of radical democracy because they are the facilitators of pluralism and, according to Mouffe, '[o]nce the very possibility of achieving homogeneity is discarded, the necessity of liberal institutions becomes evident.'[7] Mouffe argues that these liberal mechanisms are best equipped to accommodate the diverse polity and thus they become the "political" aspects of liberalism that she intends to keep in her approach. For Mouffe, economic liberalism and political liberalism are two different strains[8] and she argues that staying faithful to one does not necessitate a loyalty to the other.[9] Instead, she believes that she can advocate for political liberalism while simultaneously maintaining an anti-capitalist approach and, as I will show in this chapter, she uses Rawls as her example. In later chapters, however, I will outline why this argument and the loyalty to liberal institutions are not so straightforward. In Chapter Seven, for example, I will show why Mouffe's adherence to the mechanisms of political liberalism is problematic. I will argue that, while she wants to protect pluralism, approaching it through liberalism is not necessarily required. I will show that pluralism is not sufficient for liberalism and, far from being neutral or universal, liberalism has its own conception of the good life that, at points, contradicts the main aims of radical democracy. This current chapter, however, maintains Mouffe's perspective in order to track and explain the logic of her argument of making liberalism an essential element of radical democracy.

[5] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 7.
[6] For example see Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000), p. 4; Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 20; Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 11.
[7] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 104-5.
[8] Chantal Mouffe 'Democracy, Power, and the "Political"', in Seyla Benhabib (Ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1996), p. 245.
[9] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 2.

Like Mill and de Tocqueville, Mouffe warns against the tyranny of the majority, arguing that

> the logic of democracy alone does not guarantee the defense [sic] of individual freedom and respect for human rights. It is only through its articulation with political liberalism that the logic of popular sovereignty can avoid becoming tyrannical[10].

As will be outlined further in Chapter Five, Mouffe values the notion of popular sovereignty and wants to utilise many of the principles associated with civic republicanism. However, Mouffe also urges tempering such ideas because, ultimately, she sees them as homogenising difference and interfering with pluralism.[11] For Mouffe, liberalism is the best means when it comes to addressing the diversity of the polity and facilitating liberty. However, Mouffe's acceptance of liberalism is not absolute and she critiques, for example, the tendency of liberal models to isolate and formalise the citizen, leaving equality to be pursued simply through human rights. She argues that much of the cause of the democratic deficit can be attributed to the fact that the pursuit of liberty has come at the cost of democracy,[12] writing that

> [m]any of the problems facing liberal democracies today stem from the fact that politics has been reduced to an instrumental activity, to the selfish pursuit of private interests. The limiting of democracy to a mere set of neutral procedures, the transformation of citizens into political consumers, and the liberal insistence on a supposed "neutrality" of the state, have emptied politics of all substance.[13]

Therefore, just as Mouffe warns against over-privileging the democratic notion of popular sovereignty that is pursued by some forms of civic republicanism, she also warns against vehemently pursuing human rights under the banner of universalism because this masks difference.[14]

Part of the problem for Mouffe is that, rather than providing space for political equality, democracy, under the liberal model, has become measured merely by

[10] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 21.
[11] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 62.
[12] Chantal Mouffe 'The 'End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', in Francisco Panizza (Ed.) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 52.
[13] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 111.
[14] Ibid, p. 13.

the recognition of human rights, thereby constructing the "democratic" aspects as secondary features.[15] This type of oversight, common in liberal theories of democracy, tends to view the citizen in merely formative terms and so often misses the more substantive features of community and political engagement. In the liberal tradition, the conception of the citizen is usually defined in legalistic terms, so that equality is seen as being offered through formal means of equality before the law, and equal voting rights. While these ideals are not, in themselves problematic for Mouffe, they do result in a citizenship that is wholly individualised and removed from the social of which it is constituted. Mouffe writes that, in reducing 'citizenship to a mere legal status', liberal individualism empties the concept of its participatory and democratic potential and thus it requires reworking.[16] I will outline the specifics of Mouffe's approach to citizenship in Chapter Five to show how she attempts to reconcile this issue. In this chapter though, Mouffe's critiques of liberalism are explored because they again pinpoint how the radical democratic approach differs from the liberal one and re-conceptualises key aspects of democratic theory. However, in spite of Mouffe's critiques, and as the conclusion of this chapter will show, Mouffe does not reject or abandon liberalism all together. Building on from the discussion in Chapter One, I will explain here that Mouffe believes that the criticism of liberalism can help to facilitate further re-theorising so that the liberal elements are made viable for the radical democratic approach.

-THE LIBERAL SUBJECT-

As we saw in Chapter One, Mouffe invokes liberalism's protection of pluralism (that relies on respect for the individual) to counter socialism's tendency to homogenise the polity. However, liberalism's view of the subject as essentially free and autonomous, and as existing prior to and outside of the social, is problematic for Mouffe. While (despite her critiques) she ultimately agrees on the importance of the respect for the individual, achieved mainly through the

[15] Chantal Mouffe 'The 'End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', pp. 52-53.
[16] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 83.

protection of human rights,[17] Mouffe's understanding of the subject differs greatly from the traditional liberal one. Following Mouffe's conception of the subject, the individual cannot be separated from his/her surroundings and in fact, these elements form part of the constitutive outside thus partly determining the formation of the said subject. This challenges the Enlightenment conception, epitomised in liberalism, that the subject exists prior to and independently of outside forces. In order to facilitate this individualism, liberalism stresses the importance of liberty, or the individual's right to choose their own conception of the good. With this type of pluralism Mouffe concurs, in that she maintains that it is no longer possible to be governed by a grand narrative dictating the common good,[18] but she has reservations.

For liberals, society should facilitate the individual's opportunity to materialise their good life, barring harm to others. However, Mouffe argues that liberalism's focus on absolute individualism is problematic in that it overlooks the important role of the social. Firstly, Mouffe argues that the social is constitutive and thus plays an important role in the construction of subjectivities. Liberalism however, with its *a priori* conception of the individual, overlooks this. Mouffe argues that

> [p]sychoanalysis has shown that, far form being *organized* around the transparency of an ego, personality is structured in a number of levels which lie outside the consciousness and rationality of the agents. It has therefore discredited the idea of the necessarily unified character of the subject.[19]

Therefore, Mouffe adopts a poststructuralist approach in which the subject cannot be seen as whole and unified because it is always only precariously grounded, with the constitutive outside always capable of disruption. However, this alterity is 'both a condition of possibility and a condition of impossibility of every identity.'[20] According to Mouffe, we do not operate as atomistic subjects and our subjectivities are formed through group identification that occurs partly

[17] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 21.
[18] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 11.
[19] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', in George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (Eds.) *Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective* (Routledge: London; New York, 2009), p. 333, emphasis in original.
[20] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 30.

through a disassociation with the constitutive outside. In Mouffe's approach, epitomised by Schmitt's statement "Tell me who your enemy is and I'll tell you who you are",[21] it is the outside "enemy" that allows us to determine what we are not. In doing so, we necessarily confirm what we are and therefore, according to Mouffe, our social subjectivities always coalesce into group identifications, holding in common what they are not.

Mouffe uses Schmitt to explain the way that our identity formations always involve some kind of us/them distinction, thereby facilitating the need for some conception of collective identification. For Mouffe, collective engagement is an essential feature of a democratic polity; however it is also an element that is too often overlooked in liberal models. Mouffe argues that 'in the field of politics, it is groups and collective identities that we encounter, not isolated individuals.'[22] Liberalism, however, fails to recognise this and rather sees collectives as comprised of individual subjects coming together purely for self-interest and therefore misses the dimension of the political.[23] It is important to note though that this process of identity formation is always precarious and has the opportunity of turning antagonistic, because the other forces an identity into a site of symbolic "lack" that can always be renegotiated. In constituting my identity, the constitutive outside prevents an identity from being completely stable and fixed; it is therefore always a temporary stability. This disruptive power means that the relationship with the other always has the opportunity of being antagonistic, because, while constituting my identity, the other is also destabilising and preventing full closure. The importance of this antagonism will be discussed in the later sections of this chapter.

[21] Carl Schmitt as quoted by Mark Lilla 'Carl Schmitt', in Mark Lilla *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (The New York Review of Books: New York, 2001), p. 57.
[22] Chantal Mouffe 'Political Liberalism, Neutrality and the Political', *Ratio Juris,* Vol. 7, No. 3, December 1994, p. 319.
[23] Liberalism also misses the fact that the social is a good, in and of itself so that '[i]deas of public-mindedness, civic activity and political participation in a community of equals are alien to most liberal thinkers.' (Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 62.) As we saw in chapter one, these aspects of the social form an essential element of Mouffe's approach and provide one of the more radical parts of her theory. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

-RAWLS-

A crucial issue for Mouffe's utilisation of liberalism is the separation of economic liberalism from political liberalism. While the theoretical argument of how this is achieved is not fully outlined by Mouffe, it is an insight into why she chooses to devote much of her work to examining John Rawls's liberal theory. For Mouffe, Rawls represents a unique liberal theorist who does not incorporate, as a founding principle, a notion of the protection of private property or the superiority of the market,[24] nor does he appeal to a universal moral principle or absolute individualism, as in the tradition of Kant and Mill respectively.[25] For Mouffe then, this is proof that economic liberalism does not always follow with political liberalism. This is a liberating factor for Mouffe because it allows her to follow in line with many liberal components without feeling the need to sacrifice her left, anti-capitalist, socialist goals, and so it provides Mouffe with a radical left component for radical democracy. In Chapter Six I will discuss the effectiveness of this approach, pointing out some of the areas that require further analysis and re-theorisation for a successful anti-capitalist response.

Although there are many theorists that Mouffe could have chosen to use in her analysis of liberalism, in nearly all of her writing on the subject, Mouffe chooses to focus principally on John Rawls. As discussed, the discernible reason for this is that, unlike many other liberal theorists, according to Mouffe, Rawls is able to focus a discussion of liberalism that does not necessarily lead to an acceptance or justification of individual property rights. For Mouffe then, his theory is the pinnacle example of a liberal theory divorced from the capitalist partnership. The key difference in Rawls's approach comes about due to his original assumption. Rawls rejects the typical Hobbsian reduction to self-interest,[26] replacing it instead with absolute equality through the "Original Position". According to Rawls, the best way to determine the appropriate rules of society,

[24] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 3.
[25] Chantal Mouffe 'Political Liberalism, Neutrality and the Political', p. 315.
[26] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999), p. 250.

and the type of institutions that can best serve the arrangement, is to assume ignorance with regard to the possibilities that can exist in the future. In the Original Position, Rawls requires that people imagine that they are in a place in time, before our current society has been organised. While in this hypothetical place, we are asked to determine the rules of society. However, the important caveat is that all are under the "veil of ignorance", whereby we are unaware of what is of value in the new society or the talents that we will possess. Rather than being aware of the attributes we will be endowed with, the veil keeps this hidden thereby, according to Rawls, allowing for a more objective and reasoned pursuit of the principles of justice.[27] Following this, Rawls argues that without the knowledge of our attributes, or the value that they will acquire, the pursuit of pure self interest is redirected so that people will come to desire the protection of the people who arbitrarily wind up with the attributes of least value – after all, this could indeed be ourselves.[28] Thus Rawls assumes the notion of the right over the good, in contrast to traditional utilitarian liberals, as well as a contextualised principle that avoids the Kantian appeal to external notions of morality or universalism.

Rawls's approach sets 'out to provide a rationalistic grounding for a moral consensus.'[29] Rawls argues that through the Original Position people can successfully, and objectively (under the veil of ignorance), arrive at a *valid* conception of justice because it is reached through a reasonable and neutral way. This 'emphasizes that the task of articulating a public conception of justice is primarily a practical social task, not an epistemological one'.[30] However, Rawls's priority of the right over the good contains some problematic assumptions for Mouffe. Firstly, it requires that the subject exists outside of, and prior to, society and as I have outlined, Mouffe does not make this distinction. Secondly, Rawls still tries to "deal" with pluralism rather than seeing it (as Mouffe does) as a good in itself. As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, pluralism is a key

[27] John Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 2003), pp. 10-19.
[28] Ibid, p. 13.
[29] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 250.
[30] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 43.

feature of Mouffe's alternative approach, and she argues that any theories that try to negate or mitigate it, pose a threat to democracy. Thirdly, Mouffe is sceptical about any claim of "rational consensus" as this disguises power relations. Mouffe argues that

> the domain of politics – even when fundamental issues like justice or basic principles are concerned – is not a neutral terrain that could be insulated from the pluralism of values and where rational, universal solutions could be formulated.[31]

Therefore, each approach needs to highlight the political dimension involved in its justifications and show that it is a result of hegemonic practices rather than rationalisation or universalism.

While the above critiques provide further insight into the priorities of Mouffe's approach to democracy, the critical point of departure for Mouffe lies in her critique of Rawls's distinction between the "rational versus reasonable". As discussed earlier, part of the process of the Original Position relies on people making "reasonable" choices when it comes to the principles of justice. Hence

> [t]he "reasonable", for Rawls, is importantly distinct from the "rational": where the latter 'expresses a conception of each participant's rational advantage, what, as individuals, they are trying to advance', the former 'is incorporated into the background setup of original position which frames the discussions of the parties and situates them symmetrically'. In other words, the rational pursuit of individual ends must be subordinate to the reasonable, as the principles of the reasonable set limits to 'the final ends that can be pursued'.[32]

In Rawls's theory the rational allows for a subject to pursue his/her own interests and desires, though there must be some adherence to the principles of justice that would permit this to occur. Hence, for Rawls, the reasonable becomes the justification for the principles necessary for a free and fair society. He argues that the principles of justice as fairness (where inequalities are only tolerated if they produce benefits for the least advantaged)[33] are legitimated in

[31] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 92.
[32] Eamonn Callan as quoted by Claudia W. Ruitenberg 'Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, Vol. 28, No. 3, May 2009, p. 270.
[33] John Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, p. 54.

that they were drawn out of a "neutral" procedure. For Rawls, the reasonable represents a fair way at arriving at a definition of justice because it is not affected by elites, biases or power games. He writes,

> 'it is clear that since the differences among the parties are unknown to them, and everyone is equally rational and similarly situated, each is convinced of the same arguments. Therefore, we can view the choice in the original position from the standpoint of one person selected at random'.[34]

However Mouffe is sceptical of any approach that claims to be beyond the reach of subjectivism and power. According to Mouffe, because of the constitutive nature of the discursive, there is never a terrain that can be entered into which does not involve power. Therefore, any alternative that appeals to objectivity and universalism is simply masking the power matrices involved.

Rawls wants the meaning of the principles of justice to be fixed '*once and for all*'[35] because, he argues, the fact that they were derived through the process of reasoning means that they necessarily have produced a fair outcome. However, as will be discussed in the following section, Mouffe argues that democracy requires debate and confrontation about the interpretation of the principles and a recognition that any type of "consensus" is only hegemonic, temporary, and capable of being challenged. As Mouffe notes, 'modern pluralist democracy constitutes a system of relations of power'[36] which cannot simply be overcome by appeals to the rational and reasonable. Similarly, she argues that '[i]n a modern democracy, we should be able to question the very frontiers of reason and to put under scrutiny the claims to universality made in the name of rationality.'[37] Therefore, democratic models need to ensure that the power relations are made visible because there is never a way to completely dissolve them in the hope of a power-free society. Rawls attempts to achieve this through his Original Position, but Mouffe asks

> [w]hat is this if it is not an indirect form of asserting that reasonable persons are those who accept the fundamentals of liberalism? In other words, the

[34] John Rawls as quoted by Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 58, endnote 29.
[35] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 28, emphasis in original.
[36] Ibid, p. 32.
[37] Chantal Mouffe 'Political Liberalism, Neutrality and the Political', p. 321.

> distinction between "reasonable" and "unreasonable" helps to draw a frontier between the doctrines that accept the liberal principles and the ones that oppose them.[38]

Consequently, Rawls's approach draws a distinction between what is permissible and what is not, without recognising that such a process is indeed a political one, because it *constructs* these dichotomous spheres and relegates all "unreasonable" discourse to a non-public realm. As Mouffe argues, Rawls justifies his claims under the guise of the moral, believing that the principles are "reasonable" enough to govern society in a fair and just manner. Mouffe does not argue against the drawing of ethical frontiers when it comes to governing society; however she does warn against this pursuit when it does so under the guise of, not only neutrality and objectivity, but also harmony and consensus. For Mouffe this misses antagonism and therefore the political. She warns against liberal models of democratic theory like Rawls's, because they advocate that neutral procedures and outcomes can be guaranteed. The presence of power hinders this ability, according to Mouffe, and 'the drawing of a frontier between the legitimate and the illegitimate is always a political decision'.[39] However, as will be shown in the next section, the pursuit of neutrality masks this relationship.

-NEUTRALITY-

Following on from Foucault's notion of power, Mouffe argues that there is no neutrality because power is always present and constitutive. According to Mouffe though, liberalism overlooks the power matrices that formulate identities,[40] and perpetuates a misdirected quest for neutrality in politics. Mouffe argues that

> one of the main weaknesses of liberalism is that it deploys a logic of the social based on a conception of being as presence, conceiving of objectivity as being inherent in things themselves. As a result it cannot apprehend the process by which political identities are constructed. It is unable to recognize that

[38] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 24.
[39] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 121.
[40] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 20.

> identity is always constructed as "difference" and that social objectivity is constituted through acts of power.[41]

These acts of power constitute the possibility for antagonism to occur and thus need to be negotiated. This is the essence of the political, but it is often overlooked by alternative political theories. In Mouffe's approach though, the recognition of the role of power and its constitutive nature is one of the most radical elements. Despite claims to the contrary, "[w]hen we try to be neutral…we support the dominant ideology".[42] Therefore, in a radical democratic approach, neutrality or objectivity is never the misdirected aim. Instead, Mouffe's approach highlights its own political decisions, showing that the process is part of a hegemonic structuring and can therefore always be challenged.

Mouffe acknowledges Foucault's assertion that power is indeed everywhere and that it also always plays a constitutive role. She therefore takes issue with liberalism's supposed neutrality arguing that, rather than providing "objective" governing principles, liberalism advocates a particular ideal, and therefore necessarily rejects/excludes other conceptions. These decisions will always be made. The problem with the liberal approach, however, is that it presents these decisions under the guise of rationalism and neutrality. In doing so, liberalism misrepresents the political dimension that involves inescapable acts of power. As Mouffe explains,

> every order is political and based on some form of exclusion. There are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated. The articulatory practices through which a certain order is established and the meaning of social institutions is fixed are "hegemonic practices". Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony.[43]

[41] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy' (Centre for the Study of Democracy: London, 2002), first accessed January 2005 at http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/pdf/Mouffe%20PDF%20.pdf, p. 6.
[42] Paulo Freire as quoted by Claudia W. Ruitenberg 'Educating Political Adversaries', p. 278.
[43] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 18.

However, liberalism's failure to recognise this political process is indeed its 'blind spot',[44] according to Mouffe, that prevents it from facilitating pluralism in a democratic way. She therefore argues that liberalism is impotent when it comes to dealing with the political.[45] By espousing a "neutral" set of procedures and principles, liberalism inadvertently quarantines some debates and elevates its assumptions to positions of untouchability. However these assumptions are laden with subjectivism and so privilege some ideas over others. According to Mouffe,

> the rationalist defence of liberalism, by searching for an argument that is beyond argumentation and by wanting to define the meaning of the universal, makes the same mistake for which it criticizes totalitarianism: it rejects democratic indeterminacy and identifies the universal with a given particular.[46]

A radical democratic approach, on the other hand, shows the process of exclusion and highlights the temporary nature of the hegemonic order.

Mouffe argues that every 'drawing of a frontier…has a political character and is always the expression of a given hegemony.'[47] Therefore, it needs to track these exclusions and allow them to be challenged; this is not simply about a consensus reached through rational debate or a majority compromise reached through the aggregation of preferences. A radical democratic approach allows for only partial fixations because the sub-hegemonic is always a potential threat. What is key is the legitimation of this antagonistic process because it underlies the dimension of the political. The danger of Rawls's, and other approaches espousing neutrality, is that 'antagonism, violence and power have only disappeared because they have been made invisible.'[48] According to Mouffe, Rawls, like other liberals, can only achieve his conception of justice through 'avoidance' and by 'ignoring philosophical and moral controversies'.[49] Mouffe on the other hand, argues for making difference and antagonism a key feature of

[44] Chantal Mouffe 'Some Reflections on an Agonistic Approach to the Public', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Eds.) *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (ZKM Centre for Art and Media: Karlsruhe, Germany; MIT Press: Cambridge, MA; London, England, 2005), p. 804.
[45] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 1-2.
[46] Ibid, p. 146.
[47] Ibid, p. 143.
[48] Chantal Mouffe 'Political Liberalism, Neutrality and the Political', p. 314.
[49] Ibid, p. 318.

her alternative approach to democracy through the transformation of antagonism into agonism.

- DIFFERENCE AS POLITICAL -

The formation of identities outlined by Mouffe is a pivotal challenge to liberalism's typical aggregative approach to politics and democracy, which sees essentialised individuals pitted against each other in the pursuit of self-interest. By limiting politics to the pursuit of self-interest, liberalism not only misses the construction of the us/them formation, but also the political aspect involved in this process. The political aspect, as Mouffe sees it, is the process of the us/them identification that necessarily involves exclusion and therefore has the potential to be antagonistic.[50] Mouffe argues that liberalism is too focused on the illusion of full inclusion and harmony and therefore ignores the political.[51] This can be seen in the example of human rights where rights are endowed across the board without discrimination, whereas according to Mouffe, this fails to see that 'some existing rights have been constructed on the very exclusion or subordination of others.'[52] In Mouffe's approach, on the other hand, difference is seen as having an inherent political dimension because power is always involved. Diversity, in Mouffe's understanding, does not exist in a modern polity simply to be managed. Instead, it is seen as being constructed by systems of discourse and also constitutive of subject positions. Therefore, the typical liberal mode of tolerating, tempering or overcoming differences is unsatisfactory for Mouffe, and it overlooks the political nature of alterity.

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[50] The concept of the political that Mouffe employs is also comparable to some other radical democratic writers. For example, Jacques Rancière uses a similar concept of the political to explain levels of inequality and therefore tension, within democracies. He writes: 'The essence of the political is dissensus; but dissensus is not the opposition of interests and opinions. It is a gap in the sensible: the political persists as long as there is a dissensus about the givens of a particular situation, of what is seen and what might be said, on the question of who is qualified to see or say what is given. This means that the political is not comprised of the conflict of interests and values between groups nor of the arbitration by the state between these values and interests. The political is comprised of specific subjects that are outnumbered with respect to the count of the objective whole of the population.' (Jacques Rancière in Jacques Rancière and Davide Panagia 'Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière', *Diacritics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Summer, 2000, p. 124.) By employing the use of the political, both writers challenge the liberal understanding of democracy, which is driven towards consensus and harmony.

[51] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 22.

[52] Chantal Mouffe 'Democracy, Power, and the "Political"', p. 247.

For Mouffe, liberalism's conception of the subject necessarily creates an aversion to the political because '[w]hat liberalism refuses to admit is that any form of social objectivity is ultimately political and that it bears the traces of the acts of exclusion which govern its constitution.'[53] Therefore, according to Mouffe's critique, liberalism misses the way difference is always constructed through the us/them distinction, instead reducing politics to simply the pursuit of individual and essentialised interests. Mouffe argues that identities are always structurally positioned, capable of both fluidity and antagonism, and she uses the new social movements as an example of her account of "chains of equivalence". For Mouffe, chains of equivalence are important because they illustrate that subjects experience inequalities across multiple identifications, simultaneously, but liberalism, with its focus on an essential being, overlooks these sites of antagonism and therefore the political. For example, a liberal model may tend to see women as a unified category within a feminist coalition, based on the biological determinate of sex, and despite the plethora of differences within this category. Following Mouffe's critiques, this view does not recognise the different structural positions of the subject of "woman". For example, in addition to gender, a woman may be positioned according to her class, race, sexuality, role in the workforce, etc., and at times these positions may conflict with each other. However, a liberal approach tends to mask these differences for the purposes of political coalitions, preferring to focus on harmony and unity. Under Mouffe's chains of equivalence, the differences are vital because they illustrate the myriad of oppressive forces at play so that the focus is not simply on patriarchy, in the feminism example, or capitalism in worker based struggles. In Mouffe's approach, differences are always recognised in the chain and specific interests can never be pursued at the expense of the interests of others within the chain.[54]

[53] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions', p. 6.
[54] Chantal Mouffe in Nico Carpentier and Bart Cammaerts 'Hegemony, Democracy, Agonism and Journalism: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 6, 2006, p. 971.

A further example which illustrates the chain of equivalence in action is the anti-globalisation movement, described by Paul Kingsnorth as being about *One No, Many Yeses*.[55] What these equivalents have in common is their rejection of the same frontier, namely market-led globalisation. While globalisation affects each particular in different ways, their fight against a common enemy unites these groups and individuals. This conception differs though from a liberal, interest group coalition because, in Mouffe's chain, the differences between each particular are still maintained; they do not have to be lost, overlooked or compromised for the sake of political strategy or collective engagement, and instead, the unity is bound by the antagonism towards a common enemy. As Mark Anthony Wenman explains, in the establishment of a frontier enemy,

> a plurality of particular struggles now become equivalent terms in their mutual antagonism to the external oppressive force, and this equivalence finds expression in the substitution of a collective identity for the particular demands of each of these struggles.[56]

Furthermore, what makes Mouffe's concept of chains of equivalence even more unique and important (and indeed radical), is the ability of the chain to reflect and change each of the particulars within it. This occurs when each subject or group of subjects, witnesses the different, and yet equivalent ways that globalisation (in this example), is effective. So, for example, workers in the West, having to compete with low paying positions in the majority world, become witness to the ways in which the discourse of market-led globalisation is perpetuating this antagonism. Instead of seeing the *individual* low paying employee as the problem, workers in the West are exposed to the way that globalisation is constructing both of these subject positions. Therefore, while the effects are different – workers in the West are threatened with less work, while the poor labour standards and conditions in the majority world means that workers there are exploited – the positions can be seen as being affected by the

[55] Paul Kingsnorth *One No, Many Yeses: A Journey to the Heart of the Global Resistance Movement* (Free Press: London, 2003).
[56] Mark Anthony Wenman 'Laclau or Mouffe? Splitting the Difference', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 29, No. 5, 2003, p. 590.

same force in similar ways; it is at this point that *difference is turned into equivalence*.[57] As Mouffe writes, the objective of the chains is 'to transform the consciousness of individual groups in society so that they see that their interests are tied up with the interests of other groups.'[58] This allows the chains to establish a new hegemony by exposing current systems of power, and their necessary effects. However, this can only be achieved by analysing the political ramifications of the discourse.

Mouffe's understanding of difference is in contrast to the liberal treatment. In a liberal approach, difference is seen as existing in an autonomous/atomistic form where individuals hold a plurality of views and interests, and compete to have them recognised. Under this liberal, aggregative model, the above example would be seen as workers from the West and the majority world competing against each other, and each group would see the other as the enemy rather than part of the equivalent "us". According to Mouffe, this liberal view tends to essentialise differences and locates problems within individuals rather than in systems of power. Mouffe argues that a liberal conception of the *a priori* subject impedes the process of forming chains of equivalence, and the consequential hegemonic challenge, because it does not recognise the constitutive nature of the discursive space. According to Mouffe,

> [f]or the liberals an adversary is simply a competitor. The field of politics is for them a neutral terrain in which different groups compete to occupy positions of power…They do not put into question the dominant hegemony and there is no attempt at profoundly transforming the relations of power.[59]

By seeing interests as defined in essentialist terms, liberalism fails to delineate the political frontier of the discursive and thus overlooks the antagonistic nature of politics.

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[57] Simon Tormey and Jules Townshend 'Laclau and Mouffe: Towards a Radical Democratic Imaginary', in Simon Tormey and Jules Townshend *Key Thinkers from Critical Theory to Post-Marxism* (Sage: London; California; New Delhi, 2006), p. 97.

[58] Chantal Mouffe in David Castle 'Hearts, Minds and Radical Democracy', (interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) *Red Pepper*, June 1, 1998, first accessed March 2008 at http://www.redpepper.org.uk/article563.html.

[59] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 21.

Liberalism tends to see difference and politics through the lens of demands stemming from rational self-interest and thus misses other driving forces. For example, according to Mouffe, nationalism cannot be understood through the lens of self-interest,[60] because it focuses on the collective, and appeals to passions that are beyond rational interest. In a similar fashion to the deliberative alternative, politics in the liberal approach is envisioned as a battleground whereby individuals compete (or deliberate) in order to secure their own interests. However, Mouffe argues that politics is driven by more than personal interest. According to Mouffe passion plays an important role and cannot always be equated with the notion of pure self-interest. She writes that

> in order to come to terms with the "political", it is not enough for liberal theory to acknowledge the existence of a plurality of values and to extol toleration. Democratic politics cannot be limited to establishing compromises among interests or values or to deliberation about the common good.[61]

Therefore, in seeing the role of democracy as mediating between interests, liberalism misses the role that power plays, both in the construction of hegemonic discourses and subjectivity. In order to truly facilitate the political, Mouffe believes that liberalism needs to recognise the constructed nature of identities and provide space for antagonism to be democratically present. She asks,

> [h]ow, in effect, can we hope to understand the nature of these new antagonisms if we hold on to an image of the unitary subject as the ultimate source of intelligibility of its actions? How can we grasp the multiplicity of relations of subordination that can affect an individual if we envisage social agents as homogenous and unified entities? What characterizes the struggles of the new social movements is precisely the multiplicity of subject positions which constitute a single agent and the possibility that this multiplicity can become the site of an antagonism and thereby politicized. Hence the importance of the critique of the rationalist concept of a unitary subject.[62]

[60] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions', p. 11.
[61] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 6.
[62] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 12.

According to Mouffe, '[l]iberalism 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.'[63] However, such a conception fails to recognise that the political is ontological,[64] and therefore always present, so for Mouffe antagonism and the political are axioms. While liberalism espouses a toleration of pluralism, it fails to see the *political* aspects of this difference. Mouffe's analysis shows that the discursive space and the other, always play a constitutive role; their presence is political and means that things could have always been different. A radical democratic approach aims to highlight this process and give space for the political. In contrast, through a liberal lens, difference exists but it is regulated to another sphere, outside of politics, usually the economic, judicial or moral.[65] The goal for radical democracy therefore, Mouffe argues, is to provide space for the political through what she calls "agonistic pluralism" (discussed later in this chapter). Therefore Mouffe makes a distinction between *the political* and *politics*, describing the former as 'the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations'.[66] The latter, however,

> indicates 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 because they are affected by the dimension of "the political".[67]

As discussed in Chapter Two, when there is no room for antagonism to be democratically present, the result is a form of violent difference that tends to be debated through moral rather than political discourse, as seen in the rise of the new right-wing parties. In the following section I will outline Mouffe's radical democratic proposal for taming antagonism so that it is given a democratic outlet.

[63] Ibid, p. 111.
[64] Ibid, p. 3.
[65] Chantal Mouffe 'Which Public Sphere for a Democratic Society?', *Theoria,* June 2002, p. 57.
[66] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 101.
[67] Ibid, p. 101.

- AGONISM -

The fundamental argument underlying Mouffe's approach is that the political informs every facet of a truly democratic project. Mouffe states that the political 'must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition.'[68] The value of antagonism and the political is necessary, according to Mouffe, in order to deal with difference. Furthermore, for difference to be democratically accounted for in society, there need to be mechanisms that provide for this. Agonism steps into this role because it ensures that a democratic space for difference is created, and that it is given a societal context. Rather than simply allowing a plethora of differences accorded to the individual (as in liberal pluralism), radical democracy, through the use of agonistic pluralism, creates a space for contestation to occur, but without requiring a "rational" homogenisation, or a relegation of these differences to the private sphere. We cannot rationally argue our way out of, or simply overcome our differences, so it is important for this dimension of the political to remain at the forefront of the democratic project. The political, for Mouffe, entails that '[t]hings could always be otherwise',[69] and that order is the result of the hegemony which has instituted some practices to the exclusion of others. Therefore, there is always power at play and it is impossible to avoid or negate this power. The formation of hegemonies means that there remains the potential for antagonism. The goal of radical democracy then is to ensure that antagonism can be tamed by transforming it into agonism. According to Mouffe 'agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognise the legitimacy of their opponents.'[70] This is unlike the liberal and post-political approaches that attempt to neutralise, rationalise, or overcome conflict in the hope of securing a harmonious ordering of society. Therefore, as will be shown in this section, Mouffe's approach

[68] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 3.
[69] Chantal Mouffe 'Some Reflections on an Agonistic Approach to the Public', p. 805.
[70] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 20.

provides a dramatically different (and therefore radical) way of democratically facilitating these tensions.

According to Schmitt "every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms itself into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to the friend and enemy."[71] Mouffe adopts Schmitt's ideas and concludes that the friend/enemy dichotomy is inherent in politics. Mouffe argues that, in order to provide democratically for pluralism and antagonism, we need to make a distinction between the antagonism of an enemy and the "agonism" of an adversary. Mouffe believes that liberalism sees difference in the form of a competitive enemy who needs to be destroyed. According to her theory of agonistic pluralism however, the confrontation is with an adversary not an enemy. She writes, '[a]n adversary is a legitimate enemy…with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy.'[72] Following Schmitt, the enemy is never a 'personal' enemy but rather a 'public' one,[73] in the sense that it is not about destroying an individual. Instead the focus is on contesting the bounds of the political. Hence the need for collective identities and why Mouffe concludes that liberal individualism is unable to address such processes. Adversaries struggle to have their position secured as the hegemonic but, as Mouffe states, they share an adherence to common principles. However, because liberalism does not recognise the political nature of contestation, it simply relegates difference to a dichotomous relationship, unable to be transcended, where the positions are framed as either inherently right or wrong thus negating, not only the political, but the very possibility of a pluralist democracy. Liberalism draws frontiers but does not recognise the political nature of such decisions, or it masks them behind appeals to rationality, reasonableness, or universalism. However, as Mouffe argues, this does not neutralise antagonism, rather it simply prevents its democratic transition to agonism.

[71] Carl Schmitt as quoted by Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 22.
[72] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', *Social Research*, Vol. 66, No. 3, Fall 1999, p. 755.
[73] Chantal Mouffe 'Schmitt's Vision of a Multipolar World Order', *South Atlantic Quarterly,* Vol. 104, No. 2, Spring 2005, p. 246.

In Mouffe's theory of agonism '[a]dversaries do fight – even fiercely – but according to a shared set of rules, and their proposition, despite being ultimately irreconcilable, are accepted as legitimate perspectives.'[74] Therefore, radical democracy aims to create an agonistic debate about the fundamentals of democracy, and it ensures that the hegemony is only ever partially fixed. By turning the us/them distinction into a democratic and political contestation, through the transformation of antagonism into agonism, Mouffe is able to provide space for non-essentialised difference. This differs markedly from the liberal approach, which tends to essentialise difference into the pursuit of self-interest, and draws boundaries without recognising the political nature of such a process. Mouffe writes that this is problematic because,

> [w]hen the opponent is defined not in political but in moral terms, he can be envisaged only as an enemy, not as an adversary: no agonistic debate is possible with the 'evil them'; they must be eradicated.[75]

In contrast, the process of transforming antagonism into agonism, or enemies into adversaries, is a sort of '*conversion*' of identity rather than a compromise on rational grounds.[76] It is not about us seeing the validity of someone else's position or being persuaded by their argument. Rather, it is about recognising that they share a position within the democratic polity (through the adherence to the principles of liberty and equality), and are thus respectfully challenged. This may appear, on the surface, to parallel a liberal, pluralistic toleration. However, there are very important differences.

To begin with, the differences are not simply a matter of autonomous choice as, according to Mouffe, we are never completely free of the discursive. Hence 'interests never exist prior to the discourses in which they are articulated and constituted.'[77] So, for example, a discourse of neoliberalism may help to construct interests and choices along the lines of increased profit, over say the

[74] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 52.
[75] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions', p. 15.
[76] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 102, emphasis in original.
[77] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects: Toward a New Concept of Democracy' (translated by Stanley Gray), in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1988), p. 90.

environment. But while this may appear to be a "rational choice", it cannot be separated from the paradigm at play, and thus it is not merely about an individual uncovering and pursuing their underlying, entrepreneurial interests. Therefore, while liberalism is able to view difference and pluralism as a matter of autonomous choice, and thus relegate any socially disruptive choices to the realm of the private, a radical democratic approach rejects such distinctions. According to Mouffe, because of the constitutive nature of the other, the political is ontological and it is impossible to delineate political from non-political spaces. To extol simply a toleration of difference and pluralism, as is the case with liberalism, therefore misses the interplay between, and constitutive nature, of such differences. As Mouffe writes, 'such a pluralism misses the dimension of the *political*. Relations of power and antagonisms are erased and we are left with the typical illusion of a pluralism without antagonism.'[78] Mouffe fundamentally rejects this atomistic model and thus her approach provides a new way of conceptualising pluralism that will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

- CONCLUSION -

As has been shown throughout this chapter, Mouffe's understanding of pluralism is vastly different from the liberal one. According to Mouffe's analysis, pluralism cannot be seen as a plethora of interests, held by individuals with the aim of competing for these demands. Such a view reduces politics to an aggregation of interests, and remains 'blind to power relations.'[79] Instead, Mouffe's approach highlights the complex nature of pluralism and its relationship to the political. Mouffe's conception of agonistic pluralism is useful because it allows for the constitutive nature of difference to be recognised as well as facilitated. For pluralism to remain at the core of democracy, political alternatives need to ensure that its presence is never negated. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the dimensions of power laden within these differences.

[78] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 20, emphasis in original.
[79] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 70.

Pluralism is never neutral and so democratic approaches need to provide mechanisms for dealing with these complexities in a way that continues to foster democratic ideals.

Although liberalism fails to fully comprehend the political and agonistic nature of pluralism, Mouffe still finds worth within the paradigm. Indeed as was explained in Chapter One, liberalism forms an essential element in the drive to achieve the socialist goals that are also inherent in radical democracy. For Mouffe, liberalism contributes the notion of the individual and the importance of pluralism, dimensions that are often overlooked or devalued in traditional socialist projects. However, in order for liberalism to be useful for her radical democratic approach, Mouffe argues that liberalism needs to be re-theorised, especially with regard to its conception of the subject. Like her critique of classical Marxism, liberalism tends to see subjects as *a priori* rather than acknowledging their constructed nature. This type of Enlightenment thinking means that the power matrices involved in the subject's positioning are overlooked. While classical Marxism was aware of structures of power, it limited its analysis to the effects of capital rather than expanding the lens to incorporate other areas of subordination. As such, classical Marxism recognised antagonism, but only saw it in the form of class antagonisms.[80]

Deliberative democratic and post-political theories, on the other hand, have an aversion to antagonism and the dimension of the political. Instead of seeing them as inherent to the democratic process, these alternatives promote the misconception that harmony, consensus and neutrality are possible, and indeed desirable. According to Mouffe, these alternatives try to overcome the us/them distinction and therefore mask power. Similarly, by not allowing for conflict, these post-political and consensus driven models prevent the facilitation of democratic outlets for antagonism.

[80] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', p. 144.

Political models that aim at consensus or homogenisation negate, not only the political dimension, but also the functioning of a true democracy. However, a radical approach, incorporating agonism, avoids masking power relations and the boundaries drawn between the us/them. Indeed, by highlighting the fact that every decision is a political one, and because '[t]here are no impartial solutions in politics',[81] Mouffe's approach illustrates that it is important to trace these lines of exclusion. Radical democracy can show that social order is not static, but is rather formed through hegemonic practices, which are always capable of being antagonistic through challenges and renegotiation. Therefore, Mouffe's argument, that behind each agonistic confrontation is the fight to secure the hegemony of the social order, illustrates that power can never be transcended. Alternative political models that try to produce "neutral" sets of procedures and principles then, simply hide this dimension. Rawls's original position and Habermas's ideal speech situation, despite claims to the contrary, are not able to produce objective outcomes that are fair and equal for all because such a task is impossible. Therefore, as alternatives that aim to reinvigorate democratic discourse, these approaches are seriously flawed. Mouffe's approach, on the other hand, is able to facilitate the democratic aspects of pluralism while reconciling that there is no space that is free from power. In contrast to the alternatives discussed in this first part, Mouffe's radical democracy does stand as a useful and important contribution to the field of democratic theory.

Mouffe's use of poststructuralist theorising importantly shows that power is inherent and always constitutive. Mouffe's approach recognises that,

> '[t]o establish a set of norms that are beyond power or force is itself a powerful and forceful conceptual practice that sublimates, disguises and extends its own power play through recourse to tropes of normative universality.'[82]

Unlike the alternatives discussed that do disguise power, Mouffe's approach avoids this. The radical democratic approach illustrates that it must be

[81] Chantal Mouffe 'The 'End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', p. 55.
[82] Judith Butler as quoted by Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 143.

recognised that the establishment of norms are discursive practices, pursuing the hegemonic position. Such an analysis shows that, despite appearing as a common sense, or neutral order, the construction of norms is merely a hegemonic discourse that can therefore be challenged. Mouffe's radical democratic approach allows for this challenge to occur and prevents the view that order can be established conclusively. In comparison, the alternatives discussed throughout this first part of this thesis 'do not put into question the dominant hegemony and there is no attempt at profoundly transforming the relations of power.'[83] As will be detailed in the following two chapters, Mouffe's approach does, however, challenge these forces. By utilising poststructuralist theory, Mouffe is able to re-theorise many elements of political theory and produce a radically different approach to democracy, while tracing its own power matrices.

[83] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 21.

Part Two

Mouffe's Radical Alternative

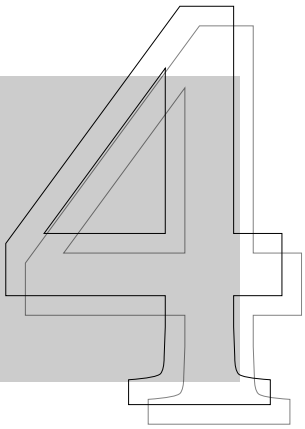
In the two chapters of this Part Two, I will further examine Mouffe's radical democratic alternative. This part offers a further exploration of the theoretical aspects of Mouffe's approach, some of which have already been touched upon in previous chapters. However, where the preceding three chapters looked at Mouffe's work in comparison to the other political alternatives, Chapters Four and Five provide more of an exegesis of the core elements of Mouffe's approach.

To begin with, Chapter Four looks at how Mouffe's theoretical approach, which draws on the work of a number of poststructuralist, semiotic, and psychoanalytic theorists, comes to reconceptualise fundamental aspects of democratic and political theory, from the subject, to pluralism, and even democracy itself. This chapter then also explores some of the implications of this re-theorising, in terms of Mouffe providing a radical alternative.

Building on the theoretical framework of Chapter Four, Chapter Five examines a more practical application of Mouffe's ideas. By looking at her approach to citizenship, I will show how Mouffe intends to utilise her theory in order to pursue the political project of radical democracy. However, in the ensuing discussion of this chapter, some of the inconsistencies and theoretical gaps in Mouffe's work begin to surface. While they will be explored in more detail in

Part Three, Chapter Five provides the foreground from which to consider these arguments.

Mouffe's Radical (Re)-Theorising



Examining Mouffe's re-theorising of various concepts provides insight into the usefulness of her argument and hence this chapter provides a more detailed exegesis of the most radical aspects of Mouffe's approach. While the first three chapters of this thesis introduced, and discussed Mouffe's concepts, in contrast to other alternatives, this chapter will examine in detail the aspects of Mouffe's approach in their own right. Although an argument will be made (in Chapters Six and Seven of Part Three), that Mouffe's approach does not fully reach its radical potential, here the concern is to highlight some of the most progressive aspects of her work. Such a focus is imperative as it illustrates that, despite the faults of the approach as a whole, Mouffe's re-conceptions raise important challenges to traditional and alternative models of democracy. Indeed, as this chapter will show, this is where the most radical aspects of her approach occur.

In Part One of this thesis I argued that Mouffe's approach could be seen to be radical because it poses important challenges and offers alternatives to other models of democracy and politics. This chapter takes this idea further. In the first section I will discuss Mouffe's re-theorisation of identity, outlining how Mouffe is able to utilise a poststructuralist understanding of the subject, while still allowing for agency and political engagement. In the second section, I assert that Mouffe's conception of agonistic pluralism is particularly apposite when dealing with the potentially antagonistic nature of diversity. Unlike the other models discussed in Part One, Mouffe's approach recognises the inherent

presence of power in all social relations, and so is better equipped to deal with the political. It is this understanding that informs Mouffe's approach to democracy, and this is discussed in the third section of this chapter. Mouffe's re-theorisation of democracy, like her other conceptions, acknowledges the constitutive role of power and ensures that no single authority can monopolise the place of democracy. Instead, Mouffe highlights that democracy can be occupied by varying discourses, each vying for the position of hegemony. What her analysis shows is that this battle is part of the wider democratic debate and that the constant re-negotiation is vital for maintaining democracy. In re-conceptualising democracy in this way, Mouffe provides a radically different and yet truly democratic alternative that celebrates diversity while acknowledging the nature and ubiquity of power and the political.

- IDENTITY RE-THEORISED -

"Distinguo ergo sum"[1]

I distinguish therefore I am

Mouffe's poststructuralist conception of identity which, if it were to be summarised in one sentence, would be reflected succinctly by the above quotation. Such a conception has profound implications for her approach to democracy. Moreover, it challenges many of the assumptions underlying the other democratic alternatives discussed in this thesis. Although Mouffe's theory of identity was touched upon in Part One, it is useful to discuss this element in more detail here. The exploration of her approach to identity will facilitate a deeper analysis of Mouffe's conception of pluralism, and will illustrate why such an approach is useful for democratic re-theorising. It will also help in tracing Mouffe's logic in utilising concepts taken from theorists like Derrida, Foucault, Saussure and Lacan – a logic which informs her poststructuralist account of identity and ultimately informs her core concern with the ubiquity of antagonism and the political.

[1] Carl Schmitt as quoted by Mark Lilla 'Carl Schmitt', in Mark Lilla *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York Review of Books: New York, 2001), p. 57.

-THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE-

Mouffe challenges the essentialist view of the subject as complete, fixed and *a priori*, and instead puts forward a poststructuralist account of identity. This approach relies heavily on the linguistic approaches of Derrida, Saussure and Lacan. Thus, she draws the conclusion that identities are constructed and "filled" with meaning through discursive practices, rather than being informed by an underlying essence that exists prior to society. For Mouffe it is not possible for anything to have meaning outside of the discursive because 'in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse'.[2] As explained in Chapter One, the decentering of structure means that there is no pre-given essence or essentialised factor on which to rely for meaning. For example, in showing that Marxism's account of the effects of capitalism can not accurately account for the new social movements, Mouffe's poststructuralist critique highlights that the reliance on a centred structure (in this example, capitalism) to fully determine meaning (i.e. class) is an illusion. Instead Mouffe argues that it is *discourse* – a system of power without a centre – that is responsible for the contextualisation of meaning and thus identities. However, it is also vital to note that this meaning is never fully given, because it can always be disrupted, and thus it is always contingent and historically located.

In describing discourse, Mouffe goes beyond the linguistic or merely speech acts, and includes 'written documents, speech, ideas, concrete practices, rituals, institutions, and empirical objects'.[3] The "discursive" then, is the 'theoretical *horizon*',[4] which operates to inform the current possibility of present discourses, and as Anna Marie Smith describes it, the discursive is 'the totality of discourses taken as a whole.'[5] Laclau and Mouffe write that their theory of discourse and meaning

[2] Jacques Derrida *Writing and Difference* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1978), p. 280.
[3] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (Routledge: London; New York, 1998), p. 85.
[4] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism without Apologies', *New Left Review*, I. 166, November/December 1987, p. 86, emphasis in original.
[5] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 85.

> affirms: a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence; and b) that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities.[6]

Therefore, Mouffe follows Derrida in saying that '[t]here is nothing outside the text'.[7] However, in making no distinction between the discursive and non-discursive, Mouffe distinguishes her work from that of Foucault, who may be said to maintain this binary.[8] Mouffe's theory of discourse then 'does not merely designate a linguistic region within the social, but is rather co-extensive with the social."[9]

It is important to note, however, that while Mouffe argues that it is discourse that creates meaning, she does not suggest that the physical *existence* of an object or being is reliant on discourse. Instead, it is clear that the *meaning* and *value* of an identity can only be informed through discursive practices. Therefore, Mouffe differentiates 'between the being (*esse*) of an object, which is historical and changing, and the entity (*ens*) of that object which is not.'[10] The effect of this re-theorising is that it moves away from *a priori* understandings that conceptualise subjectivities and identities as holding, at their core, an essence that needs to be uncovered or protected. The essentialist type of theorising looks for principal characteristics to define identities and so tends to homogenise difference. Such approaches also fail to address the power matrices involved in the construction of subjectivities and identities. Mouffe's approach, on the other hand, acknowledges the constitutive nature of power and is able to maintain space for the recognition of difference.

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[6] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Verso: London; New York, 2001), p. 107.
[7] Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology* (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore; London, 1974), p. 158.
[8] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 107.
[9] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999), p. 300.
[10] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism without Apologies', pp. 84-85.

Following on from Saussure, Mouffe argues that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, in that there is nothing inherent in either that can determine identity, and rather meaning is relational and contextual. For example, on a set of traffic lights the fact that the green light indicates "go" is an arbitrary fact since it could have easily been another colour that was used; there is nothing inherent in the colour green that necessarily suggests that it is the most appropriate colour. Instead, it is the discourse of traffic law that has constructed the meaning of the colour green in this context. Similarly, the meaning of the green light is required to be set against the meaning of the yellow and red lights, for without them, the value of the green light is lost. In Saussure's example of the chess piece, which can be substituted for some other object (for example a coin or stone), what is important is that the meaning attributed to the object remains the same; outside of the game of chess, the object would remain a coin or stone.[11] Therefore, as Smith summarises,

> [t]he linguistic sign, like the chess piece, has no positivity in isolation from the linguistic system, for its meaning is constructed exclusively in terms of the differences between itself and the other signs in that system.[12]

Mouffe also goes on to utilise the concept of "lack", taken from Lacan, to say that subjects are sites of lack,[13] which can only be "filled" through the interplay between what is referred to as the "constitutive outside". Mouffe utilises this concept, taken from Derrida, to say that the identity of a subject is paradoxically prevented, and at the same time informed by its relationship with the "other".[14] Mouffe writes that 'there is no identity that is self-present to itself and not constructed as difference.'[15] Therefore, there is always a process of positive

[11] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 86.
[12] Ibid, p. 86.
[13] While Mouffe's work relies heavily on the Lacanian notion of the "lack", it is important to note that not all radical democrats follow this line of argument. Writers like William E. Connolly and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, informed by the work of Gilles Deleuze, reject the notion of lack and instead theorise along the lines of "abundance" (Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', in Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little (Eds.) *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2009), p. 5); and (Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen 'Introduction: Rethinking Radical Democracy Between Abundance and Lack', in Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (Eds.) *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2005), pp. 5-7).
[14] In this sense the "other'" refers to more than a human other – '[t]he other that I confront is literally "other", that which is alien and outside. The other that I confront at any given time may be animal, vegetable or mineral' (Mark Anthony Wenman 'What is Politics? The Approach of Radical Pluralism', *Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2003, p. 60).
[15] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 141.

disassociation whereby my identity is constructed against the identity of an "other". According to Mouffe, however, this process is paradoxical in that this other prevents the complete closure and fullness of my identity, while at the same time contributing to its construction. It is through the prevention of closure and fullness that potential is assured because there is no finality or complete endpoint. My identity is not static because the other is always disruptive. Mouffe writes that

> [t]he existence of the other becomes a condition of possibility of my identity since, without the other, I could not have an identity. Therefore every identity is irremediably destabilized by its exterior and the interior appears as something always contingent.[16]

Following Mouffe's poststructuralist account, every identity is constructed through various factors (or is "overdetermined") and identity cannot be seen as "pure" or "objective" because it is not fully determined. Therefore, 'everything is constructed as *difference*', the outside is always 'present within the inside' and thus 'every identity becomes purely contingent'.[17] However, what liberalism and the other essentialist alternatives fail to recognise is that exclusion is always part of this process. The other democratic theories previously discussed tend to argue that full inclusion and harmony is possible in a *demos,* because they see identity as *a priori*. They therefore employ various mechanisms to try and secure this through their model of democracy. For Mouffe, however, this is a futile goal as there will never be full inclusion, because democratic politics always involves antagonism through the constitutive role of the other. Mouffe argues that the discursive construction of identities means that exclusionary lines are always drawn. These frontiers determine what is equivalent and what is different, with both types of identifications playing a constructive role in the formation of each other. For example, in Australia the political debate about asylum seekers often builds binary lines of exclusion and inclusion. The dominant discourse, facilitated through political leaders and their policies,

[16] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', in George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (Eds.) *Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective* (Routledge: London; New York, 2009), p. 336.
[17] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000), p. 21, emphasis in original.

together with media reports and general public sentiment, constructs asylum seekers as the threatening other, who pose a threat to the "normal" Australian way of life. In these arguments, the asylum seekers are generalised as dangerous, illegal, queue jumpers, who are flooding our borders and who are only interested in coming here in order to take advantage of Australia's welfare system.[18] Such powerful language, helps to reinforce the identity of "normal" Australians through the disassociation with asylum seekers. In this process, the diversity of Australian citizens is masked, and rather the "sameness" of being against asylum seekers is elevated to the principle signifier, uniting and espousing a patriotic Australianness.

This positive disassociation helps to create a powerful common identity (equivalence) of citizens as set against the non-citizen, because without the use of the other, it is difficult to mask the potentially divisive differences *within* the identity of citizens. Likewise, the similarities between the supposedly different groups of asylum seekers and Australian nationals further fragment the rhetorical purity of the citizenry. Throughout John Howard's terms as Prime Minister, this was one device that he used to assert his idea of Australian identity. The employment of the refugee 'as the antithesis of what constitutes Australianness'[19] became a successful rhetorical tool in nearly all of Howard's re-election campaigns. However, Mouffe's analysis is useful in that it highlights that such divisions and unifications are merely constructions of discourse; they are not based on any *a priori* characteristics of the subjects, but instead on the relationships that are constructed through power matrices.

Given this conceptualisation, for Mouffe 'all systems of social relations imply to a certain extent relations of power, since the construction of a social identity is an act of power.'[20] This also means that through the process of identity

[18] For examples of this kind of attitude and language see Jim Saleam and Brendan Gidley 'Will Some in One Nation Cross to the Dark Side on Refugees: Why Can't it Just be NO??', from Australia First: South Australia, first accessed December 2010 at http://www.australiafirstsouthaustralia.blogspot.com/.
[19] Nick Dyrenfurth 'Battlers, Refugees and the Republic: John Howard's Language of Citizenship', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 28, I. 84, 2005, p. 194.
[20] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 141.

formation, it is always possible for the relationship between the subject and the other to become antagonistic. This point is illustrated in the instance noted above regarding the Australian citizens and the excluded asylum seekers. In contrast, the other democratic alternatives discussed in Part One, fail to acknowledge the role of this constitutive outside and consequently, miss the dimension of power and thus the role of antagonism and the political. They therefore fail to truly accommodate difference. Mouffe's approach, on the other hand, highlights that discourse is always political because it always involves the drawing of frontiers in conveying meaning; discourse will always establish boundaries that stipulate what is included and what is excluded. Such an approach necessarily challenges the neutrality claims made by liberal and deliberative democracy theorists.

For Mouffe, because everything has a discursive nature, all objects and practices play a part in constructing meaning. Therefore, there are no neutral or objective acts or institutions, and in Mouffe's view, any theory that claims otherwise is simply preventing the political aspect from being exposed. Mouffe's approach instead allows us to problematise identity by asking *how* it is constructed. In doing so we can trace the acts of power and understand its historical location. Unlike essentialised conceptions of the subject, which see the individual as static, Mouffe's approach recognises the process of change and fluidity. Mouffe's approach also allows us to utilise this lens to analyse how the *demos* is constructed. Employing this approach, we not only trace the lines of exclusion/inclusion and show how they are drawn, but an opportunity is created for challenges to be made in order to "re-draw" these boundaries. If we return to the Australian instance of asylum seekers once again, the opportunities for such re-drawing are evident. Activists in Australia are attempting to challenge the xenophobic attitudes levelled at refugees by supporting a new immigration centre in Inverbrackie in South Australia.[21] In challenging xenophobia, these

[21] Adam Todd 'Welcome to Paradise', *The Advertiser*, December 22, 2010 first accessed at http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/ipad/welcome-to-paradise/story-fn6bqphm-1225974704692; Adam Todd 'Give Detainees a "Fair Go", Says Governor Kevin Scarce', *The Advertiser*, December 29, 2010, first accessed at

activists are trying to re-construct the idea of what it means to be a responsible, Australian citizen, and reject claims that asylum seekers are not legitimate members of the polity.

The result of discursively constructed identities then, as Mouffe's re-theorisation suggests, is that these identities are always only partially fixed, are capable of reconstruction through changes in discourse, and are not based on *a priori* or essentialised characteristics. Therefore, according to Mouffe, and keeping with most poststructuralist approaches, there is no meaning outside of the discursive because 'it is through participation in different language games that the world is disclosed to us.'[22] As we will see, however, in translating meaning, discourse does not negate the subject or the subject's agency. Instead, Mouffe's approach provides new ways of utilising identity in political ways.

-SUBJECT POSITIONS-

Affirming that meaning is only constituted through discourse, and that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, Mouffe concludes that identities cannot be considered fully established essences. Instead she employs the concept of "subject positions" in order to highlight the nature of identities. For Mouffe, subject positions represent the placement of the subject within discourse and thus its power relations with the other. Given that there are multiple sites of power, the subject will always be positioned along multiple and varying lines, depending on these social relations. She writes

> [w]ithin every society, each social agent is inscribed in a multiplicity of social relations…All these social relations determine positionalities or subject positions, and every social agent is therefore the locus of many subject positions and cannot be reduced to only one.[23]

In this context it is also possible, and likely, that a subject may be subordinated in one relation and yet not experience this oppression in another.[24] Theories of

http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/give-detainees-a-fair-go-says-governor/story-e6frea83-1225977506265.

[22] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 76.
[23] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', pp. 89-90.
[24] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 77.

the subject that homogenise identity tend to miss this diversity, according to Mouffe, because they focus on essentialised characteristics. For example, an individual may be positioned according to both the subject positions of "woman" and "employee", each of which may produce different lived experiences. These identities, under Mouffe's approach, simply become signifiers, in that there is no essential value that can *determine* meaning and hence assume positionalities. As the 2nd wave of the feminist movement showed, not all women experience the effects of gender hierarchy in the same way. But, utilising an *a priori*, static, and homogenous identity of "woman" overlooks these important differences and experiences. Mouffe challenged the classism in Marxism and socialism for similar reasons.

However, Mouffe's notion of subject positions does not prevent challenges to inequality, nor does it negate using the signifiers of "woman" or "worker" to convey subject positions. Mouffe is careful to ensure that the challenges to domination that underlay the feminist movement, for instance, are still possible through her re-theorisation.[25] For example, under an essentialised approach, the term or category of "woman" has sometimes entailed finding common issues, supposedly experienced by all women, as the means to address inequality between genders. However, this usage fails to address diversity and differences between women associated with others matrices of power, such as class or race positioning. Such universalised and homogenous claims regarding women as an undifferentiated group also results in unsustainable assumptions regarding the social positioning of every individual woman as against every individual man. Clearly the identity category of woman is not all determining in terms of power relations, since some individual men or even groups of men may also face significant social inequalities. Furthermore, when this analysis is viewed along class or race lines, the inequalities experienced by men and women may be equivalent.

[25] Ibid, pp. 78-82.

In contrast to essentialised categories, the notion of subject positions that Mouffe's approach offers can be employed in political exchanges, while recognising that these positions are not singular, nor fixed, and they are not identical in all contexts. In dealing with feminism, Mouffe argues that current democratic feminists 'have been looking either for the specific demands that should express women's interests or for the specific feminine values that should become the model for democratic politics.'[26] Instead, Mouffe's re-theorisation reframes the issues and allows us to instead ask:

> How is "woman" constructed as a category within different discourses? How is sexual difference made a pertinent distinction in social relations? And how are relations of subordination constructed through such a distinction?[27]

Mouffe's approach, therefore, does not abandon "identities" entirely, nor does it negate their political use, but rather the fixity of identity politics is reconceived through the reconstitution of identities as subject positions. In relation to the example of feminism, Mouffe concludes that

> [t]he whole false dilemma of equality-versus-difference is exploded since we no longer have a homogenous entity "woman" facing another homogenous entity "man", but a multiplicity of social relations in which sexual difference is always constructed in very diverse ways and where the struggle against subordination has to be visualized in specific and differential forms.[28]

While the signifier "man" may still be employed as the antagonistic, constitutive outside, which provides for a chain of equivalence through a discourse of feminism, it is not individual men that are the "enemy". Therefore in a radical democratic approach there are no battles against essentialised identities or actual individuals, but rather the problem is seen as being created by the tensions between power relations, conveyed in different signifiers (and experienced in different subject positions) that are constructed by the discursive. As Mouffe says, subject positions

> can never be conflated with social agents. The struggle against racism or sexism, for instance, consists in destroying racist or sexist *subject positions* and the institutions in which these are embodied, *not concrete human beings*. The

[26] Ibid, p. 79.
[27] Ibid, p. 78.
[28] Ibid.

> elimination of the "enemy" should not be understood as physical elimination.[29]

Consequently, in Mouffe's re-theorising, the analysis focuses on how the ideas and practices, implicit or overt, affect my positioning, and what changes need to be made to alter this. In contrast, *a priori* theories of the subject that essentialise identity tend to miss diversity, because they focus on homogenised characteristics, or they frame the battle as being between actual individuals or as fixed oppositional groups. This can impede the struggle for substantial equality because it locates the problem as being within an homogenised subject, and therefore misses the roles of power as exercised within the discursive; it locates the problem in the wrong place. It is the challenge to power relations where actual progress can be made and Mouffe's approach allows for this.

-AGENCY-

When discussing the affective role of discourse, it is important to note that Mouffe's understanding of the power of discourse is vastly different to traditional conceptions of "structures". Under such an approach, 'structures are characterized by the absence of social agency',[30] so that the subject and the macro level of power are distinct, with the meaning of the former relying on the latter. Where structures are seen to have a fully established centre that acts upon an existing subject, Mouffe's understanding of discourse is less prohibitive. In fact, it is precisely the decentering of structures that ensures the agency of the subject. Although 'no individual can choose to stand outside the totality of interpretive frameworks; [and] our fundamental dependence upon the interpretative function of discourse is written into our very human condition',[31] this does not negate the agency of the subject because there is a difference between *affecting* and *determining* – or *systems* and *structures*.

[29] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 25, emphasis added.
[30] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 137.
[31] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 57.

According to the analysis of classical Marxists, for example, structures like capitalism have necessary effects on the subject. In the case of capitalism, it produces certain categories of identities that are positioned according to class, each of which can be experienced, respectively, in the same way. These structures are understood to produce predictable results because they are seen as having a solid centre from which meaning is determined. However, poststructuralist critiques, like Mouffe's, aim at showing that this form of approach fails to account for a variety of effects. In Mouffe and Laclau's analysis, their example is the growth of the new social movements that cannot be accounted for in Marxist, class-based theorising. Mouffe's response to such traditional structuralist accounts provides a new, decentred understanding of systems of power (as discourse) that acknowledges the limitations and effects that are created by these same discursive systems, while simultaneously allowing the experience of agency. The distinction between "structure" and "system" is important here because, as Jacob Torfing notes, *structures* are 'closed and centred totalit[ies].'[32] *Systems*, on the other hand, can be described as 'the reproduced patterns of interaction between individual and collective actors' that do not prevent agency.[33] Mouffe's approach, while allowing for the constructive effects of discourse, does not prevent an account of agency.

Mouffe's explanation of the formation of identities does highlight the influence of power. However, as Judith Butler notes "[t]o claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency."[34] Although Mouffe does not discuss explicitly the notion of agency, her approach similarly contends that agency is made possible by the decentring of structure and the contextualisation of the subject.[35] In other words, because we cannot predict the influence that various systems of power will have, the subject may live their subject positions in many different ways. For Mouffe, this occurs through

[32] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 137.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Judith Butler as quoted by Fiona Webster 'The Politics of Sex and Gender: Benhabib and Butler Debate Subjectivity', *Hypatia*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 2000, p. 8.
[35] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 95.

identification, where the subject plays-out, communicates, or articulates, their constituted subject position. For example, under a capitalist system a subject may articulate their subject position as a consumer in a variety of ways. They may act to take advantage of their purchasing power and try to build a monopoly by acquiring assets like real estate. On the other hand, they may try to work against the free-market hegemony by consuming fair-trade products that are not produced for economic profit. Alternatively, they may try to avoid the system altogether, rejecting the consumer identity by establishing subsistence farms and offering services, rather than money, in exchange for products they need to source. In each of these examples, the subject is able to articulate its response to the system of capitalism, though their responses are always still framed, and somewhat limited by, the presence of the systems; they are not unaffected. As these examples show, and importantly for Mouffe, articulation is not a one-way process. Instead, she (and Laclau) describe articulation as being 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice.'[36] Therefore, articulation also acts to affect the discourse such that it supports it (like the buying of real estate under a discourse of capitalism) or it challenges it (like the rejection of consumerism outlined in the same example).

Furthermore, agency is not to be conflated with autonomy. As Torfing explains, agency occurs when a subject is 'intentionally acting' so that a 'subject's actions have a direction, i.e. they are not random.'[37] However, this does not suggest that there are *no* limits imposed on the subject by discourse or power relations. Agency does not imply complete autonomy, where absolutely anything is possible through the "choice" of the subject. Discourse does impose limits through contextualisation. For example, in response to the system of capitalism as described above, each situation is constituted, and necessitated, precisely because of the *existence* of the system. By contrast, in a socialist system there would be little opportunity to create real estate empires,

[36] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 105.
[37] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 137.

and there would be less need to be self-sufficient in order to sustain oneself in the face of unpredictability within the economic order. This illustrates that the discursive system provides an environment or context that facilitates articulation, but its presence also means that absolute autonomy is not possible. In this way discourse is constitutive – affecting and enabling the subject. This is another "lack" that enables agency but prevents identity from being fully fixed and whole. It is precisely because discourse is not a synonym for structure, that agency is possible. In decentred systems, power is not simply top-down and oppressive, and thus discourse can always be challenged and disrupted. As Mouffe and Laclau explain,

> no discursive totality is absolutely self-contained – …there will always be an outside which distorts it and prevents it from fully constituting itself – …the form and essence of objects are penetrated by a basic instability, and…this is *their most essential possibility*.[38]

By "abstracting" the subject from the constitutive nature of discourse, the other alternative accounts of democracy discussed in this thesis diminish agency while simultaneously perpetuating the illusion of the possibility of complete autonomy. Instead, Mouffe's approach acknowledges agency while recognising the inescapable affect of power. This is a radical element because it allows subjects to challenge systems of power and re-construct their subject positions. In order to account for this new understanding of identity, and the role of the political and antagonism in its construction, Mouffe is also required to re-theorise the notion of pluralism.

- PLURALISM -

Recognising the *character* of pluralism is an essential feature of Mouffe's approach, and her conception of pluralism is vastly different to those found in other theories. In both Chapters Two and Three, I detailed Mouffe's arguments against the deliberative and liberal means of dealing with pluralism, and in both

[38] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism Without Apologies', p. 89, emphasis in original.

cases we see an essentialised notion of difference where it is either rationalised away or forced into the private sphere. In both instances the goal is to try and negotiate away from pluralism or find 'a *solution* to the *problem* of pluralism.'[39] However, because Mouffe's approach follows the Derridean approach, which sees difference as occurring before the subject, a radical democratic approach to pluralism is fundamentally different. For Mouffe, the logic of difference and equivalence means that pluralism cannot be neutral; it is always potentially conflict ridden. As a result, Mouffe re-theorises pluralism in order to accommodate antagonism and the political.

Mouffe's pluralism is not about choice or relativism, nor is it about simply different, essentialised identities. Instead, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism highlights that conflict is always a part of pluralism, and hence in her approach it is not just about variety. Similarly, Mouffe's approach does not see the conflict inherent in pluralism as occurring between relatively "equal" positions that need to be tolerated or competed against, as is the case in some liberal models. Instead, Mouffe's approach recognises the constitutive and political nature of pluralism, and so *agonistic pluralism* becomes an essential feature of Mouffe's radical democracy.

-AGONISTIC PLURALISM-

For Mouffe, pluralism is 'the defining feature of modern democracy',[40] and its recognition in liberalism is part of the reason why Mouffe is so adamant that political liberalism must be an element of radical democracy.[41] According to Mouffe, modern democracies are defined 'by the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself the representation of the totality and claim in that way to have the "mastery" of the foundation.'[42] Therefore, democracy is seen as an empty space, open to fluidity, difference and change. In order to avoid the

[39] John Gray 'Where Pluralists and Liberals Part Company', in Maria Baghramian and Attracta Ingram (Eds.) *Pluralism: The Philosophy and Politics of Diversity* (Routledge: London, 2000), p. 85, emphasis added.
[40] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 19.
[41] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 20.
[42] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', *Social Research*, Vol. 66, No. 3, Fall 1999, p. 752.

totalitarian aspects of arresting this diversity, respect for pluralism is paramount. However, Mouffe's conception of pluralism is not simply about variety, or a plethora of individual or group based interests, desires, or opinions, as some liberal theories tend to frame it. Instead, Mouffe sees pluralism as having an inherently conflictual nature and so her approach utilises the concept of *agonistic pluralism*[43] that recognises the importance of passions and the inherent presence of the political.

In Mouffe's re-theorisation, social activity is always about the drawing of frontiers so that, like identity formation, democracy and politics in general, always involves distinguishing between an "us" and a "them". Such a process, Mouffe notes, can always become antagonistic, as the excluded challenge the boundaries in order to gain access to the rights, resources, or recognition bestowed upon the included. The goal for democratic politics then, argues Mouffe, is to ensure that these tensions are tamed.[44] To do this, Mouffe advocates agonism over antagonism. As explained in Chapter Three, this "conversion" occurs when parties recognise that, despite their differences, they ultimately share an adherence to the ethico-political values of democracy. This takes the form, according to Mouffe, of a respect for liberty and equality. In Mouffe's approach, these principles form the basis for the *demos* and citizenship, and their importance to Mouffe's approach is discussed in more detail in the forthcoming chapters.

Part of the radicalness of Mouffe's approach is that she acknowledges the dimension of power involved in pluralism. At first glance, agonistic pluralism,

[43] It is important to note that Mouffe's utilisation of the term "agonistic pluralism" is applied in two related senses, one general and one more specific. In the first instance it can be used to describe the pluralism that exists between the variety of democratic alternatives, like deliberative or liberal, of which Mouffe's approach is just one. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Mouffe argues that this debate is crucial for ensuring an actual facilitation of democracy. For Mouffe, without this diversity of political positions, democracy is prevented. However, agonistic pluralism is also a component of Mouffe's own approach so that, when it comes to clarifying a radical democratic position on democratic institutions or principles, Mouffe recognises that such a position is also contestable. As will be shown, this does not prevent Mouffe from articulating a radical democratic perspective, but rather it highlights that the understanding can always be re-negotiated because of the presence of pluralism.

[44] Chantal Mouffe in Markus Miessen and Chantal Mouffe 'Articulated Power Relations: Markus Miessen in Conversation with Chantal Mouffe', *Roundtable: Research Architecture*, 2007, first accessed March 2008 at http://roundtable.kein.org/node/545.

with its stress on the necessary respect for liberty and equality, may look like liberal tolerance. However, further analysis shows that this is not the case. Mouffe's stress on the antagonistic potential in pluralism, paired with the recognition that this is inherent in politics, means that Mouffe rejects the idea that difference can be simply tolerated or managed. For Mouffe,

> [p]olitics aims at the creation of a unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an "us" by the determination of a "them". The novelty of democratic politics is *not* the overcoming of this us/them distinction[45].

The tendency in liberal and post-political models of democracy is to precisely aim towards overcoming difference, and the result is an inability to truly accommodate pluralism and the political. In contrast, Mouffe's approach is unique and radical in that it is able to facilitate democracy *through* the recognition of the role that antagonistic pluralism plays. It is also able to ensure that this antagonism is accommodated by democratic means through the process of transformation (adherence to the democratic principles) into agonism.

According to Aletta Norval, 'political frontiers serve not only to individuate identity, but also to organise political space through the simultaneous operation of the logics of equivalence and difference.'[46] In the first instance – the logic of equivalence – discourse establishes equivalences between subjects and interests, setting them against a constructed "enemy", like in the anti-globalisation movement.[47] In the logic of difference, however, the differences also exist, but are co-opted for political purposes so that their divisiveness can be tamed[48] (the previous explanation of John Howard's use of the rhetoric of Australian citizens as opposed to asylum seekers is a good example of this). In either case, both logics play a constitutive role in social formations and so underlie the nature of pluralism. Where Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism is useful, is in its

[45] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', p. 755, emphasis added.
[46] Aletta J. Norval 'Trajectories of Future Research in Discourse Theory', in David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis (Eds.) *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2000), p. 220.
[47] Ibid, p. 221.
[48] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 90.

ability to recognise this characteristic and provide democratic means to accommodate it.

Employing Schmitt's theory of turning enemies into adversaries, Mouffe's radical democratic approach is able to recognise the political nature of pluralism without trying to completely suffocate it. Where deliberative democratic or liberal approaches try to rationalise pluralism away, Mouffe's approach maintains diversity and leaves room for its inherent power to continue to play its constitutive (and democratic) role. As Mouffe states,

> [m]odern democracy's specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order…a democratic society makes room for the expression of conflicting interests and values.[49]

Authors like John Dryzek have misinterpreted Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, and argue that her approach leads to a debate between 'core identities'.[50] This could not be further from the case. Following Mouffe's approach, disagreement and conflict avoids being essentialised, because identities are understood to be fluid, contingent, and the result of power relations. She asserts that tensions between different camps do not have to resort to 'essentialist identities and non-negotiable moral values',[51] since these rely on an *a priori* understanding of the subject which Mouffe rejects.

-MOUFFE & WEBER-

Writers like George Crowder and Mark Wenman have suggested that Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is similar the of value pluralism of Max Weber.[52] While Mouffe's account of the agonistic nature of pluralism does resemble Weber's

[49] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', p. 756.
[50] John S. Dryzek 'Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies: Alternatives to Agonism and Analgesia', *Political Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 2, April 2005, p. 221.
[51] Chantal Mouffe 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', p. 756.
[52] George Crowder 'Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Democracy' refereed paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association conference, University of Newcastle, 25-27 September 2006, first accessed March 5, 2008, at http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Schools/Economics%20Politics%20and%20Tourism/APSA%202006/POLSOCTHEORY/Crowder,%20George.pdf, p. 7; Mark Anthony Wenman 'Laclau or Mouffe? Splitting the Difference', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 29, No. 5, 2003, p. 582.

approach, and she has noted the similarities herself,[53] Crowder's conclusions, particularly, fail to consider how Mouffe's fundamentally different approach to the subject alters this conception of pluralism. For example, Mouffe stresses that

> pluralism can only be formulated adequately within a problematic that conceives of the social agent not as a unitary subject but as the articulation of an ensemble of subject positions, constructed within specific discourses and always precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject positions. This requires abandoning the reductionism and essentialism dominant in the liberal interpretations of pluralism, and acknowledging the contingency and ambiguity of every identity, as well as the constitutive character of social division and antagonism.[54]

Whereas Weber, according to Crowder,

> sees ourselves as *creating* our *own* values and as *choosing* among them without objective guidance when they are in conflict. Consequently our moral *choices* are fundamentally subjective, non-rational.[55]

Clearly, there are some similarities between Mouffe's and Weber's understandings of conflict and pluralism, and both reject the notion of an over-arching, universal or rational guiding ethic. However, there are significant differences that are important to highlight, particularly if we are to challenge Crowder's misplaced conclusion that Mouffe's approach 'is really just orthodox interest-group politics in post-structuralist clothing.'[56] Dismissing Mouffe's approach in this way misses the important contribution that her radical democracy can provide for democratic theorising.

The philosophical approaches of Mouffe and Weber do have some similarities. For example, echoing Mouffe's value of antagonism, and the rejection of centred structures, Weber also theorises that violence and struggle are an inherent and continuous part of politics,[57] and that 'facts…do not reflect a

[53] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Caroline Bayard, Sev Isajiw and Gary Madison 'On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 49, Spring 1996, p. 137.
[54] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 10.
[55] George Crowder 'Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Democracy', p. 7, emphasis added.
[56] Ibid, p. 3.
[57] Ian Adams and R.W. Dyson 'Max Weber', in Ian Adams and R.W. Dyson *Fifty Major Political Thinkers*, Second Edition, (Routledge: London; New York, 2007), p. 167.

structure that is pregiven [sic]',[58] because they contribute to the construction of knowledge and value.[59] Unlike Mouffe, however, Weber continues to conceptualise an *a priori* subject whose values are, in the end subjective,[60] and so his approach differs significantly from Mouffe's. Furthermore, while Weber does seem to embody the rejection of universality and objectivity that underlies Mouffe's critique of liberalism and deliberative democracy, as we see in the following quote, not only does Weber miss the role of the constitutive outside, but he reduces difference to the essential core of the individual:

> it is not, for Weber, the structure of the world that necessarily determines our concepts but rather our conceptual knowledge embodies our acts of valuation. Yet since our values are non-cognitive, then neither our concepts nor our values are the shape they are because of any necessary dependence on the world. Instead, all our statements expressing what the world is, and what in it is to be prized, depend on some subjective state of the utterer.[61]

Therefore, a conflation of Mouffe's approach with the value pluralism of Max Weber misses all of the important and novel contributions of agonistic pluralism. Mouffe's understanding of pluralism, while paralleling Weber to some degree, has fundamental differences, especially with regard to the subject and the constitutive role of power.

Part of the problem with the conflation of Mouffe and Weber is that it overlooks one of the key, radical aspects of Mouffe's approach: the construction of the subject. The radical democratic approach is dramatically at odds with an *a priori* approach to the subject and so provides a decidedly different way to conceptualise the *role* and *nature*, not just existence, of pluralism. Mouffe's pluralism cannot be reduced to the interests and needs of an *a priori* subject, and thus, it should not be confused with mere relativism, as Crowder does.[62] A pluralism that relies on a fully conceived being, looking to uncover their essential subjectivity, sits sharply at odds with the tenets of agonistic

[58] Jem Thomas 'Values, Diversity and Social Theory', in Jeffrey Weeks (Ed.) *The Lesser Evil and the Greater Good: The Theory and Politics of Social Diversity* (Rivers Oram Press: London, 1994), pp. 21-22.
[59] Ibid, p. 24.
[60] Ibid, p. 25.
[61] Ibid.
[62] George Crowder 'Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Democracy', pp. 3 and 7.

pluralism. In agonistic pluralism, the we/them distinction is not based on 'identities pre-existing the process of identification.'[63] Therefore Mouffe's conception cannot, and does not, facilitate an aggregative or relativist approach; nor does it rely on the unveiling of scientific knowledge in the way in which Weber's approach does.

Crowder critiques Mouffe's framework on the basis that it results in a situation where 'ultimate, reasoned justifications or "foundations" for normative commitments are not to be had – in the end because of value pluralism.'[64] While Mouffe does reject the idea that rationalist based arguments can provide an ultimate base for theory, this is not the whole picture for Mouffe. The rejection of final ethical conclusions, for Mouffe, is not simply because she sees different people's ideas of justice as not being compatible with, or equivalent to, each other. Indeed Mouffe cautions against this type of self-driven relativism. She writes,

> [i]t is always possible to distinguish between the just and the unjust, the legitimate and the illegitimate, but this can only be done from *within* a given tradition…in fact *there is no point of view external to all tradition* from which one can offer a universal judgement.[65]

Instead, Mouffe sees the discursive as playing a major role in constructing our subjectivities and our conceptions, such that it is not possible for an individual to draw upon or uncover the true or ultimate (subjective or universal) ethical dimension. In Mouffe's theorising, a subject's view is based on contextualised placements within the discourse and hence cannot represent simple interests or purely relative values. Crowder, in his dismissal of Mouffe, fails to recognise this and so overlooks this radical component.

Furthermore, Mouffe's and Weber's conceptions of power and force – which inform their theories of pluralism – while having some similarities, are also ultimately markedly different. Weber, using the words of Trotsky, believes that

[63] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 18.
[64] George Crowder 'Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Democracy', p. 12.
[65] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 15, emphasis added.

"[e]very state is founded on force",[66] and Mouffe comparably argues that every state, community, and collectivity, is drawn through the bounds of exclusion. Therefore, both Weber and Mouffe see power as an inherent part of the political. Yet, these conceptions of force and power are poles apart. Where Weber sees power to be an inherent part of politics, he nevertheless conceives power in modernist terms as top-down, force.[67] Mouffe's conception, on the other hand, is informed by Foucault's notion that power is everywhere, meaning that power is not simply oppressive, but rather it is also constitutive. For Mouffe, power is inherent in all social acts, not just political ones and, as a result, she views power as playing an active role in constructing all social relations.

It would be misguided, therefore, to conclude, as Crowder does that

> [o]nce ethics has been reduced to a function of power, the net result is to play into the hands of those who posses power already, and to rob the powerless of their best weapons: appeals to reason and justice.[68]

Such a conclusion evaluates Mouffe's approach according to modernist conceptions, wherein power is seen as inherently negative and avoidable. For Mouffe, as with other poststructuralist and postmodern writers, analyses like Crowder's overlook the constitutive possibilities of power, and in doing so miss its role in the formation of subjectivities. As such, they tend to keep hidden how power is constitutive and present. Mouffe's approach, in contrast, allows for the tracing of the role of power, highlighting space for challenge and reconfiguration. Therefore, while Weber can argue that we '*choose* moral values and live by them'[69], Mouffe's approach does not, and cannot, simply reduce or conflate values to choice, because it is always aware of the constitutive role of power.

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[66] Leon Trotsky as quoted by Max Weber 'Politics as a Vocation', in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Eds.) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1964), p. 78.
[67] Max Weber 'The Prestige and Power of the "Great Powers"', in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Eds.) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1964), p. 159.
[68] George Crowder 'Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Democracy', p. 12.
[69] Ian Adams and R.W. Dyson 'Max Weber', p. 168, emphasis added.

- DEMOCRACY, POWER & HEGEMONY -

The recognition of the constitutive role of power is key to Mouffe's approach, and it informs her theorising of identity and the political. In the following section, I examine how Mouffe's accommodation of power helps to reconceptualise democracy, and the project of radical democracy. As will be shown, the poststructuralist account of power reframes the debate about democracy, and what is to be achieved by an alternative like Mouffe's. Rather than hindering the project, the account of power as constitutive facilitates the drive for democracy and ensures that such a project will be ongoing.

-THE DEMOCRATIC HORIZON-

Mouffe's re-conceptualisation of pluralism, which highlights its agonistic nature, requires that her democratic approach cannot simply be about the negotiation of interests, and the goal of democracy cannot be consensus or harmony. Instead, for Mouffe democracy is recognised as having a conflictual nature and as always involving boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In this way, Mouffe's approach to democracy differs significantly from the other alternatives discussed in this thesis, and it is partly through this difference that the radical character of Mouffe's approach is evident.

A key feature of Mouffe's approach to democracy, and one that sets it apart from the other alternatives discussed in this thesis, is her utilisation of Derrida's concept of "democracy to come". According to Derrida, the concept of "democracy to come" entails understanding democracy as 'the inheritance of a promise',[70] rather than an actual, reachable, future place. As Paul Patton explains,

> [r]ather than a future present it refers to the absolute future of pure invention, the unforeseeable and wholly other. "Democracy to come" is not an in-principle possible but not yet achieved constitutional state. Rather, it is of the order of the "im-possible".[71]

[70] Jacques Derrida *Rogues: Two Essays On Reason* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, 2005), p. 82.
[71] Paul Patton 'Derrida, Politics an Democracy to Come', *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 2, No. 6, October 2007, p. 772.

This concept of democracy to come is essential to Mouffe's approach because it describes one of the paradoxes of democracy – namely, if we were to reach a point of absolute, final consensus on the debate about democracy and social order then, at that point, democracy is actually being hindered. For Mouffe, following from Derrida's logic, reaching a stage where democracy is declared to have been achieved, once and for all, is an illusionary pursuit, because democracy requires constant re-negotiation and contestation. Mouffe's theorising on the political shows that pluralism is always present, and agonistic confrontations are key to ensuring ongoing democratic outcomes. Mouffe therefore asserts that the same understanding applies with regard to democracy itself, so that the objective for democratic theorists is to aim for the promise of democracy, but avoid seeing this as a final end-point.

This is yet another example of the radical nature of Mouffe's approach. Instead of espousing a final, totalising *model* of democracy, Mouffe's radical democratic *approach* provides methods, practices and tools for analysis that can be utilised in order to produce democratic outcomes in a variety of social spaces. However, this process is ongoing and fluid, and Mouffe recognises that democracy should be seen 'as a good that exists as a good only as long as it cannot be reached.'[72] The fact that no social order can actually encompass the whole of society means that democracy is always being re-negotiated, and that is how democracy can be provided for. By maintaining this "empty space", Mouffe's approach ensures that democracy is unceasingly radicalised – power cannot be concentrated and there is always an in principal equality that allows subjects to challenge the configuration of the democratic ideal.

Mouffe is highly critical of theories of democracy that espouse a final end-point for democracy, because she believes that this is not possible. When discussing Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's "absolute democracy", for example, Mouffe says that their position misses the political dimension because there is no

[72] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 137.

recognition of the necessary role of power.[73] In a critique that mirrors her rejection of the post-political and deliberative approaches, Mouffe argues that these alternatives pursue a myth of a harmonised society that is capable of transcending the divisions of us/them. For Mouffe this is not possible because, she argues that

> there is democracy as long as there is conflict and that existing arrangements can be contested. If we arrive at a point where we say "this is the endpoint, contestation is no longer legitimate", this means the end of democracy.[74]

Mouffe does understand democracy to be about an adherence to the principles of liberty and equality. However, she recognises that there will be competing views concerning what these principles mean. Even at this fundamental level though, Mouffe argues that it is important for conflict to be present in order to ensure democracy.

For Mouffe, facilitating democracy is about allowing contestation between different positions so that the radical democratic approach becomes part of a larger, agonistic and plural democratic debate. Indeed this is a radical aspect of her approach. As Žižek notes,

> "radical democracy" is thus to be taken somehow paradoxically: it is precisely *not* "radical" in the sense of pure, true democracy; its radical character implies, on the contrary, that we can save democracy only by *taking into account its own radical impossibility*.[75]

By ensuring that the debate about democracy is ongoing, Mouffe prevents the assimilation of diversity and allows pluralism to always be actively present, even in its agonistic form. In doing so, the concentration of power, through a closure of debate, is prevented in Mouffe's approach, and the democratic principle of equality is protected. As Mouffe says,

> [t]he central issue of democratization today is how antagonistic interests can be controlled so that no concentration of interests can be allowed to exercise

[73] Chantal Mouffe in Markus Miessen and Chantal Mouffe 'Articulated Power Relations'; Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, pp. 107-115.
[74] Chantal Mouffe in Markus Miessen and Chantal Mouffe 'Articulated Power Relations';
[75] Slavoj Žižek 'Introduction', in Slavoj Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso: New York, 1989), p. 6, emphasis in original.

> a monopoly on economic or political power and dominate the process of decision making.[76]

In re-theorising the nature of democracy to a horizon pursued through agonistic debate, Mouffe allows for this to occur and so provides a useful, vastly different, democratic approach to the other alternatives discussed.

Following Mouffe, radical '[d]emocratic politics does not consist in the moment when a fully constituted people exercises its rule',[77] because the identity of "the people" is never conclusively established, nor is it able to be fully inclusive. For Mouffe, democracy always involves drawing a line between an "us" and a "them", because '[y]ou cannot have a *demos* if it is not in some sense exclusive.'[78] Thus any democratic model that purports full inclusion or closure is not at all democratic. Recognising that the concept of "the people" is a political construction with boundaries of inclusion/exclusion leads Mouffe to comprehend that democracy is not defined solely at the level of the state or political party and instead, it becomes an empty space that discourse tries to fill through securing its hegemony.

-THE HEGEMONIC PROJECT-

Mouffe's understanding of hegemony highlights that power is never complete or fully determining, because there are always elements that cannot be fully integrated or accounted for. Mouffe says, when talking about capitalism, for example, that the relations of production that are constructed 'should not be explained as an effect of structure'.[79] Instead they need to be seen as an effect of hegemonic formations because

> [a] constant struggle must create the conditions necessary to validate capital and its accumulation. This implies a set of practices that are not merely economic but political and cultural as well. Thus, the development of capitalism is subject to an incessant political struggle, periodically modifying

[76] Chantal Mouffe 'Pluralism and the Left Identity', in Michael Walzer (Ed.) *Toward a Global Civil Society* (Berghahn Books: Providence; Oxford, 1995), p. 299.
[77] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 56.
[78] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph and Thomas Keenan 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', *Grey Room*, No. 2, Winter 2001, p. 104.
[79] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', p. 90.

> those social forms through which social relations of production are assured their centrality.[80]

The movement away from the description of forces from structure to hegemony is conscious for Mouffe (and Laclau) and informs their critique of Marxism. Their re-construction of Gramsci's language of hegemony is intended to reveal that, what appear to be structural (read as centred and determining) forces, are actually hegemonic in the sense that they do not fully determine social positions. Rather, '[w]hat is at a given moment considered as the "natural" order…is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices; it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity'.[81] In contrast to Marxism, Mouffe writes that she is against the view of "necessary effects" produced in ideological and political superstructures, precisely because this implies that the economy follows its own logic 'absolutely independent of the relations it would allegedly determine.'[82] Instead, in Mouffe's arguments, systems of power are hegemonic formations, which rely on constant "validation" through socially entrenched practices. Their "hegemonic" quality, as opposed to their centred or natural one, implies that the power is less centred, less capable of fully determining social positioning. Similarly, the position of a system of power as the dominant, common sense can be challenged once it is understood that it is not objectively or absolutely entrenched. Every discourse can be destabilised and challenged.

According to Mouffe,

> there is no doubt that one of the dangers which threatens democracy is the totalitarian attempt to pass beyond the constitutive character of antagonism and deny plurality in order to restore unity, [however] there is also a symmetrically opposite danger of a lack of reference to this unity…[The] unravelling of the social fabric caused by the destruction of the symbolic framework is another form of the disappearance of the political.[83]

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[80] Ibid, p. 91.
[81] Chantal Mouffe 'Some Reflections on an Agonistic Approach to the Public', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Eds.) *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (ZKM Centre for Art and Media: Karlsruhe, Germany; MIT Press: Cambridge, MA; London, England, 2005), p. 805.
[82] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', p. 90.
[83] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 188.

Therefore, while Mouffe privileges agonistic pluralism and advocates democracy as a horizon, she nevertheless sees an important place for temporary stabilisations that can act to "unify" the *demos*, through the political pursuit of hegemony. Through her deconstruction of the nature of structures, Mouffe argues that society cannot be based on 'the unfolding of a logic exterior to itself'.[84] It is 'because there is no longer a centre which binds together power, law and knowledge, that it becomes possible *and necessary* to unify certain political spaces through hegemonic articulations.'[85] These places of stabilisation, that provide for a constructed unity, are always temporary and are able to be challenged and contested and hence, they operate as hegemonic discourses rather than as objective, centred, and absolute structures. Nevertheless, the pursuit of hegemony becomes a necessary strategy for the project of radical democracy, because '[e]verything depends on the Left's ability to set up a true hegemonic counteroffensive to integrate current struggles into an overall socialist transformation',[86] in order to challenge the current hegemony of conservative discourses.[87]

In order for radical democracy to position itself as the hegemonic discourse, it needs to take advantage of the "empty space" resulting from the decentering of structure. As Laclau points out,

> in a situation of radical disorder "order" is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of this absence. In this sense, various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function.[88]

In this context, democracy becomes a site of lack, an empty signifier that is open to "filling" through different discourses, like socialist, liberal, deliberative or radical. Radical democracy is thus one discourse trying to establish

[84] Chantal Mouffe 'Some Reflections on an Agonistic Approach to the Public', p. 805.
[85] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 187, emphasis added.
[86] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', p. 98.
[87] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 176.
[88] Ernesto Laclau as quoted by David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis 'Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', in David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, (Eds.) *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2000), pp. 8-9.

hegemony through the filling of this lack. This becomes its political project. In order to participate in this process, the discourse of radical democracy needs to establish practices and principles that articulate its framework of inclusion/exclusion. Such an articulation facilitates the forming of chains of equivalence between radical democratic identities where differences are shown as being equivalent. For example, the new social movements can use the identity of radical democratic citizenship as a rallying point of equivalence in order that their "allegiance" to the principles of democracy, together with their recognition of the plurality of demands within the chain, informs the practices that required change so as to meet these pluralised demands, and address inequalities.

To establish hegemony, the political project of radical democracy tries to 'organise a field of meaning so as to fix the identities of objects and practices in a particular way'[89] that is in line with the principles of the approach. For Mouffe, this is achieved through the construction of radical democratic citizenship. The particular form of radical democratic citizenship will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. At this point it is sufficient to say that, while creating a collectivity of citizens is vital for Mouffe, she also argues that this must be done at the same time as recognising the role of the political (power) and the ultimate contingency of any unification. Quoting Hanna Pitkin she says that, "[w]hat characterizes political life is precisely the problem of continually creating unity, a public, in a context of diversity, rival claims and competing interests".[90] By avoiding conflict, certain interests, needs and desires are simply sidelined and are unable to be challenged. Here it is clear that Mouffe's approach tackles, very directly, the conflicting imperatives of unity and diversity. Her re-theorisation of hegemony allows for such conflicts because it highlights that any stabilisation is only temporary, and does not actually stand in for the absolute totality. For Mouffe this does not negate the pursuit of hegemony as a political project, it defines it.

[89] David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis 'Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', p. 3.
[90] Hanna Pitkin as quoted by Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 50.

Mouffe sees two clear applications of the concept of hegemony that she appropriates from Gramsci. In the first example, one that she sees the Right as utilising, hegemonic projects "neutralise" differences in order to prevent challenges to its established order.[91] In the second instance of "expansive hegemony", Mouffe sees the formation of chains of equivalence that link in order to transform hegemony. In this case differences are preserved, but the commonalities of the struggles are also used to link groups together.[92] In democratic chains of equivalence the links that are established are done so in order to extend democratic values into more spheres of life. Mouffe talks about the demands of the working class being equally pursued with the demands of gays and women, for example, so that no demands are seen as privileged or able to be granted at the cost of others in the chain.[93] For Mouffe, this type of hegemony is precisely the one that can become useful for the project of radical democracy.

According to Mouffe, '[a] successful hegemony signifies a period of relative stabilization and the creation of a widely shared "common sense"'.[94] As will be shown in Chapter Five, this occurs through the creation of a radical democratic citizenship that is based on an interpretation of the principles of radical democracy. In contrast to the other political theories discussed in this thesis, Mouffe's creation of a common sense is achieved through discursive practices, rather than justifications based on rationalist and moral grounds. She writes that

> [t]he creation of democratic forms of individuality is a question of *identification* with democratic values, and this is a complex process that takes place through a manifold of practices, discourses and language-games.[95]

Following Mouffe's argument, it is impossible to provide objective foundations for democracy because all appeals are part of hegemonic formations and so are

[91] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', p. 103.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 53.
[95] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 70, emphasis in original.

always contestable. Theories that overlook this fact are simply masking the constitutive role of power, concealing the dimension of the political.

-POWER-

In their preface to the second edition of *Hegemony*, Mouffe and Laclau reaffirm their project of establishing the radical democratic approach as the hegemonic one. They write that, in terms of the new strategy for the Left, '[w]hat is at stake is the building of a new hegemony. So our motto is: "Back to the hegemonic struggle".'[96] This focus means they also commit to the idea that power is inescapable, so that every decision/position becomes a locus of power. Mouffe argues that, unlike the other democratic alternatives, her approach can recognise this 'moment of "decision"',[97] which is inevitably involved in power matrices. For Mouffe, such moments 'entail an element of force and violence and cannot be adequately apprehended through the sole language of ethics or morality',[98] as is the case in both Rawls's and Habermas's approaches.

Radical democracy, like the other alternatives, is a political approach, and will thus privilege some ideas and practices over others. In doing so, lines are drawn between what is valued and what is not. What makes the radical democratic approach different (and more democratic), is that it does not appeal to notions of morality to inform these distinctions, because this would simply hide the political aspect of this practice. An appeal to universalism does not make a process objective or neutral, or allow it to operate outside of power matrices. Instead, as the radical democratic approach shows, it is a political process that aims to achieve hegemony and therefore involves power. The radical democratic approach also highlights that this process is never a complete and final one. The nature of hegemony entails that it is always capable of being challenged, especially by those on the outside. Mouffe's re-theorisation of

[96] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. xix.
[97] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 130.
[98] Ibid.

hegemony shows that nothing can ever establish itself as the end point, and her radical democratic approach embodies this principle.

What is unique about Mouffe's alternative is that it does recognise the nature of such moments, and thereby provides for the political dimension (power). The elimination of violence and hostility is, for Mouffe, an illusion left over from the philosophies of the Enlightenment.[99] She writes that

> [p]oliticization never ceases because undecidability continues to inhabit the decision. Every consensus appears as a stabilization of something essentially unstable and chaotic. Chaos and instability are irreducible, but this is at once a risk and a chance, since continual stability would mean the end of politics and ethics.[100]

As such, Mouffe's approach acknowledges the presence of power and facilitates its constant renegotiation. Unlike the other alternatives discussed, Mouffe's conception of democracy as a horizon ensures that power is never centralised or completely co-opted. Instead, through agonistic exchanges, the contingency of hegemonic discourses is exposed and so can be challenged by other counter-hegemonic practices.

Mouffe's theorisation of power is useful in that it shows 'that we should not conceptualize power as an *external* relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves.'[101] Mouffe's radical democratic approach provides for this conception by re-theorising the construction of subjectivities, illustrating the inherent role of power and its ultimate ubiquity. In a similar fashion to Foucault, Mouffe does not see power as external, and so moves beyond the modernist conception of power on which *a priori* conceptions of the subject are based. Through Mouffe's re-theorising, we do not strive to eliminate power from society, because power is seen as constitutive. Democratic models and alternatives that state that their goal is to eradicate inequality through the abolition of power,

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid, p. 136.
[101] Ibid, p. 21, emphasis in original.

operate under an illusion that this is possible. Mouffe asserts, through her use of discourse theory, that everything is political in the sense that there are always relations of power at play. Discursive practices either contribute 'to the reproduction of the given common sense' or 'to the destruction or critique of it.'[102]

In highlighting that every practice, every act, and every discourse is an element of power, contributing to or challenging the established hegemony, Mouffe provides an alternative strategy for the Left to secure its position as the new common sense. However, this new hegemony cannot, following Mouffe's approach, be espoused as representing universal interests, once and for all. Instead its hegemonic position is just that – it is always capable of challenge from the sub-hegemonic – and it cannot be taken to be a neutral position ensuring absolute equality, because frontiers and borders are always drawn. However, in bringing attention to this process, Mouffe's approach is far more transparent and does not hide or mask the lines it draws between the inside and outside. In doing so, it brings a challenge to the fundamental ways we have been considering notions of equality and democracy. It shows that there are always power matrices involved. As was illustrated in Part One of this thesis, Mouffe argues that modernist discourses portray themselves as standing in for the whole, despite the fact that exclusion is always part of the process. A radical democratic alternative is thus more democratic (and so radical) in the sense that it highlights these frontiers rather than hiding them. It also shows that democracy is a process that will never be finalised, because to reach an endpoint will be its undoing. In this context, radical democracy, informed by poststructuralism, does not try to represent itself as fully inclusive or capable of complete closure, and it is in this dimension that it is indeed radical.

[102] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', p. 100.

- CONCLUSION -

Mouffe's radical approach turns the traditional approaches to democracy, the subject and the political on their head, so that the way we understand "doing politics" is radically altered. As Smith outlines, 'politics is not a power game between already constituted subjects [as other models see it]; political struggles are primarily struggles *to produce subjects*.'[103] Mouffe's approach is important because it offers a way to recognise this process, while simultaneously offering democratic means to facilitate it. As Mouffe notes, agonistic

> pluralism is anchored in the recognition of the multiplicity within oneself and of the contradictory positions that this multiplicity entails. Its acceptance of the other does not merely consists [sic] in tolerating differences, but in positively celebrating them because it acknowledges that, without alterity and otherness, no identity could ever assert itself.[104]

Mouffe's approach also transforms the relationship of democracy and power. In contrast to the deliberative approach, which argues that 'the more democratic a society is, the less power would be constitutive of social relations', Mouffe's approach recognises that 'relations of power are constitutive of the social'.[105] This re-theorisation means that democratic theory needs to ensure that 'the main question for democratic politics is not how to eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values.'[106] Mouffe's approach allows for this by constantly pursuing (but never achieving) final democracy through ongoing, agonistic debate. By showing that power is inherent,

> social spaces formerly considered neutral makes apparent the often unacknowledged power relations in everyday activities. In this way, such off-limits territories as culture, education, and the family become the sites of critical investigation and emancipatory contestation. Rather than diminishing

[103] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, emphasis added.
[104] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', p. 337.
[105] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 100.
[106] Ibid.

> a sense of political agency…the principles of radical democracy have the potential of reinvigorating the subject within new spheres of activity.[107]

Therefore, Mouffe's approach does provide new ways to consider democracy and engage democratic subjects.

Mouffe argues that agonistic pluralism 'is also a pluralism that *valorizes* diversity and dissensus, recognizing in them the very condition of possibility, of a striving democratic life.'[108] As such, agonistic pluralism provides a dramatically different way to approach democratic theorising and looks at the "issue" of difference and pluralism in a completely different way to other democratic alternatives. Rather than trying to rationalise away from diversity, or trying to find ways to manage it, the radical democratic approach celebrates pluralism's democratic and constitutive nature. In doing so, Mouffe provides a radical conception of democracy and ensures the accommodation of difference. In this way, Mouffe's approach is highly democratic. As Wenman notes, '[b]ecause the other is experienced as both the condition of possibility and impossibility of my identity, the experience is one of antagonism.'[109] Therefore, democratic alternatives need to acknowledge this dimension rather than try to mask it behind *a priori* conceptions of the subject and society. The nature of antagonism also means that it has the potential to become 'disastrous'[110] and so Mouffe's strategy for transforming it into agonism ensures that antagonism is tamed in a democratic way. As will be shown in the next chapter, radical democratic citizenship, premised on the principles of liberty and equality, provides a useful framework for ensuring this process.

[107] David Trend 'Democracy's Crisis of Meaning', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 15.
[108] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', p. 337, emphasis added.
[109] Mark Anthony Wenman 'What is Politics?', p. 60.
[110] Ibid, p. 62.

5 Radical Democratic Citizenship

The conception of citizenship offered by Mouffe is the culmination of her various theoretical strategies, examined in the chapters, and so it provides a good example of how Mouffe attempts to put her ideas into practice. However, it is also in this application that some of the problems of Mouffe's approach begin to surface, and thus this chapter will begin to expose some of the potential gaps in Mouffe's theorising. As is characteristic of Mouffe's work, in outlining her conception of citizenship, Mouffe juxtaposes her theory with other alternatives. In relation to her discussion of citizenship, Mouffe places her approach against the debate between, liberals and civic republicans or communitarians. Like the other chapters, this chapter again avoids engaging in a critique of Mouffe's analysis of the alternatives that she discusses. While I acknowledge that Mouffe's discussion is often over-generalised and lacking a detailed exploration of the theorists' work, I nevertheless maintain her perspective for the purpose of illustrating Mouffe's argument.

Mouffe finds that both the liberal, and the communitarian approaches, offer something worthwhile. However, she also finds important flaws in both of them. She writes, for example, that

> the liberals insist on pluralism, but they are very bad about thinking about community. The communitarians are good about thinking about community, but they are bad at thinking about pluralism.[1]

[1] Chantal Mouffe in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Hegemony and Socialism: An Interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe', *Palinurus*, I. 14, 2007, first accessed November 2010 at http://anselmocarranco.tripod.com/id68.html.

As such, these two approaches are usually seen as dichotomous, with the liberal, individual centred approach at one end of the spectrum and the community centred, communitarian approach at the other. Although Mouffe agrees with the distinctions, she nevertheless rejects the binary, saying that '[w]e should not accept a false dichotomy between individual liberty and rights, or between civic activity and political community.'[2] Accordingly, Mouffe's position attempts to bridge these differences, utilising the strengths of each approach to create a radical democratic alternative that overcomes the dichotomy. To do this she employs the work of Michael Oakeshott, and specifically his conception of the *respublica*. As will be shown, what is achieved by Mouffe's adoption from this work is an ethically informed, political conception of citizenship, which facilitates the agonism that lies at the heart every social formation. It also respects pluralism, while allowing for a sense of collective identity and diversity. However, the radicalisation of citizenship requires a radical interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality, which are not explicitly outlined by Mouffe. Therefore, while her re-theorisation of citizenship illustrates some of the most radical aspects of Mouffe's approach, it also highlights the theoretical gaps that severely hinder the actualisation of the radical democratic project.

- THE LIBERAL APPROACH -

Mouffe does find some value in the political elements of liberalism, but she nevertheless concludes that 'the straitjacket of individualism' mars its conception of citizenship.[3] The liberal conception of the subject, which emphasises *a priori* individualism, is in distinct contrast to Mouffe's and, as such, the liberal and the radical democratic approaches to citizenship are also vastly different. For Mouffe, the individual cannot be conceived as existing outside of, or prior to society, and thus to try and base a conception of citizenship on such a conception, as liberalism does, is highly problematic. Although Mouffe finds

[2] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 65.
[3] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', in Judith Squires (Ed.) *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1993), p. 70.

liberalism useful in its respect for pluralism, ultimately she finds that its construction of citizenship is lacking and in need of radicalising 'so that the great contribution of political liberalism to modern democracy can be freed from the individualistic and rationalistic premises that have become fetters to democracy'.[4] For Mouffe, '[u]nderstanding the nature of pluralism requires a vision of the political as a discursively constructed ensemble of social relations, a vision that is at variance with the philosophy of liberalism',[5] because liberalism sees the individual as existing prior to its inclusion within the community. Such a view is at odds with Mouffe's poststructuralist understanding regarding the construction of the subject, and so needs to be challenged.

Part of the effect of the liberal understanding of individualism is a citizenship that it is based on a formalised, legal status, rather than something more substantive and socially connected. According to Mouffe, liberal citizenship is an 'impoverished conception'[6] that overlooks the constitutive outside, and the role of discourse in shaping identity. Therefore, the liberal citizen is constructed as merely the bearer of negative rights, autonomously situated; the ways in which these rights are formulated or articulated is unimportant to liberals. As Mouffe explains

> [t]he way these rights are exercised is irrelevant as long as their holders do not break the law or interfere with the rights of others. Social cooperation aims only to enhance our productive capacities and facilitate the attainment of each person's individual prosperity.[7]

Therefore, this liberal understanding overlooks the constitutive role of the social in forming these rights, as well as the value of community for community's sake.

In contrast, for Mouffe citizenship is a collective identity that stresses and values solidarity; its purpose is not to protect the individual from outside influences, as this can never be assured, nor does it exist simply for the purpose of pursuing

[4] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 3.
[5] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 11.
[6] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 61.
[7] Ibid, p. 62.

one's own self-driven ends. The poststructuralist dimension of Mouffe's analysis illustrates that the subject is always situated and cannot be seen as isolated from its surroundings. Therefore, the critique follows that the liberal conception overlooks this, and offers a bare, minimalist, conception of citizenship that misses the construction of the political subject and its link to the social. Mouffe writes that, in the liberal approach, citizens

> are abstracted from social and power relations, language, culture and the whole set of practices that make agency possible. What is precluded in these rationalistic approaches is the very question of what are the conditions of existence of the democratic subject.[8]

Therefore, the communitarian critique of liberalism's individualism is particularly attractive to Mouffe. Utilising these communitarian critiques of liberal citizenship, Mouffe argues that the liberal approach is unable to offer a substantive formation of citizenship, but rather provides only a bare, formalised conception.[9]

When examining the typical liberal conception of citizenship, Mouffe again uses the example of Rawls. Mouffe argues that his conception of citizenship, constituted by his two principles of justice, results in a form of citizenship which promotes

> the capacity for each person to form, revise and rationally pursue his/her definition of the good. Citizens are seen as using their rights to promote their self-interest within certain constraints imposed by the exigency to respect the rights of others.[10]

However, here again Rawls relies on a conception of the subject as autonomous and capable of objective reasoning, thereby overlooking the role of the constitutive outside.

Rawls's Original Position is premised on the ability to remove all outside factors that may contribute to bias or influence, but using poststructuralist arguments, Mouffe asserts that this is not possible. Therefore, for Mouffe, Rawls's

[8] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000), pp. 95-96.
[9] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 62.
[10] Ibid, p. 61.

conception of citizenship typifies the liberal approach, which focuses on the negative rights of individuals, to the detriment of other political factors.[11] For Rawls, as with other liberals, the best way to achieve a fair and just status of citizens is to ensure that they are able to pursue their self-interests without interference, and so negative rights become key. However, following Mouffe's argument, this perspective fails to see that rights cannot be endowed to subjects prior to society, because it is *within* the discourse that these rights are even possible. Overlooking this factor is the reason, according to Mouffe, that current trends in democratic theory fail to adequately address the conception of citizenship, and therefore cannot see the subject as anything but 'individuals as prior to society, bearers of natural rights, and either utility maximizing agents or rational subjects.'[12]

Furthermore, in her critique of the liberal conception of citizenship, Mouffe also illustrates that its over-exaggeration on the importance of individualism means that citizens are alienated from the social aspect of life. Communitarians argue that liberal approaches only provide "for an "instrumental" community"[13] and thus produce atomised subjects, removed from real political engagement. Mouffe utilises this critique to say that the liberal approach prevents an active and participatory form of citizenship, and encourages 'the privatization of life'.[14] In doing so, Mouffe argues that the liberal approach moves the ethical to the private, moral sphere, leaving politics void of ethical considerations.[15] For Mouffe, the liberal approach minimises the availability of space for democratic political outlets, and therefore, once again reduces politics to simply the pursuit of atomised, self-interest. The result of this is that the political is seen as a competition between individuals, rather than as being part of the democratic process. As such, Mouffe argues that,

[11] Unlike traditional liberal theorists, Rawls rejects the notion of naturally endowed human rights, though he still does make rights the priority in his model. See Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999), p. 267.
[12] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 95.
[13] Michael Sandel as quoted by Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 61.
[14] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 96.
[15] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 65.

> because of the lack of a democratic political sphere where a political confrontation could take place, it is the legal system which is made responsible for organising human co-existence and for regulating social relations. This displacement of the political by the legal terrain…has very negative consequences for democracy.[16]

Consigning the political to the legal domain is as problematic as relegating it to the moral or private spheres, which Mouffe also critiques.[17] Therefore, in a similar fashion to her critique of deliberative and Third Way models, which focus on consensus to the detriment of passionate and legitimate (democratic) outlets, Mouffe argues that the de-politicisation of social life is detrimental to democracy. From this analysis, Mouffe concludes that the liberal approach makes no room for the political, or indeed any type of solidarity, describing it as producing a 'democratic deficit' that has become common in most liberal-democratic societies.[18] In contrast, Mouffe advocates for a type of citizenship, which promotes a common identity and encourages political engagement. She also stresses the need for a revitalisation (and radicalisation) of the communitarian notion of the public sphere, all which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Despite her critiques of liberalism, Mouffe does not abandon the liberal approach to citizenship completely. Liberals may privilege rights and individuals above all else, but Mouffe does see some value in this, though she is cautious and does not agree absolutely.[19] For example, Mouffe writes that rights are important, but that they should be seen as social and collective rights, rather than merely individual rights that are endowed prior to an insertion into a community.[20] She therefore rejects the liberal approach to natural, or human rights which still rely on an essentialised notion of the subject. For Mouffe,

[16] Chantal Mouffe 'The 'End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism', in Francisco Panizza (Ed.) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 54.
[17] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 19.
[18] Ibid, p. 96.
[19] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 63-64.
[20] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 79; Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 4.

rights cannot be based on universalism, or a notion of essentialised humanity, because they rely on a community for them to be utilised. According to her view, rights require some sense of collective identity (citizenship) in order for these rights to be exercised. Endowing them simply because one is deemed human, does not guarantee the expression of these rights. Instead, argues Mouffe, it is through citizenship that rights can be actualised.[21] Having rights without having a community in which to exercise them is like being given a million dollars and being stuck on a deserted island in the middle of the ocean. Liberalism, however,

> 'fails to take account of the degree to which the free individual with his own goals and aspirations whose just rewards it is trying to protect, is himself only possible within a certain kind of civilization…it took a long development of certain institutions and practices, of the rule of law, of rules of equal respect, of habits of common deliberation, of common association, of cultural development and so on, to produce the modern individual.'[22]

Therefore, it is important to recognise, as Mouffe does, that the social provides the environment in which rights can be practiced and given meaning.

As explained in previous chapters, Mouffe maintains an adherence to liberalism because it recognises the pluralism of conceptions of the good life, but she rejects the liberal view that this can be informed by reference to an essentialist conception of the individual, or appeals to rational consensus. Following Mouffe's analysis, it is not possible for the subject to pursue his/her own conception independently from society. Her approach thereby rejects the complete subversion of the good by the right, because such an approach would overlook the constitutive nature of the social. Mouffe does find value in liberal practices saying that '[l]iberal-democratic institutions should not be taken for granted; it is always necessary to fortify and defend them.'[23] However, her approach also recognises that these institutions and practices, like human rights, are part of the tradition of liberalism, and are not to be based on an external,

[21] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph, and Thomas Keenan 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', *Grey Room*, No. 2, Winter 2001, p. 107.
[22] Charles Taylor as quoted by Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 64.
[23] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 4.

objective referent. Therefore, under a radical democratic approach, these establishments would always be open to challenge and subversion. According to Mouffe, this fluidity and contingency helps to better provide for democracy, by allowing institutions to change to better correspond to different historical, and cultural, contexts.

Mouffe does also accept the liberal assertion that there is a distinction between the public and the private, although she refuses to see them as two distinctly and autonomous spheres. Instead, Mouffe argues that they are constantly overlapping because, 'at any moment "private" affairs can witness the emergence of antagonisms and thereby become politicized.'[24] For Mouffe, this politicisation highlights the fact that individuals are never completely autonomous, and are always affecting or being affected by the other. There will never be a time when we are able to say, for example, 'here end my duties as a citizen and begins my freedom as an individual. Those two identities exist in a permanent tension that can never be reconciled.'[25] The radical democratic approach to citizenship tries to facilitate this understanding, and maintaining the notion of public/private is a useful way to do this. Mouffe says that under a radical democratic approach

> [t]he distinction between private and public is maintained as is the distinction between individual and citizen, but these do not correspond to discrete spheres; every situation is an encounter between private and public because every enterprise is private while never immune from the public conditions prescribed by the principles of citizenship. Wants, choices, and decisions are private because they are the responsibility of each individual, but performances are public because they have to subscribe to the conditions specified by citizenship. The identities qua individual and qua citizen are preserved, and none is sacrificed to the other; they coexist in a permanent tension that can never be reconciled.[26]

For Mouffe, this distinction allows for recognition of the individual, which is important for pluralism and democracy, and informs why she retains some

[24] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 51.
[25] Ibid, p. 72.
[26] Chantal Mouffe 'Citizenship and Political Identity', *October*, Vol. 61, Summer 1992, p. 32.

elements of liberalism in her approach, while also recognising a political sense of community.

Mouffe's conception of democracy, which appropriates elements from diverse theoretical approaches like liberalism and socialism for example, is exemplified here because Mouffe will not reject individualism outright, nor will she advocate for its complete prioritisation. She also does not envisage the complete autonomy of the individual as possible. However, Mouffe will also not completely abandon the notion of the individual subject in favour of an overarching society or common good. For Mouffe, both elements exist, paradoxically and simultaneously, and a radical democratic approach attempts to provide for the paradox. In short, the radical democratic approach attempts to bridge the divide between the liberal and communitarian approaches.

-NEUTRALITY VERSUS THE POLITICAL-

In order to provide for pluralism, most liberal theorists argue that minimal interference is the best guarantee to allow individuals to each pursue their own conception of the good life. However, where intervention is needed in order to provide the mechanisms for individual pluralism to be actualised, liberalism is concerned to ensure that no specific conception of the good is valorised. Thus, neutrality can be ensured through a variety of approaches, say as the priority of the right over the good in Rawls's theory, or in a proceduralist account of democracy such as Habermas's deliberative model. In all instances, neutrality is formulated through neutral reasoning or an appeal to an objective universalism.

In Habermas's model, he appeals to reason to justify the rules and obligations of deliberative democracy, and argues that it is only through such procedures that pluralism can be accommodated. In his deliberative sphere, different conceptions of the good life and competing values are able to be expressed and are only compromised on the basis of rational arguments. Through this process, argues Habermas, citizens are able to be free from coercion and are

able to pursue their own ends. If an individual changes their view, this is only achieved through persuasive, rational arguments.

In Rawls's theory the same argument follows, but at a different level. Rather than focussing on the rational consensus (and thus neutrality) of *procedures*, Rawls's focus becomes the neutrality and reasonableness of the *principles* of justice. According to Mouffe, Rawls determines that, because 'it is neutral with respect to controversial views of the good life…such a liberalism can provide political principles that should be accepted by all'.[27] In this and the Habermas example, the state remains neutral regarding which type of "good" should be pursued. These perspectives run counter to the communitarian conception of the common good – a view which will be discussed later in the chapter.

In contrast to the liberal approach, and following a poststructuralist and postmodern argument, Mouffe rejects the notion of neutrality because for her, no political decisions can be isolated from the operation of power. In every validation or claim to legitimacy, appeals are made which rely on judgement, and thus they are always embroiled in some form of power matrix where one value or idea is preferred and privileged over another. This argument is not to be confused with the relativist position because this still implies neutrality. According to relativist thinking, each judgment is determined purely by subjectivism, as there are no objective measures to appeal to in evaluating the worth of claims. Accordingly, each position is of equal (read – neutral) value, because each bias is seen as being as valid as another. However, Mouffe argues that '[t]o assert that one cannot provide an ultimate relational foundation for any given system of values does not imply that one considers all views to be equal.'[28] This is the type of extreme postmodern position that Mouffe warns against.[29] She asserts that the danger of such a strong postmodern viewpoint is that it hides the power matrices and still relies on an essentialist view of the subject. While Mouffe shares with postmodernism, the necessity of recognising

[27] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 23.
[28] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 14-15.
[29] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 13.

difference and alterity, she insists that an extreme version misses the dimension of the political. For Mouffe, the 'extreme post-modern'[30] position focuses purely on differentiation and fails to address the power relations between identities. She argues that 'by putting an exclusive emphasis on heterogeneity and incommensurability, it impedes us to recognize how certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination',[31] and therefore her approach does not reach the same conclusions.

Mouffe's form of poststructuralist argument is that positions are always embroiled in the discourse, and thus there can be no appeals to something external or essential, including the individual. In this setting she writes that,

> [t]o acknowledge the limits of pluralism also means that all differences cannot be accepted and that a radical-democratic project has also to be distinguished from other forms of "postmodern" politics which emphasize heterogeneity, dissemination and incommensurability and for which pluralism understood as the valorization of all differences should be total. Such an extreme form of pluralism, according to which all interests, all opinions, all differences are seen as legitimate, could never provide the framework for a political regime.[32]

In a radical democratic approach, judgments cannot be determined based on an individual's "true" being, and free from the influence of discourse, nor is there anything outside of discourse that informs meaning, to which we can appeal to objectively. As we saw in Chapter One, Mouffe follows Derrida's argument that the discursive is constitutive and there is nothing outside of it, therefore nothing is ever neutral, and no elements can be guaranteed absolute legitimacy or privilege. As such, Mouffe's approach can easily be distinguished from relativist positions that overlook the role of power.

Mouffe argues that, despite their claims, the notions of justice advocated by Rawls and other liberals, still require the social to inform them, and so they are

[30] Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity', in George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (Eds.) *Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective* (Routledge: London; New York, 2009), p. 334.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 13.

not neutral or objective.[33] Furthermore, Mouffe asserts that the state will always advocate some form of good over another, and that this is an unavoidable dimension of the political. According to Mouffe, the liberal position masks this ever-present politics. She notes that, '[t]o negate the political does not make it disappear, it only leads to bewilderment in the face of its manifestations and to impotence in dealing with them.'[34] Mouffe's approach, on the other hand, engages with, and is able to trace the construction of the good, providing for a challenge to the discourse if it is required.

As an example of a latent sense of common good, the neoliberal conception of the good was witnessed clearly during the financial crisis of 2009. During this time (and still today) consumer spending was seen as an important good that citizens should participate in. In Australia, through the provision of cash payments of $900, the Government encouraged citizens to spend, rather than save, this money, or use it to pay-off credit. The then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd urged people to

> '[g]o out and to spend this money that you receive to help make ends meet…Because by spending this money, families and pensioners will help create more jobs across Australia and strengthen the Australian economy.'[35]

Similarly, in the austerity measures around Europe, the common political rhetoric was that it was important for individuals to make sacrifices for the greater "economic good" such that citizens were expected to wear tax increases, reduced services, or increased costs to services still available. Greece's Prime Minister George Papandreou, for example, recently stated that "[e]very citizen must sacrifice some of their prosperity to safeguard the future…We have to stabilise the economy and reduce the deficit."[36] In both instances a sense of common good was associated with the profit making ability of the market and took precedence over the self-interest (or needs) of individuals.

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[33] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 64.
[34] Ibid, p. 140.
[35] Kevin Rudd as quoted in 'Australians Must Spend Stimulus Fund: Rudd', *ABC News*, December 7, 2008, first accessed January 2011 at http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/12/07/2439891.htm.
[36] George Papandreou as quoted by Kerin Hope 'Papandreou Demurs Over Snap Poll After Regional Losses', *Financial Times*, November 7, 2010, first accessed January 2011, at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3315f114-ea7c-11df-b28d-00144feab49a.html#axzz1At9bhyXE.

As Mouffe's approach shows, policies and practices like these, are always embedded with discursively constituted value judgements. Nevertheless, it is also important in this context to reiterate that the inability to achieve objectivity, and avoid an overarching ethic, is not the problem or the goal of radical democracy, because objectivity is impossible. Rather, it is vital to expose the process of construction in order that the discourse can be analysed and problematised, so that challenges can be made. In Mouffe's terms, appeals to neutral values actually only hide the power relations at play and may therefore perpetuate rather than mitigate, subordination.

In response to these and other various critiques, many liberal theorists have reformulated their appeals to neutrality and have acknowledged that the liberal position is indeed specific.[37] According to Mouffe, academics like Ronald Dworkin and Rawls (post *A Theory of Justice*), recognise that there are certain principles, and thus certain conceptions of the good life, at the core of liberalism.[38] However, while this adjustment is welcomed, Mouffe argues that it does not go far enough. For Mouffe these writers have attempted a reformulation, but their conclusions still overlook the importance of the potentially antagonistic character of pluralism. Mouffe writes that 'what is really at stake in the debate about neutrality is the *nature* of pluralism'.[39] Writers like Rawls recognise pluralism, but only as a fact which needs to be dealt with, rather than as being of value in and of itself.[40] According to Mouffe, in the liberal way of thinking, neutrality 'is defined as non-interference with substantive views, and pluralism is identified with the toleration of different ways of life irrespective of their intrinsic value.'[41] However, as I have outlined in previous chapters, for Mouffe pluralism is always potentially antagonistic and thus political. By leaving all diversity beyond critique, Mouffe asserts that liberalism removes the

[37] James P. Sterba 'Liberalism and the Challenge of Communitarianism', in Robert L. Simon (Ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Social and Political Philosophy* (Blackwell: Massachusetts; Oxford, 2002), p. 177.
[38] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 135-136. Jacob Torfing also notes Rawls's reformulation (Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 268).
[39] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 136, emphasis added.
[40] Ibid, pp. 136-137.
[41] Ibid, p. 137.

dimension of the political. The illusion of the absence of power in both liberal and deliberative conceptions is indicative of the problem Mouffe is trying to address. In both instances power is hidden from view, and thus becomes difficult to challenge.

For Mouffe, the *presence* of power is not the issue, because power will always be involved. It becomes problematic, however, when it is hidden or protected by the guise of neutrality. Mouffe suggests that neutrality acts to repress difference and dissent. For instance, any position that claims universal objectivity can frame alternative perspectives as simply representing narrow self-interest. An example of this occurred during the successive conservative governments under the Prime Ministership of John Howard in Australia. In order to de-legitimise and silence opposing or minority voices, Howard framed them as simply "special interest groups", calling them "designer forms of discrimination".[42] In contrast, he advocated that his views and values represented the mainstream.[43]

Similarly, the framing of justice as simply being about the acquisition of equal (read as same) rights can perpetuate, rather than mitigate, inequalities. In this setting I will draw once again, upon events arising during Howard's term in office. In this case the example is the changes to custody provisions, which were implemented in 2006, following the breakdown of marriage and marriage-like relationships. The new laws enshrined shared custody as the first order of parenting arrangements, so as to increase the access and rights of fathers. In an effort to counter against a perceived inequality in favour of mothers, the new laws gave equal access to both parents, and allowed child support payments to be decreased in exchange for more time spent with the child.[44] However, because these changes were applied across the board, without reference to the particulars of each case, some children were put in dangerous situations with

[42] John Howard as quoted by Nick Dyrenfurth 'Battlers, Refugees and the Republic: John Howard's Language of Citizenship', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 28, I. 84, 2005, p. 187.
[43] Nick Dyrenfurth, ibid.
[44] Rae Kaspiew, Matthew Gray, Ruth Weston, Lawrie Moloney, Kelly Hand, and Lixia Qu *Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms: Summary Report* (Australian Institute of Family Studies: Melbourne, 2009), first accessed January 2011 at http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fle/summaryreport.pdf, p. 13.

parents who were granted equal access despite evidence of past abuse.[45] As a result, '[m]any legal sector professionals believe the reforms have favoured fathers over mothers and parents over children, and that the post-reform bargaining dynamics are such that mothers are "on the back foot".'[46] This example illustrates that seeing equality through the prism of same treatment does not always produce equal results. Therefore, it is important to recognise this tension and highlight that neutrality is not possible in a political environment. In order to address the gap in liberal theory, with regard to neutrality, Mouffe utilises concepts taken from the communitarian approach, particularly the common good, which will be the focus of the following section.

- THE COMMUNITARIAN APPROACH -

Against liberalism's individualism, communitarians stress the importance of community, and for Mouffe they highlight that '[a] citizen cannot properly be conceived independently of her insertion in a political community.'[47] Reviving much of the civic republican tradition, communitarians advocate an emphasis on community and participation by citizens in the public sphere. Furthermore, in contrast to the liberal approach, communitarians believe that subjects are not simply individuals pursing their own ends, but rather are intimately linked to the community and thus each other. Accordingly, citizens are not simply endowed with rights and the guarantee of negative liberty, because communitarians require subjects to actively engage in the political process and consider the needs of the public good. Consequently, one of the first elements that Mouffe appropriates from the communitarians is the notion of the "active" citizen, and she writes that 'we need to recover the dimension of *active participation* that they hold in the classical republican tradition.'[48]

[45] Ibid, p. 5.
[46] Ibid, p. 13.
[47] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 4.
[48] Ibid, p. 3, emphasis added.

For Mouffe, the notion of active citizenship ensures against the formalised, passive citizenship that she sees in liberalism. Instead, Mouffe writes that '[a] radical, democratic citizen must be an active citizen, somebody who *acts* as a citizen, who conceives of herself as a participant in a collective undertaking.'[49] That being said, Mouffe does not suggest that radical democracy adopt the principles of direct democracy models, because she sees them as promoting an illusion of consensus, and she states instead her preference for representative democracy.[50] However, Mouffe is not completely clear on her preference for representative democracy over direct democracy. At some moments she appears quite adamant that representative democracy is the best model. For example, she agrees with Roberto Bobbio that we need to 'stress the importance of representative democracy and the need to abandon the illusions of direct democracy',[51] and that '[r]epresentative democracy needs to be defended'.[52] Yet Mouffe also says that '[t]here are many social relations where representative forms of democracy are completely inadequate…Representative democracy is better suited in some cases, direct democracy in others.'[53] Unfortunately, Mouffe does not substantiate her claims and as a result, it is difficult to discern exactly when representative democracy would be more or less appropriate than direct democracy. Suffice to say, the notion of citizen participation that is key to communitarian approaches, is an important element for Mouffe's radical democracy.

According to the communitarian approach, the liberal conception of citizenship is seriously flawed because it does not take into account the situation of the political subject. The liberal subject is seen as existing prior to, and independently of, the community, and it is assumed that individuals enter into the social contract simply in order to protect their own private needs and desires. According to Mouffe, '[i]deas of public-mindedness, civic activity and political participation in a community of equals are alien to most liberal

[49] Ibid, p. 4, emphasis in original.
[50] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 77.
[51] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 95-96.
[52] Ibid, p. 96.
[53] Ibid, p. 104.

thinkers.'[54] In the communitarian approach, however, the subject exists *because of* the community and hence communitarians conceptualise a "'situated self"'.[55]

Mouffe agrees with this communitarian position, saying 'it is only through our participation in a community which defines the good in a certain way that we can acquire a sense of right and a conception of justice.'[56] However, she is cautious not to view the subject as a whole and fully unified subject, as some communitarians do.[57] The communitarian recognition that we are actually participants in a broader community, rather than simply a sum of individuals, is particularly useful for Mouffe's approach. As outlined in Chapter One, Mouffe argues along poststructuralist lines to say that our construction as subjects happens precisely because of the role of the external factors. We do not exist simply as individuals in the private realm, and then merely enter the public arena. Rather, according to Mouffe, we are always part of this public dimension, and it always plays a role in constituting our identities. Hence, the political is constitutive according to Mouffe, and she rejects the liberal notion that it is simply a competitive battleground. However, she also challenges the communitarian conception of community. She argues that, rather than seeing it as 'an empirical referent', as it is understood in the communitarian approach, it should be 'conceived as a discursive surface.'[58] Therefore, while communitarians (and liberals) see the community as something existing prior to political engagement, Mouffe argues that it is through political discourse that the community is constructed.[59]

For Mouffe, there is also no "single" community to which we are a part, because different discourses position our subjectivity in a variety of social interactions. According to Mouffe,

[54] Ibid, p. 62.
[55] Ibid, p. 20.
[56] Ibid, p. 46.
[57] Ibid, p. 20.
[58] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 81.
[59] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 69.

> [m]any communitarians seem to believe that we belong to only one community, defined empirically and even geographically, and that this community could be unified by a single idea of the common good. But we are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities (as many, really as the social relations in which we participate and the subject positions they define), constructed by a variety of discourses, and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject positions.[60]

Therefore, while Mouffe argues that citizenship will still be informed by the construction of *demos*,[61] she nevertheless contends that this cannot negate our membership in other types of collective engagement. Similarly, in Mouffe's view it would be wrong to consider the *demos* in a singular way, through the common good or geographical boundaries for example, because in a radical democratic approach, '[t]here would be a plurality of forms of *demos*'.[62] As will be outlined in more detail in the sections that follow, the *demos* would allow for appeals to liberty and equality to occur in multiple realms, rather than being limited to spheres traditionally relegated as public.

In spite of the above criticisms, Mouffe appropriates from the communitarians the privileged position that the identity of citizen holds, because it provides an alternative to the liberal view. She writes that

> [f]or the liberals…our identity as citizens – which is restricted to a legal status and to the possession of a set of rights that we hold against the state – is only one among many others and does not play a privileged role. Politics for them is only the terrain where different groups compete for the promotion of their specific private interests and the very idea of the political community is put into question.[63]

Instead, Mouffe regards citizenship as an overarching feature that illustrates the pervasiveness of the political, such that her conception differs vastly from the liberal notion. Rather than seeing citizenship as a passive status, Mouffe follows

[60] Ibid, p. 20.
[61] Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', *CSDBulletin* (Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster), Vol. 9, No. 1, Winter 2001-2002, first accessed January 2005 at http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/pdf/CSDB91.pdf, p. 12.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 80.

the communitarians who stress the importance of subjects being intimately involved in the community. For Mouffe, politics is 'the realm where we can recognize ourselves as participants in a community'[64] and thus we need to engage as such. At the same time, Mouffe is careful not to advance the communitarian push to have our role as citizens take absolute and final precedence over other forms of identity. Mouffe considers that this absolutely privileged status would severely hinder individual liberty. Indeed she declares that '[t]he individual is not to be sacrificed to the citizen'.[65] Instead, citizenship becomes the collective identification that operates to unify, but it is also a location where differences can be maintained.

Here Mouffe utilises the communitarian notion of "the people", but also restructures it in order for it to be useful for a radical democratic approach. For Mouffe, the concept of "the people" is not pre-given, and it does not exist prior to political processes. Furthermore, it is not able to refer to a completely whole, homogenous and inclusive group. Rather, Mouffe argues that this identity is constituted, and thus 'must be seen as the *result* of the political process of hegemonic articulation.'[66] Accordingly, Mouffe rejects communitarian appeals to "the people" that allude to full inclusion and harmony. For Mouffe, divisions are always drawn between who is considered part of this identity and who is not. Thus it is a political process that needs to trace the acts of constitutive power.

Mouffe goes on to note that '[s]uch an identity, however, can never be fully constituted, and it can exist only through multiple and competing forms of *identifications*.'[67] Mouffe argues that, while the identity of citizenship should be prioritised, it cannot be the totalising identity, because other memberships need to be recognised in order to facilitate pluralism. She writes:

> [t]o affirm that citizenship should be accorded a certain pre-eminence among our different identities, and that it is the democratic political identity *par*

[64] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 5.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 56, emphasis in original.
[67] Ibid, emphasis in original.

> *excellence*, does not imply that we should either deny the importance of our other forms of membership or defend a state-centred conception of politics.[68]

Rather than appeal to an overarching, homogenising form of citizenship, Mouffe utilises the communitarian notion of the common good, again restructuring it in order for it to be more in line with her radical approach. This is done through the appropriation of concepts taken from Michael Oakeshott, which will be discussed in later sections.

-THE COMMON GOOD-

Mouffe argues that the liberal approach, in its complete and dichotomous separation of public and private, leaves the political void of ethical considerations. In order to rectify this, Mouffe argues that the communitarian approach can offer a political ethic overlooked by liberalism. Communitarians argue that a common and public good should unite the political community. For them, this exists 'prior to and independent of individual desires',[69] rather than simply the good of a sum of individuals, as in some liberal approaches. Therefore, under a communitarian model, the ethical takes on a public, and thus political, dimension (what Mouffe refers to as the "'ethico-political'"[70]), and exists beyond the private sphere. For Mouffe this is very worthwhile because, owing to the liberal pursuit of individual liberty, '[a]ll normative concerns have increasingly been relegated to the field of private morality, to the domain of "values", and politics as been stripped of its ethical components.'[71] That being said, Mouffe is not advocating an absolute priority of the common good, as this interferes too much with liberty. Hence, while Mouffe agrees with many of the communitarian critiques of liberalism, she warns against accepting the communitarian alternative wholeheartedly.[72] She writes,

> we cannot accept the solution put forward by the communitarians because their attempt to recreate a type of "*gemeinschaft*" community, cemented by a

[68] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', pp. 5-6, emphasis in original.
[69] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 61.
[70] Ibid, p. 66.
[71] Ibid, p. 65.
[72] Ibid, pp. 60-66; 112.

> substantive idea of the common good, is clearly pre-modern and incompatible with the pluralism that is constitutive of modern democracy.[73]

Mouffe rejects the concept of the common good as formulated by the communitarians because it attempts to construct an inclusive society that is premised on a nostalgia for a supposed past consensus around certain values. In this way, argues Mouffe, the 'rejection of pluralism and defence of a substantive idea of the "common good" represents…another way of evading the ineluctability of antagonism."[74]

As has been pointed out earlier, Mouffe rejects the view that antagonism is avoidable and instead argues that every consensus is political, and thus maintains the possibility of being antagonistic. She writes that '[w]e have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion."[75] Since every act of inclusion necessarily involves exclusions, we cannot be part of a totally homogenous and inclusive community. Such a view masks difference and avoids the importance and nature of pluralism. Mouffe argues that, in a similar fashion to the deliberative theorists, communitarians fail to acknowledge the dimension of the political and so, again, end up with a model of democracy that assumes an essentialised subject, overlooks the nature of pluralism, and thus obscures power relations. Instead, Mouffe advocates a reworking of the notion of common good in order that it becomes a useful component of the radical democratic approach.

Mouffe accepts Claude Lefort's argument that

> democracy is instituted and sustained by the *dissolution of the markers of certainty*. It inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge, and as to the basis of relations betweel [sic] *self* and *other*, at every level of social life.[76]

[73] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 80.
[74] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 7.
[75] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 104.
[76] Claude Lefort *Democracy and Political Theory* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 1988), p. 19, emphasis in original.

Therefore, we cannot base society on reference to an absolute common good, as there is no group or individual capable of dictating what is best for, or standing in for the whole of society. Following Lefort's argument, Mouffe says that '[p]ower, law and knowledge are therefore exposed to a radical indeterminacy…[such that] a substantive common good becomes impossible',[77] but an ethical dimension to politics can still remain. In this context Mouffe contends that

> [c]ertain regimes characterize themselves by the fact that they make no distinction between the good of man and the good of the city, but the separation of these two spheres by modernity and the rejection of a single conception of the moral good should not ignore the existences of the "political good".[78]

Despite Mouffe's recognition of pluralism, she still advocates that a "common" conception of the public and political good is possible, and necessary, for democracy.

While communitarians use the common good as the overarching, totalising concept, Mouffe prefers to see it as a "horizon" or 'following Wittgenstein, a "grammar of conduct" that coincides with the allegiance to the constitutive ethico-political principles of modern democracy: liberty and equality for all.'[79] For Mouffe, it is the adherence to the principles that link a common identity, and thus facilitates the ethico-political, which informs the conception of citizenship. However, this radicalised version of the common good cannot be seen as providing a static and all encompassing ethic, because '[t]here will always be competing interpretations of the principles of liberty and equality, the type of social relations where they should apply, and their mode of institutionalization.'[80] Mouffe rejects the communitarian version because it is unable to recognise this political aspect, and in consequence overlooks, not only antagonism, but also the pluralism and liberty provided for by liberalism.

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[77] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 64.
[78] Ibid, p. 31.
[79] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 81.
[80] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 24.

In order to facilitate the elements of both the communitarian and the liberal principles, Mouffe rejects any notion of incompatibility. She believes that the tensions between citizen and individual, and liberty and common good do exist, but insists that the dichotomy is false.[81] She writes that

> [o]ur only choice is not one between an aggregate of individuals without common concern and a pre-modern community organized around a single substantive idea of the common good. Envisaging the modern democratic political community outside of this dichotomy is the crucial challenge.[82]

In order to bridge this divide and provide for a radical democratic citizenship, Mouffe appropriates concepts from the work of Michael Oakeshott, which will be discussed below.

- THE BRIDGE: OAKESHOTT -

In reconceptualising the notion of citizenship, the dilemma for Mouffe is how to negotiate a type of political identification which allows for pluralism, and a poststructuralist understanding of the subject, and can provide for individual liberty as well as a substantive sense of *demos*. Mouffe advocates the importance of the notion of citizenship because for her, it replaces traditional forms of collective identity. Through her analysis of Marxism, Mouffe shows that the new social movements of the early 1980s necessitated a re-examination of the category of workers as *the* locus of progressive change. The criticisms of class as the guiding characteristic of collective, provoked by the rise of the new social movements, as well as poststructuralist critiques have, argues Mouffe, left a gap in the way we can politically unite, and thus she hopes that a reworking of citizenship can provide 'the kind of collective identity required by radical and plural democracy.'[83] However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, neither the liberal nor communitarian models offer a fully satisfactory alternative. In this context Mouffe turns to the work of Michael Oakeshott, arguing that his

[81] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 65.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', p. 11.

theories can be reformulated to provide a bridge between the liberal and communitarian approaches, and thus facilitate a new radical democratic citizenship.

In outlining a radical democratic notion of citizenship Mouffe firstly distinguishes between two different conceptions of society formulated by Michael Oakeshott. The first is called a *universitas*, whereby citizens are connected by a common purpose or outcome, much like the communitarian notion of the public good, or the Marxist notion of socialist revolution. In the second version, called a *societas*, participants 'are linked by the authority of the conditions specifying their common or "public" concern.'[84] Basically, says Oakeshott, citizens are connected simply through their "loyalty to one another."[85] For Mouffe, this second term is far more useful for her reconstruction of citizenship. She argues that a *universitas* is, in a similar fashion to the public good, far too concerned with trying to achieve a universal outcome, the absence of which is what she takes to be the defining characteristic of modern democracy. From the concept of *societas*, Oakeshott draws out a theory defined as *respublica*, whereby the *moral* "rules of the game" become the unifying characteristics for citizens. It is, according to him,

> 'the articulation of a common concern that the pursuit of all purposes and the promotion of all interests, the satisfaction of all wants and the propagation of all beliefs shall be in subscription to conditions formulated in rules indifferent to the merits of any interest or the truth or error of any belief and consequentially not itself a substantive interest or doctrine.'[86]

However, this is not a prescriptive set of procedures that Mouffe is outlining, as say in a Habermasian, deliberative model. Rather the *respublica* provides the "moral considerations specifying conditions to be subscribed to in choosing performances."[87]

[84] Chantal Mouffe 'Democratic Politics and the Question of Identity', in John Rajchman (Ed.) *The Identity in Question* (Routledge: New York; London, 1995), p. 37.
[85] Michael Oakeshott as quoted by Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 66
[86] Michael Oakeshott as quoted by ibid, p. 68.
[87] Michael Oakeshott as quoted by ibid, p. 67.

Mouffe acknowledges that such a concept is open to interpretation and indeed, can be used for conservative purposes. However, she also argues that it is possible to radicalise it by recognising 'that the *respublica* is the product of a given hegemony, the expression of power relations, and that it can be challenged.'[88] The obvious critique here is that if it can be challenged, then surely a radical democratic conception can also be disputed, and while this is the case, this does not prove to be fatal for radical democracy. Rather, it is precisely this recognition that gives strength to Mouffe's radical democratic position. It is only by acknowledging the hegemonic nature of norms that we can analyse power relations, and thus forms of subjugation. Indeed, for Mouffe, this is the precise purpose of a *respublica*. For Mouffe the *respublica*, like other political elements, is merely a 'discursive surface',[89] and therefore, is open to challenge and restructuring by exposing its forms of subjugation.

To ensure that the *respublica* is useful for radical democratic citizenship, Mouffe argues that it becomes defined by the respect for the principles of liberty and equality. While Mouffe acknowledges that there will be different interpretations of the principles, the mere adherence to them is enough to define the adversary as opposed to the enemy who rejects the principles outright. According to Mouffe, in the fight for hegemony, where positions try to advance their own interpretation of the principles, this can be seen as an agonistic struggle (between adversaries) rather than an antagonistic one (between enemies).

In Mouffe's approach, the mere fact that a discourse appeals to the principles of liberty and equality is enough to "qualify" them as part of the agonistic, democratic debate. As such, 'those who do not accept the democratic "rules of the game"…thereby exclude themselves from the political community.'[90] This tense and tenacious pluralism between the interpretations is however, vital for democracy. Radical democracy then, is only one position in the spectrum of alternatives trying to secure its hegemony by stabilising its interpretation of the

[88] Chantal Mouffe, ibid, p. 69.
[89] Ibid, p. 71.
[90] Ibid, p. 4.

unifying principles of the *respublica*. In this way, radical democracy can provide a point of collective harmonisation. However, this position will never be fully stabilised and secured because the battle will be ongoing; challenges from other alternatives will force a renegotiation on the interpretation so that any established hegemony is fluid and provisional. This ongoing battle is, for Mouffe, the pivotal element of democracy. Therefore, in presenting a radical democratic citizenship, Mouffe acknowledges 'that there can be as many forms of citizenship as there are interpretations of those principles, and that a radical democratic interpretation is one among others.'[91] The challenge for radical democracy is to try and secure its interpretations as the hegemonic one and respond to the challenges from the other alternatives.

- RADICAL DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP -

'The way we define citizenship is intimately linked to the kind of society and political community we want.'[92]

Defining citizenship is, for Mouffe, a key component of any democratic approach; it outlines the "rules of the game" and conveys the interpretation of the ethico-political principles. However, as this section will show, Mouffe neglects to fully theorise all of the necessary aspects within her approach to citizenship, namely the radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality. Therefore, I argue that Mouffe fails to capitalise on this key radical element, which will help to actualise her radical project. This section will lay the foundation for this argument, which is argued more comprehensively in the following chapter, in addition to outlining Mouffe's utilisation of Oakeshott's concept of *respublica*, and the other elements of radical democratic citizenship.

[91] Ibid, p. 84.
[92] Ibid, p. 60.

Rather than being defined by the state, law, or geography, Mouffe's radical democratic citizenship is defined by adherence to the principles of liberty and equality. Mouffe writes that '[w]e have to accept that national homogeneity can no longer be the basis of citizenship, and that pluralism must allow for a range of different ethnic and cultural identities.'[93] Therefore, in a similar way to the communitarian notion of the common good, the ethico-political, defined by the *respublica* provides a point of unification for the collective identity of citizen. The *respublica* helps to temper pluralism, and facilitates the transition of antagonism into agonism, because it provides the guiding ethic of what is permissible and what is not. However, the framework is flexible because it simply requires an adherence to the principles, not a strict and common interpretation. Indeed, in a modern democracy there will be differing interpretations of these principles, resulting in different conceptions of citizenship. That said, a radical democratic citizenship is nevertheless bound in certain ways. It is, according to Mouffe,

> a form of political identity that is created through identification with the political principles of modern pluralist democracy, i.e. the assertion of liberty and equality for all…[an] allegiance to a set of rules and practices that construe a specific language game…It is…a common political identity of persons who might be engaged in many different communities and who have different conceptions of the good, but who accept submission to certain authoritarian rules of conduct…conditions that individuals must observe when choosing and pursuing purposes of their own.[94]

Using the *respublica* as the framework for ethical, political, action, allows Mouffe to protect and advance pluralism and difference, while maintaining a nodal point of commonality. It also allows the radical democratic interpretation of the principles to be renegotiated. For example, Mouffe asserts that a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality 'will emphasize the numerous social relations in which situations of domination exist that must be challenged'.[95] However, the forces of oppression move and fluctuate, and so

[93] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 8.
[94] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 82.
[95] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 84.

the radical democratic understanding also needs to be able to respond to future claims of inequalities.

The poststructuralist element of Mouffe's approach, which highlights the constitutive role of power and the invariable affective power of discourse, is also useful in providing a radically different approach to citizenship. Using Mouffe's analysis with regard to the case of contemporary Australian citizenship, for example, proves fruitful in illustrating the discursive construction of the citizen. For example, without a bill of rights,[96] and with very few rights endowed through the Constitution, Australian citizenship, by liberal standards, is quite bare. In fact, the Australian Constitution avoids the term "citizen" preferring instead the 'less problematic' term "subject".[97] Where "citizen" is used, it refers simply to those citizens of a foreign power.[98] While there are legal mechanisms for articulating Australian citizenship, much of the identity of "the Australian citizen" has been constructed through rhetoric and other discursive means.[99]

Nick Dyrenfurth asserts that it is language in particular, that has played an important role in constructing Australian citizenship.[100] Dyrenfurth's research shows that the construction of Australian citizenship has changed over time, depending on discursive changes, illustrating the remarkable fluidity and historical dependency of the concept. What Dyrenfurth's and Mouffe's analyses reveal is that our role as citizens is 'something to be constructed, not empirically given.'[101] Legal conceptions of citizenship are only part of the make-up of where citizenship is established. Furthermore, relying on a formalised notion of

[96] Although there has been much debate about a national Bill of Rights for Australia, this has yet to be implemented. Therefore, the Australian Capital Territory and the state of Victoria have both passed their own legislation that provides a human rights act or charter. For more information see Australian Parliamentary Library *Bill of Rights* (Parliament of Australia: Canberra, 2010), first accessed January 2011 at http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/law/billofrights.htm.
[97] Nick Dyrenfurth 'The Language of Australian Citizenship', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40, No. 1, March 2005, p. 87, footnote 1.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid, pp. 87-109.
[100] Ibid, pp. 87-109. Although Dyrenfurth asserts that his analysis is not a discourse analysis in the Foucauldian sense (p. 92), the elements that he discusses, like culture, symbolism and interpretations of justice and equality, do fit into Mouffe's conception of discourse, especially considering that Dyrenfurth also acknowledges that language cannot be neatly separated from policy and practice (p. 94). Therefore, while Dyrenfurth appeals to language as being effective, his article does echo Mouffe's argument on the construction of citizenship through discourse.
[101] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 66.

citizenship in order to produce equality ignores prior, and ongoing, discursive power matrices. This point is strikingly evident in the Australian setting, given that Australian citizenship was not actually formalised until 1948, despite white settlement in 1788, and Federation in 1901. In Australia, as elsewhere, outside of the legal definition of citizenship, there were other constitutive, typically less formal and thus visible factors that affected the formation of Australian citizenship.

It is here that Mouffe's discourse focused, radical democratic approach comes into its own. Her approach is able to trace the lines drawn between inclusion and exclusion, and abandons the illusion of a fully secured and equal citizenship status. The discursive orientation also highlights that a progressive conception of citizenship cannot be absolutely guaranteed, because other approaches are capable of affecting the hegemonic conception. Hence, what is vital for the radical democratic approach is to outline its interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality, in order to disrupt and shift current conceptions of citizenship.

Furthermore, Mouffe states that she sees

> the left as a horizon where many different struggles against subordination could find a space for inscription. The notion of a radical democratic citizenship is crucial here because it could provide a form of identification that enables the establishment of a common political identity among diverse democratic struggles.[102]

However, without outlining what the radical democratic interpretation of the principles of democracy is, Mouffe offers a decidedly thin account of radical citizenship. There is little to determine what the nodal point of unification is for these diverse struggles, with no common conception of what radical democratic principles might broadly look like.

[102] Ibid, p. 6.

While the *respublica* helps to provide a radicalisation of the communitarian notion of the common good, this is also where Mouffe's theoretical lacunae begin to be exposed. As explained previously in this chapter, the common good, for Mouffe, is seen as the "grammar of conduct" that informs the *respublica*. However, because Mouffe argues that there will always be different interpretations of the principles, the radical common good (epitomised in the *respublica* and informing citizenship), 'can never be actualized' though 'it must remain as a kind of vanishing point to which we constantly refer, but cannot have a real existence.'[103] Here Mouffe invokes the communitarian notion of the common good, but re-theorises it. Much like her conception of democracy, Mouffe argues that that the openness of the principles means that there will always be different conceptions of citizenship, ranging from 'radical and plural, social-democratic, conservative, and neo-liberal.'[104] For Mouffe, therefore, radical democratic citizenship *depends* on a radical interpretation of the principles to act as the "vanishing point". Yet this is an element overlooked by Mouffe.

There are benefits within Mouffe's radical democratic approach to citizenship. These include the fact that it can offer a new analysis, a way to balance the pluralism and individualism of liberalism, with the sense of commonality and community of the communitarian position, and the potential for the *respublica* to provide an ethically informed, diverse, sense of political engagement. The manifestation of this potential is not fully achieved, however, because Mouffe's approach requires further theorisation. Her approach certainly offers new ways to conceive and articulate citizenship and political interactions, but without the radical democratic interpretation of the principles, her approach is unable to realise its radical potential.

[103] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 24.
[104] Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', p. 11.

- CONCLUSION -

For Mouffe, outlining a radical democratic citizenship is a delicate balance of adoption of the core features of both the liberal, and communitarian approaches. As such, Mouffe's model of citizenship appropriates fundamental aspects of the liberal and communitarian notions of citizenship, although her approach does also deviate from them both. Mouffe's re-conceptualisation of the subject highlights that there is no *a priori* individual, because outside forces are always constitutive. Despite this conflict with the radical democratic conception and the liberal one though, Mouffe argues that '[w]e should not forego the gains of liberalism, and the critique of individualism implies neither the abandonment of the notion of "rights" nor that of pluralism.'[105] Instead, Mouffe uses elements of the liberal approach to temper the homogenising tendency of the communitarian approach.

Appropriating, but also reconstructing, the communitarian notion of the common good through the use of Oakeshott's concept of *respublica*, Mouffe argues that it can provide the nodal point for collective identification, while also maintaining a respect and facilitation of agonistic pluralism. This balancing act provides for individualism, without sacrificing a sense of community and collective identity. It also provides a general ethico-political horizon. Couple this with Mouffe's poststructuralism, that advocates for a decentred subject, constitutive power, and only temporary stabilisations of discourse, and a radical democratic approach to citizenship provides a unique way to conceptualise membership in a political community.

Mouffe writes that

> [w]hat we share and what makes us fellow citizens in a liberal democratic regime is not a substantive idea of the good but a set of political principles specific to such a tradition: the principles of freedom and equality for all…To be a citizen is to recognize the authority of such principles and the rules in

[105] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 33.

> which they are embodied, to have them informing our political judgement and our actions.[106]

However, Mouffe stresses that there will be multiple interpretations of these principles and that her approach is just one alternative. Therefore, for the radical democratic approach to be truly useful, Mouffe needs to inform her conception of the *respublica* and specify her interpretation of the principles. Acknowledging that there will be multiple (and ongoing) ways to interpret the principles of liberty and equality (and therefore different conceptions of citizenship) is important for the democratic process. It provides for constant re-negotiations and highlights that political discourse always involves the drawing of frontiers. In order for the political project of radical democracy to get underway, and if it is to have any chance of 'provid[ing] the vehicle for the construction of a radical democratic hegemony',[107] the radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality needs to be explored.

Conceptually, Mouffe's approach to democracy and citizenship is vastly different to the liberal and communitarian models. As a result, the radical democratic approach does not necessarily provide for a model that can be implemented in an interchangeable, or equivalent way. In re-theorising the approach to democracy so that it becomes a horizon rather than an end goal, by challenging claims to inclusiveness and harmony, and by highlighting the importance of power, especially in regards to the construction of identities, Mouffe's approach *is* a radical alternative. However, the radical potential of this approach in terms of providing a political project of radical democracy is not fully realised because of the failure to address the interpretation of liberty and equality. In a radical democratic approach, '[t]he struggle for hegemony is the struggle to create a political community of citizens…an ethico-political community',[108] based on an interpretation of the principles of the *respublica*. Without specifying what this interpretation is, Mouffe undermines the most radical element of her approach.

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[106] Ibid, p. 65.
[107] Ibid, p. 73.
[108] Mark Anthony Wenman 'What is Politics? The Approach of Radical Pluralism', *Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2003, p. 62.

Providing a specifically radical democratic understanding of the principles would allow Mouffe to establish the discourse of radical democracy as a useful alternative in the theoretical field of democratic studies, and in the practical political arena. Mouffe is clear that the aim of her work is two fold in that she aims to provide a theoretical alternative as well as providing for a radical democratic project.[109] However, it is difficult to see how this tandem aim, to influence theory and practice, might be achieved without articulating the challenge she hopes to offer to existing understandings of the principles of liberty and equality. The other aims of Mouffe's are discussed and evaluated in the following chapters. Importantly, though, what will be seen is that the articulation of the radical democratic interpretation of the principles is a fundamental task that is overlooked by Mouffe, and this has decisive consequences.

[109] Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', p. 11.

Part Three

The Radical Evaluation

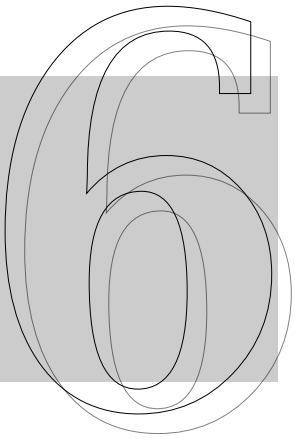
Part Three of this thesis focuses on the core question of my evaluation, namely how *radical* is Mouffe's radical democratic approach? In accordance with the "radical" criteria outlined in the introduction, this Part is divided into two chapters. Firstly, Chapter Six examines how *democratic* Mouffe's approach might be, and thus looks at her theorisation of equality and liberty. Here it will be argued that, despite her insistence on the necessity of a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality, Mouffe does not clarify what this interpretation would look like. This failure therefore hinders the possibility of the project of radical democracy. Chapter Six also offers some critiques of Mouffe's approach, focusing on how successful her aim of providing a *left*, radical alternative is. Here it will be shown that the economic side of Mouffe's approach is an area that is under-theorised in her work. Therefore, partly because of her failure to detail an interpretation of equality, the left aspect of Mouffe's approach is severely underdeveloped.

In Chapter Seven I continue the argument that there are many contradictions and theoretical gaps in Mouffe's work. The focus of the critique in this chapter revolves around her desire to continue to work within the liberal paradigm of democracy. The conclusion reached is that Mouffe, despite her restructuring of key political concepts, fails to capitalise on her most radical elements, precisely because she is trying to work within the bounds of liberalism. In this context, it

is asserted that Mouffe's radicalness is diminished, because it does not provide a substantially, and coherently, *different* approach, and so fails to *disrupt* the status quo.

Taken together, these two chapters outline the major lacunae in Mouffe's work. However, rather than seeing these as fatal for radical democracy, I argue that focusing attention on them can highlight the areas where more work can be done in order to strengthen the radical democratic project. As has been shown throughout the previous chapters, Mouffe's approach provides new ways of conceptualising democracy and its necessary components, including citizenship. Yet Mouffe falters in her ability to fully capitalise on the radical potential of her work. In order for the project of radical democracy to be successfully mounted, further theorisation, analysis, and research is required because, in its current form, Mouffe's approach is an incomplete account of the project of radical democracy.

A Democratic & Left Alternative?



Providing a democratic and left political alternative to inform the project of radical democracy is a key objective for Mouffe. Determining whether she has been able to achieve this is therefore a fundamental element of any evaluation of her work. Within this chapter, I look at Mouffe's ability to achieve this objective, by examining the democratic and left elements of the radical democratic approach.

In the first section I look at Mouffe's discussions concerning the importance of liberty and equality. For Mouffe these principles form the basis of any (legitimate) democratic project, and they are vital for informing citizenship and the *demos*, and putting limits on pluralism. However, as Mouffe notes, these principles can be inscribed with different meanings according to the discourse in which they are articulated. Therefore, the radical democratic interpretation is but one among many others, because ultimately, the principles are 'infinitely contestable and perpetually susceptible to reformulation.'[1] Within this chapter, I argue that it is crucial that Mouffe clarify what the radical democratic interpretation of the principles entails. Not only will this help to inform key concepts like citizenship, but it also helps to ground the left aspect of the radical democratic approach.

[1] Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', in Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little (Eds.) *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2009), p. 5.

In the second section of the chapter, I look at Mouffe's proposals for providing this anti-capitalist, democratic alternative. By highlighting that this is an aspect that receives little attention from Mouffe, I illustrate a further associated area of under-theorisation that has significant implications for her approach. A radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality is paramount if Mouffe is to achieve her objective. By arguing for the necessity of a radical democratic interpretation of the principles, this chapter pinpoints where the most radical potential of Mouffe's approach lies, even if it is not fully capitalised upon in its present form. As will be shown, the principles of liberty and equality provide a way for Mouffe to inform her approach, and distinguish it from the other political models discussed. In doing so, Mouffe's radical democracy has the promise to provide a clearly radical, democratic, and left political alternative.

- RADICALLY DEMOCRATIC? -

In order to evaluate how democratic Mouffe's approach is, this section examines Mouffe's treatment of the principles of liberty and equality. Given that it is difficult to determine exactly what makes an approach democratic, because there are many elements – including voting rights, electoral representation and participation, governmental accountability – which contribute to the make-up of a democracy, this section uses Mouffe's own criteria regarding democracy to assess whether her approach successfully provides a democratic alternative. The key element of this evaluation is then, an examination of how Mouffe deals with the principles of liberty and equality, because for Mouffe, the radicalisation of democracy involves the extension of the principles to more spheres of life.[2] Although Mouffe sees equality as providing the democratic element, while liberty is associated with the liberal side,[3] both principles are critical for any modern approach to democracy and so 'should be at the core of a theory of justice'.[4]

[2] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000), p. 124.
[3] Ibid, pp. 2-3.
[4] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 52.

Within this first section, I first assert that the principles of equality and liberty are a vital necessity for Mouffe's radical democratic approach. Following this, I argue that a radical democratic *interpretation* of these principles is also crucial, if Mouffe is to achieve her goal of providing a *democratic* alternative. However, rather than requiring a "definition" of liberty and equality in order to "police" the use of the principles, I argue that it is important for Mouffe to *clarify* her understanding in order that the assumptions underlying radical democracy are clearly traceable, and that her interpretation is able to facilitate the goals she sets for her approach. This section acknowledges the tension between clarifying an understanding of the principles and the emphasis upon the fluid characteristic of the poststructuralist perspective that informs Mouffe's work. The conclusion reached is that this tension does not negate the necessity of fleshing out a radical democratic interpretation. In fact, it is only through such a process of clarification that the use of the principles can be re-examined and reformulated in response to critiques, allowing the radical democratic approach to achieve a hegemonic position – the ultimate goal for Mouffe's political project.[5] However, despite the importance of this task, a close examination of Mouffe's work illustrates that it contains a substantial lacuna when it comes to clarifying the use and understanding of the principles, and this has important consequences for all of the objectives (such as a radical democratic citizenship and a left alternative) that are linked to the radical democratic project.

-INFORMING CITIZENSHIP-

The construction of a radical democratic citizenship is an essential democratic component in Mouffe's approach. As the previous chapter outlined, citizenship is dependant on the values extolled by the *respublica*; for Mouffe, these are the principles of liberty and equality. It is therefore not surprising that Mouffe writes that 'it is not possible to find more radical principles for organizing

[5] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Second Edition, (Verso: London; New York, 2001), p. xv.

society.'[6] All the same, Mouffe's tendency to merely *appeal* to the principles of equality and liberty is not sufficient to guarantee the project of radical democracy, nor does it help to fully outline the type of society envisioned. As Smith notes, '[a]s mere ideas, "liberty" and "equality" do not change anything.'[7] Instead, a clarification of what is understood as equality and liberty is crucial in helping to inform the type of political and social identity (citizenship) that Mouffe proposes for her project of radical democracy. According to Mouffe, there are as many conceptions of citizenship as there are interpretations of the principles,[8] and so a radical democratic understanding is only one amongst many. Mouffe writes that

> [i]f our aim is the extension of those principles to the widest possible set of social relations, a radical democratic conception of citizenship has to be constructed through identification with a radical democratic interpretation of equality and liberty.[9]

It is therefore somewhat curious that Mouffe spends little time engaging with the debate about how these principles are understood in a radical democratic discourse. An interpretation of the principles is what underlies the meaning of the *respublica*, and for Mouffe citizenship is the rallying point that helps to define the *demos*. However without a fully articulated conception of citizenship, it is difficult to see how the radical democratic model she upholds can be employed to provide for this social arrangement.

The radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality is also a vital element in establishing the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, it is a key feature of any democratic approach, according to Mouffe. She writes that

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[6] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 1.
[7] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (Routledge: London; New York, 1998), p. 9.
[8] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 14; Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', *CSDBulletin,* (Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster), Vol. 9, No. 1, Winter 2001-2002, first accessed January 2005 at http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/pdf/CSDB91.pdf, p. 11; Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 7 and 71.
[9] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 14.

> the "we" cannot be limited to the positive aspect of shared values, since it implies the tracing of a frontier with an exterior that is the very condition of possibility for the existence of a collective identity.[10]

However, in formulating that which is "exterior", each conception of citizenship also affirms what it positively stands for. As illustrated by Mouffe's use of Oakeshott's r*espublica*, the principles of liberty and equality set the boundaries within society; they clarify the framework of acceptable and unacceptable, and form the foundation for the political ethic that will govern the community. In doing so, a boundary is set so that the lines of inclusion/exclusion are constructed. For Mouffe, every *demos* involves this process, and there can never be a fully inclusive polity. She insists that,

> the consensus at the centre which is supposed to include everybody in our so-called post-traditional societies cannot exist without the establishment of a frontier because no consensus, or no common identity for that matter, can exist without drawing a frontier. There cannot be an "us" without a "them" and the very identity of any group depends on the existence of a "constitutive outside".[11]

Therefore, in order to draw these lines, Mouffe needs to clarify what the radical democratic interpretation of the principles is.

Within a *demos* we are bound by a 'common identification with a given interpretation of a set of ethico-political values.'[12] This can be read as excluding those who simply reject the principles of liberty and equality, but with rhetorical appeals to them becoming more common, this overlooks the complex nature of meaning creation. Political parties and leaders across the world make appeals to equality, democracy and liberty, but their practice may be at odds with the intention of radical democracy. Consequently it is important to articulate exactly how and why these different interpretations are rejected by radical democracy. Mouffe writes that different discourses of justice, for example, are part of the agonistic struggle for hegemony and that they play an important role

[10] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics, Democratic Action, and Solidarity', *Inquiry*, Vol. 38, I. 1, 1995, pp. 104-105.
[11] Chantal Mouffe 'Which Public Sphere for a Democratic Society?', *Theoria,* June 2002, p. 62.
[12] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 83-84.

> because, by proposing competing interpretations of the principles of liberty and equality, they provide grounds of legitimation for different types of demands, create particular forms of identification, and shape political forces.[13]

For this reason a radical democratic approach should clearly articulate its understanding in order that it is capable of informing these elements and illustrate what can be considered part of the radical democratic approach, and what should not.

-INFORMING DEMOCRACY-

Although Mouffe stresses the importance of a radical democratic interpretation of the principles, she provides very little clarification on the terms. By her own analysis, equality is the paramount feature of democracy, because equality comes from the tradition of democracy, while liberty comes from liberalism,[14] and so failing to address the understanding of equality is severely problematic for the democratic aspect of her approach. Although Mouffe critiques some of the interpretations of the principles offered by other alternatives, she does not put forward a radical democratic interpretation, suffice to say that it would be different to the theories she discusses. For example, Mouffe argues liberalism simply understands equality to be secured through human rights, and she asserts that this is a limited conception that can be reconceived.[15] Similarly, by drawing out the claims made by the new social movements in the mid-eighties, Mouffe acknowledges that the existing socialist understanding of equality (through economic redistribution), while a necessary condition of the radical democratic approach, is not sufficient for her left alternative.

For Mouffe, these new claims, which challenged inequalities based on gender, race or sexual orientation as well as class, helped to clarify that 'a radical democratic interpretation of the political principles' would need to emphasise 'the numerous social relations where subordination exists and must be

[13] Ibid, p. 53.
[14] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 2-3.
[15] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects: Toward a New Concept of Democracy' (translated by Stanley Gray) in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1988), p. 103.

challenged if the principles of equality and liberty are to apply.'[16] Yet despite some preliminary hints of this general kind, very little of Mouffe's work attends (explicitly) to how this radical democratic interpretation of the principles can challenge the sites of subordination. While it is clear that Mouffe does not want to simply adopt the conception of the principles as outlined by the other alternative theories, she fails to articulate what *she* means by a radical democratic interpretation. Through her critiques of the interpretations of the other alternatives, it is possible to extract some implicit assumptions about the type of principles that Mouffe wants for her approach (such as the need for a comprehensive and substantive view of equality that also attends to difference), but overall, this provides a very thin basis for any substantive reconsideration of democratic social arrangements. Indeed, such a vague level of theorising makes it difficult to elevate Mouffe's radical democratic approach to a position where it is seen as a viable democratic alternative.

Part of the issue for Mouffe in clarifying the principles is that, she argues that they are derived from two different, implicitly incommensurable traditions and, therefore, they are always in tension.[17] Mouffe's conviction that equality is the principle that stems from democracy, while liberty is the result of liberalism, leads her to conclude that it will never be possible to address both fully and simultaneously, because the privileging of one could mean the negation of the other. For example, Mouffe attributes what she sees as a democratic deficit to current forms of liberal democracy that sacrifice equality for the sake of liberty.[18] This assertion does, however, provide the means by which Mouffe is able to outline the indeterminacy of the radical democratic approach in that she also argues that it is important to allow for this tension, never finalising the priority of one principle over the other. This is the paradox of democracy.[19] As Mouffe writes, 'the unresolvable tension between the principles of equality and liberty is the very condition for the preservation of the indeterminacy and

[16] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?' in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 24.
[17] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 1-11.
[18] Ibid, pp. 3-4.
[19] Ibid, pp. 1-16.

undecidability which is constitutive of modern democracy.'[20] She also contends that

> [t]he tension should be envisaged…as creating a relation not of *negotiation* but of *contamination*, in the sense that once the articulation of the two principles has been effectuated – even if in a precarious way – each of them changes the identity of the other.[21]

Therefore, although liberty and equality are from two different traditions, so that their relationship is often antagonistic, Mouffe's approach does also recognise the permeability between the principles.

The poststructuralist influence also allows Mouffe to illustrate the contested and historically shifting character of the meaning of the principles, thereby avoiding viewing the principles as completely dichotomous. The recognition of this paradox is where one of the most radical aspects of Mouffe's approach lies. By valorising and ensuring the paradox, radical democracy is constantly being re-evaluated and challenged, and this is its strength, because the fluidity ensures that the democratic project is never fully closed. As discussed in Chapter Four, the agonistic debate provides for democracy in terms of "democracy to come" so that no particular element can be seen as universal.

Nevertheless, this indeterminacy does not negate the necessity of having, at some point, a shared understanding regarding the radical democratic interpretation of the principles. Indeed, it is only with such an interpretation that social reconstruction can occur so that the radical democratic understanding can be set against other agonistic positions like the deliberative or neoliberal ones. Without such a common understanding, there is a danger that the radical democratic position will fall into the trap of an extreme, unlimited pluralism that Mouffe warns against. As Torfing notes, following Lacanian theory,

> [t]he incessant sliding of the signifieds can only be arrested by the intervention of a hegemonic force capable of fixing the meaning of the

[20] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 13.
[21] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 10.

> floating signifier in relation to a greater number of social signifiers organised around a nodal point.[22]

Indeed, this is the role of a discourse attempting to secure its hegemony. However, for the radical democratic discourse, this can only be achieved by clarifying what a radical democratic interpretation of the principles is. Without this clarification there is no unifying nodal point – 'the privileged signifiers or reference points…in a discourse that bind together a particular system of meaning'[23] – for the progressive movements to rally around. Such a failure to specify the radical democratic account of liberty and equality effectively prevents an adequate incorporation of the claims of these movements as the "common sense". This lacuna thereby hinders Mouffe's ability to provide a fully conceived democratic alternative.

On the occasions where Mouffe does explicitly discuss her preferred understanding of equality or liberty, the account remains thin, under-theorised and underdeveloped. A closer examination reveals the stifling effect of this lacuna. For example, Mouffe often refers[24] to Michael Walzer's conception of "complex equality" as an example of a theory of equality that recognises pluralism, while avoiding universalism and rationalism.[25] Following on from Mouffe's understanding of Walzer, she argues that the important thing is to ensure that we

> preclude success in one sphere implying the possibility of exercising preponderance in others, as is now the case with wealth. It is essential that no social good be used as the means of domination and that concentration of political power, wealth, honour and offices in the same hands should be avoided.[26]

While these sentiments are important to consider, because a radical democracy aims to prevent the concentration of power, it is also vital to clarify how

[22] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999), p. 62.
[23] David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis 'Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', in David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, (Eds.) *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2000), p. 8.
[24] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 7; Chantal Mouffe 'The Radical Centre: A Politics Without Adversary', *Soundings,* I. 9, Summer 1998, p. 22; Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 125-6; Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 34 and 54.
[25] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 34.
[26] Chantal Mouffe 'The Radical Centre', pp. 21-22.

complex equality can be adopted and implemented by the radical democratic approach.

It is difficult to construct a clear vision of how Mouffe intends to ensure Walzer's conception of equality, because there is very little "unpacking" or analysis of all of the implications of his approach, or its relevance to radical democracy. Certainly many of Walzer's conceptions may be seen as in line with Mouffe's theorising. For example, Walzer acknowledges the importance of pluralism, but concedes that '[t]here must be principles that justify the choice and set limits to it, for pluralism does not require us to endorse every proposed distributive criteria'.[27] In keeping with Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, Walzer asserts that '[j]ustice is a human construction, and it is doubtful that it can be made in only one way.'[28] Walzer also recognises that, whatever the meaning attached to justice, its principles can only be applied to those with membership within the specific political community.[29] This parallels Mouffe's acknowledgement of the inevitable process in a *demos*, of defining the included/excluded. However, the presence of these similarities and potential directions hardly finalises Mouffe's radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality. Walzer's view that justice is assured when 'no social good serves or can serve as a means of domination',[30] fits with Mouffe's goal to prevent subordination, yet Mouffe does not engage with many of the other specifics of Walzer's approach, leaving her conception of the principles of liberty and equality wanting.

When it comes to liberty, the examples provided by Mouffe are even less helpful. She makes reference to adopting J.S. Mill's account of liberty,[31] but there is no engagement with the question of whether such an understanding will pose problems for the radical democratic approach. For example, underlying

[27] Michael Walzer *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Martin Robertson: Oxford, 1983), p. 5.
[28] Ibid, p. 5.
[29] Ibid, p. 32.
[30] Ibid, p. xiv.
[31] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 120.

Mill's theory is an understanding of the subject as *a priori* and sovereign.[32] Mouffe's poststructuralist conception of the subject as constructed by discourse and always affected by the constitutive outside, is at odds with this idea of freedom. However, Mouffe never considers these possible contradictions. Instead, she simply adopts Mill's position without acknowledgement of the tensions.

Mouffe does recognise the quagmire that exists in trying to aim to fulfil liberty and equality simultaneously, because one may hinder or interfere with the other, and that constant re-articulation is an important part of the democratic process. However, the recognition of this paradox does not bring us any closer to a radical democratic understanding of the principles of liberty and equality, suffice to say that, whatever the interpretation, they will be able to be challenged and re-negotiated. For Mouffe this paradox forms part of an agonistic debate and is crucial for democracy.

Following Mouffe's use of Schmitt and her conception of the political, it is clear that there will always be 'dissent' about the interpretation of the principles.[33] Yet this contention merely forms part of the agonistic debate and the struggle for hegemony. According to Mouffe's use of Schmitt, the liberals, deliberative democrats, and socialists, for example, are seen as adversaries rather than enemies, because they share an adherence (at least) to the principles of liberty and equality. For Mouffe,

> [t]he adversary – with whom one has an agonistic relationship – is someone with whom one agrees about the principles underpinning the organization of society, but with whom one disagrees about their interpretation. The enemy is the person who disagrees with the principles.[34]

[32] John S. Mill *On Liberty* (Watts & Co: London, 1930).
[33] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Caroline Bayard, Sev Isajiw and Gary Madison 'On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 49, Spring 1996, p. 133; Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', p. 12.
[34] Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', p. 12.

Therefore, establishing the 'grammar of conduct'[35] through a clarification of the interpretation of the principles is a fundamental element of all political processes, according to Mouffe. It is also part of the wider agonistic debate because '[a]dversaries fight each other because they want their interpretation to become hegemonic.'[36] If the radical democratic approach is to be set against the other alternatives though, it is important that the radical understanding of the principles is clearly distinguishable. This agonistic struggle is not just about disagreement; it is also about securing one interpretation as the hegemonic one because '[a]ntagonistic principles of legitimacy cannot coexist within one single political association'.[37] In order to fully participate in this hegemonic struggle, it is necessary for the radical democratic interpretation of the principles to be clarified. The struggle for a new democratic hegemony is part of the project for Mouffe's radical democracy, so a failure to elucidate what these principles mean is a major lacuna within her work that impedes the democratic potential of her approach.

For Mouffe, (agonistic) pluralism is a key feature of the radical democratic approach. However, she also clearly states that 'I am not a relativist because I believe there should nevertheless be certain criteria to decide what is a legitimate regime.'[38] Mouffe says that there must be limits on pluralism and we must be able 'to decide between what is admissible and what is not.'[39] I contend that the principles of liberty and equality can help with this task. In principal, radical democracy can offer subordinated subjects a chance at challenging oppressive structures, and consequently it has potential as a democratic alternative. As Smith notes, a radical democratic discourse 'provides her[/him] with the critical tools she[/he] needs to join with others in constructing an alternative world.'[40] Nevertheless, Smith also points out that '[i]t is precisely a radicalized interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality that can interrupt relations

[35] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 85.
[36] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy' (Centre for the Study of Democracy: London, 2002), first accessed January 2005 at http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/pdf/Mouffe%PDF%20.pdf, p. 9.
[37] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 11.
[38] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', p. 139.
[39] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 13.
[40] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 8.

of subordination in this manner.'[41] Therefore, in order to provide for the democratic potential, a radical democratic discourse is required to clarify how it understands these principles. Mouffe's failure to address this task means that her approach cannot always offer a clear alternative, because the grounds on which subordination is challenged are not always articulated. In order to appeal to progressive movements, radical democracy has to offer a hopeful, useful alternative, and provide means to change subjects' positions. Without clarifying what it means to be a "radical democratic citizen" (through adherences to radical principles), this potential is severely weakened.

-A POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH-

A further key, democratic, element for Mouffe is Derrida's concept of "democracy to come", meaning that there can never be any final resolution or complete and static consensus within a polity. The democratic utopian ideal is recognised as an unreachable horizon that inspires political action, despite the impossibility of its final implementation. Instead, argues Mouffe, decisions will be made, but also constantly re-examined and re-made, in order to respond to alterity and the political. However, it is also important for Mouffe that there be at least temporary closures so that we avoid a never-ending plethora of pluralism advocated by some extreme postmodern or relativist positions. For Mouffe, '[t]o assert that one cannot provide an ultimate rational foundation for any given system of values does not imply that one considers all views to be equal.'[42] Hence she proposes that 'pluralism must have limits',[43] and this is codified by an appeal to the principles of liberty and equality.

Although Mouffe's approach is postmodern in the sense that it rejects absolute foundations, this does not mean that Mouffe cannot justify her approach or present it as a viable alternative. Mouffe's approach can make use of

[41] Ibid.
[42] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, pp. 14-15.
[43] Chantal Mouffe 'Interview: Democracy – Radical and Plural', p. 11;

postmodernism/poststructuralism, while still providing a political ethic. As Laclau and Mouffe affirm, in incorporating postmodern elements,

> it does not follow that there is no possibility of reasoning politically and of preferring, for a variety of reasons, certain political positions to others…Even if we cannot decide algorithmically about many things, this does not mean that we are confined to total nihilism, since we can reason about the *verisimilitude* of the available alternatives…an argument which tries to found itself on the verisimilitude of its conclusions, is essentially pluralist, because it needs to make reference to other arguments and, since the process is essentially open, these can always be contested and refuted…Thus, the first condition of a radically democratic society is to accept the contingent and radically open character of all its values – and in that sense, to abandon the aspiration to a single foundation.[44]

As such, the radical democratic approach presents its conception as one of many, though it will still vie to have its position legitimated as the hegemonic one. A radical democratic approach does not present itself as the only, universal, or eternal mode of democracy, but it does advocate that it is a useful alternative in this time and place.

Mouffe's adherence to poststructuralist theorising does not interfere with her goal to provide an ethico-political framework; nor does it diminish her need to clarify her understanding of the principles underlying her approach. In fact, given her understanding of discourse, it is important to be able to trace Mouffe's interpretation of the principles, precisely in order for that interpretation to be open to amendment or refutation. Mouffe's discourse analysis shows that meaning is always constructed through discourse, and although the process is not as linear as theory simply informing practice (because practice will always affect theory), theoretical contributions nevertheless have an important role to play. Mouffe herself acknowledges this when she says that

> [t]he form in which liberty, equality, democracy and justice are defined at the level of political philosophy may have important consequences at a variety of

[44] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Post-Marxism without Apologies', *New Left Review*, I. 166, November/December 1987, p. 102, emphasis in original.

> other levels of discourse, and contribute decisively to shaping the common sense of the masses.[45]

In this context it would seem that, as "floating signifiers", the meaning of liberty and equality, within the radical democratic discourse, is more important than ever. In fact, it is because there is no essential trait, universally entrenched within the principles, that the task of clarifying the radical democratic interpretation is so vital. As Smith points out,

> [a] demand for civil liberties…does not have intrinsic meaning outside of a concrete historical situation. It could be shaped in a pro-capitalist ("free speech for corporate lobbyists") or an anti-capitalist ("freedom of assembly for striking workers") manner; its actual value will depend on its precise definition in a specific historical context.[46]

Following this understanding, the radical democratic position will change over time as it responds to different historical contexts and challenges. However, as part of this process, the "original" radical democratic interpretation needs to be clarified – we need to be able to trace what it is changing *from* as well as what it is changing *to*. Mouffe recognises that different constructions of the principles exist, and yet she fails to participate in the clarification of a radical democratic meaning of them, thereby undermining her ability to participate in this agonistic, democratic debate. In doing so, she fails to provide a sufficiently developed account of the radical democratic alternative.

The poststructuralist understanding of discourse does not negate the need for a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality, and providing an interpretation of the principles is vastly different to providing an objective, theory, or model of democracy, based on essentialised foundations. In discussions about feminism, for example, Chris Beasley points out that articulated definitions are vitally important because, even when meaning is not clearly conveyed, assumptions still exist beneath the surface. She notes that,

[45] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* p. 174.
[46] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 50.

'when definition does not take an implicit form it is not problem-free.'[47] Rather, this masking simply allows the assumptions to be hidden from view and critique. On this basis, Beasley suggests that part of the presumed problem of outlining a definition, in line with poststructuralist thought, arises because of misunderstandings concerning the task of defining. She argues that the process of defining is often equated with outlaying a truth or essentialist core that can be used to unify and fix meaning altogether.[48] As an alternative, Beasley recommends that a

> definition may be better conceived in terms of a verb rather than as a noun, *as a process* rather than an outcome or answer, as an activity generating meaning rather than capturing the already existent meaning "out there".[49]

Therefore, following a poststructuralist account still requires Mouffe to articulate her understanding of the principles.

In this context, and in order to uncover how Mouffe understands the principles of liberty and equality, it is important to note that, unlike the approach taken by say deliberative or liberal theorists, Mouffe is not to be understood as striving to uncover the "authentic", "universal" or "reasonable/rational" meaning of these principles. Instead Mouffe's approach recognises that the definition is a political act that constructs meaning, rather than simply uncovering it. This implies that the radical democratic interpretation of the principles is not completely static and there will be challenges made because, '[t]he rules and norms that lay the foundations for radical democracy will always have to be re-examined in the light of new conditions and struggles.'[50]

As a necessary component of the *respublica* and thus citizenship, a starting point for a radical democratic interpretation is vital. As Beasley notes, 'in order to discuss where we on the broad Left might be going, it becomes necessary to

[47] Chris Beasley 'Negotiating Difference: Debatable Feminism' in Paul Nursey-Bray and Carol Lee Bacchi (Eds.) *Left Directions: Is There A Third Way?* (University of Western Australia Press: Crawley, WA, 2001), p. 197.
[48] Ibid, pp. 203-204.
[49] Ibid, p. 205, emphasis added.
[50] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 23.

clarify the meaning of the political stance(s) we wish to advocate.'[51] In this setting, the clarification of the radical democratic interpretation of the principles, despite their fluidity and unstableness, remains an important task, and yet is one that is substantially overlooked by Mouffe. By not engaging in the agonistic discussion, Mouffe hinders the process of facilitating the project of radical democracy and this interferes with its potential as a legitimate democratic alternative. Mouffe writes that

> [b]y presenting us with different interpretations of the democratic ideal of liberty and equality, it [political philosophy] will not supply metaphysical foundations for the liberal democratic regime…but it could help us to defend democracy by deepening the creation of new subject positions within a democratic matrix.[52]

All the same, without the clarification of what the radical democratic interpretation of the principles is, it is difficult to establish the nodal point for these new forms of identification. Avoiding foundations is important in Mouffe's approach, if she is to remain consistent with her poststructuralist arguments, but this does not negate the necessity of outlining the radical democratic conception of the democratic principles.

Mouffe clearly and consistently, argues that the role of the democratic principles is to inform citizenship and, therefore, the *demos*. My argument is, however, that a theoretical gap appears when one questions and searches for an account of *Mouffe's interpretation* of these principles. Mouffe acknowledges that there are multiple and competing interpretations of liberty and equality and yet, a radical democratic one is never offered by Mouffe. Because the principles are used as nodal points around which to rally, they inform citizenship and thus help to define what type of society the radical democratic approach can construct. The principles help to stabilise the floating signifier of democracy, and inform the chain of equivalence. As Brockelman notes, '[t]he thing that empowers concrete struggles, that allows them to grow and join with the political efforts of

[51] Chris Beasley 'Negotiating Difference: Debatable Feminism', p. 193.
[52] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 57.

others, is precisely a *program*, a vision for the future.'[53] In order to advance the project of the radical democracy then, a clarification of the principles is key.

While the principles of the radical democratic position may be reflexive, it is important to show where this reflexivity ends. This is the point that prevents the radical democratic solicitation of the principles from being co-opted by other, *antagonistic* discourses. This is also the line that defines where exclusion and inclusion occur – a fundamental element of all political processes according to Mouffe. Mouffe herself notes that, '[t]he test for a discourse aiming at the establishment of new forms of articulation is its adequacy in creating a link between recognized principles and hitherto unformulated demands'.[54] The struggle for hegemony is the struggle to make the radical democratic position the "common sense"' position, but this cannot begin without some articulation of the particular definition of its use of the principles. Furthermore, Mouffe claims that

> [i]f our aim is the extension of those principles to the widest possible set of social relations, a radical democratic conception of citizenship has to be constructed through identification with a radical democratic interpretation of equality and liberty.[55]

This is, therefore, a crucial task that is not fulfilled by Mouffe, and so requires further theorisation.

To the extent that Mouffe fails to clarify a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality, on her own accounting, Mouffe's approach remains significantly underdeveloped. It is therefore difficult to consider Mouffe's approach as providing a radical democratic alternative when this lacuna is so stark. Moreover, as will be shown in the following section, while Mouffe believes that equality is the 'backbone' of the left alternative,[56] she nonetheless

[53] Thomas Brockelman 'The Failure of the Radical Democratic Imaginary: Žižek Versus Laclau and Mouffe on Vestigial Utopia', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2003, p. 205, emphasis in original.
[54] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 54.
[55] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 14.
[56] Chantal Mouffe 'The Radical Centre', p. 20.

also fails to articulate how a radical democratic interpretation can provide for this vision.

- RADICALLY LEFT? -

'[C]an one imagine a non-capitalist liberal democracy? This is the most pressing question for the left today.'[57]

'The most important task for the left today is to find alternatives to neoliberalism.'[58]

Mouffe's work is littered with sentiments that are similar to those presented in the above quotes. While the subject of her critique has shifted over time (from a focus on capitalism to neoliberalism) Mouffe's rejection of economic inequality is consistent, as is her goal to provide for a new *"Socialist Strategy"*. This makes the fact that she does *not* outline a detailed capitalist critique or alternative as perplexing, as it is frustrating. Additionally, over time she is increasingly inclined to offer comments that seem to contradict her previous statements regarding the aim of her work, and the necessity to provide a left, economic alternative. For example, in 2000 and 2001, respectively, she appears to express doubt about a socialist alternative noting that '[w]e might have given up the idea of a radical alternative to the capitalist system,'[59] and she is 'not quite sure what it would mean today to fight against capitalism as a unified system that could be replaced by a completely different one'.[60]

Although scholars like Wendy Brown have suggested that Mouffe does not spend enough time critiquing capitalism to provide an effective alternative,[61] I suggest, by contrast, that the radical democratic approach certainly has the

[57] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 19.
[58] Chantal Mouffe in David Castle 'Hearts, Minds and Radical Democracy', (interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) *Red Pepper*, June 1, 1998, first accessed March 2008 at http://www.redpepper.org.uk/article563.html.
[59] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 15.
[60] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph and Thomas Keenan 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', *Grey Room*, No. 2, Winter 2001, p. 117.
[61] In Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 19; Wendy Brown in Wendy Brown, Christina Colegate, John Dalton, Timothy Rayner, Cate Thill 'Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown', *Contretemps 6*, January 2006, p. 30.

potential to provide a left alternative, and that this was indeed part of the intention in the foundation to the approach, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. The conclusion I therefore reach is that Mouffe does intend for her approach to be anti-capitalist, but that it should not be envisioned as providing an *equivalent* economic model that can simply *replace* the capitalist one. As Mouffe is at pains to show, the capitalist neoliberal agenda achieves its hegemonic position through means that are not limited to simply the "sphere" of the economic and it would thus be a mistake to limit analysis and critique to this element of social relations alone. Inversely, when devising an alternative social or economic system, issues that may traditionally been considered "outside" of the domain of the economic, like the environment or gender relations, also need to be considered.

All the same, to overlook economic dimensions completely, would seem to be a serious delimitation in an analysis intended to challenge capitalism and neoliberal agendas. I suggest this failure to address economic inequalities has drastic consequences for the objectives of Mouffe's approach. As Glyn Daly, in *Conversations with Žižek* points out,

> the prohibitive anxieties surrounding the taboo of economism can function as a way of not engaging with economic reality and as a way of implicitly accepting the latter as a basic horizon of existence. In an ironic Freudian-Lacanian twist, the fear of economism can end up reinforcing a de facto economic necessity in respect of contemporary capitalism[62].

To avoid this trap, attention to economic forms should be an important part of a radical (left) approach, and it is the critique of the capitalist system where Mouffe thinks this analysis should be done,[63] (although this is not always sufficiently attended to by Mouffe).

[62] Glyn Daly 'Introduction: Risking the Impossible' in Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly *Conversations with Žižek* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 2004), p. 15.
[63] Chantal Mouffe in Mary Zournazi, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Hope, Passion, Politics: A Conversation with Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Lacalu' in Mary Zournazi *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* (Pluto Press: Annandale, NSW, 2002), p. 135, emphasis added.

When asked by David Castle 'What do you see as the key areas of struggle to make radical democracy a hegemonic idea?', Mouffe replied

> [t]he main block for left-wing European parties today is that they have no conception of an alternative economic programme. There is the belief that the economy is untouchable because of the rule of the market, globalisation, the decline of nation states etc. It is principally this which has led them to this consensus politics. *The most important task for the left today is to find alternatives to neoliberalism.*[64]

However, Mouffe's failure to address economic alternatives does not arise because she – unlike the European left-wing parties she critiques – is embracing the new globalised, economic system. Instead, there appears to be a lack of theorisation in Mouffe's work that, ironically, prevents her from providing a left alternative. This section will therefore discuss what Mouffe does and does not say about capitalism (or neoliberalism) in order to determine how *left* her approach might be, in its current form. I argue that the evident oversight in her work regarding the economic dimension, is partly caused by Mouffe's failure to clarify her understanding of the principles of liberty and equality. I contend further that such a clarification can help ground the overall radical strategy, and provide a basis for the rejection of the capitalist agenda. Before explaining the specificities of this argument, I will first examine instances within Mouffe's work where she discusses her economic alternative in more detail.

-EVIDENCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE-

Overall Mouffe's research lacks an in depth analysis of capitalism, but her infrequent, explicit dealings with the subject do provide insights into some of the possible strategies put forward by her radical democratic approach. For example, in terms of alternatives, Mouffe says that

> you don't have to choose between the old Keynesianism or neo-liberalism. The question of unemployment is not going to be solved by the traditional idea of full employment as some socialist parties still believe. It also cannot be solved through the American model of flexible labour markets. We need a much more drastic redistribution of work. We should look at the reduction

[64] Chantal Mouffe in David Castle 'Hearts, Minds and Radical Democracy', emphasis added.

> of the working week and job sharing. We should also look at the idea of basic income – the idea that people should, by the very fact of being a citizen, be able to receive an income that can then be added to through work. It is essential that we break the link between income and work simply because there is not enough work for everybody today. This also implies a cultural transformation – work can no longer be the centre of our identity. But the socialist parties are very, very reluctant about this, because it brings into question their own symbolic view of the centrality of work.[65]

The objective of asserting an alternative to capitalism and neoliberalism is certainly a difficult task for any theorist, but this is perhaps particularly an issue for Mouffe after her deconstruction of the class essentialism she perceives in Marxism. Although she concludes that post-Marxist analysis can still provide useful tools for challenging capitalism, her argument brings to the fore the weakness of a social critique based only on class. In highlighting this, Mouffe illustrates that the "economy" is not a separate field and is rather always interwoven into other realms of life. On this basis she concludes that a critique of, and alternatives to, capitalism can no longer simply address issues of labour, production, and class relations, as there are far more matters involved, and subject positions to consider, than these. Such a position undoubtedly makes the conceptual development of an economic alternative a difficult task. Mouffe cannot simply fall back upon Marxism to provide a ready-made substitutive vision. Instead, Mouffe talks about the more limited aim of redefining socialist goals in order to challenge neoliberalism, and she forgoes the idea of revolutionary change.[66] What is important to Mouffe, and what her approach offers, is a way to critique the methods of hegemony that operate to secure and legitimate the current economic model. In doing so, Mouffe's approach tackles all fields of social relations, not just the economic. Thus, despite her stressing the language of an "alternative" (which suggests the presentation of an equivalent, interchangeable system), part of what constitutes the "radical" aspect

[65] Chantal Mouffe in ibid.
[66] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', p. 142.

of Mouffe's approach lies more modestly in reconceptualising how we might conceive of this alternative.

Although this re-conceptualisation of the economic is clearly important, it is also vital to recognise that the hegemony of neoliberalism continues to contribute to lived inequalities across a range of fields, for a range of subjects and hence, the characteristics of any possible economic alternatives still needs to be addressed specifically. In *On the Political* Mouffe critiques Anthony Giddens and the Third Way approaches because they fail to engage in a detailed critique of capitalism.[67] Her argument is that, in failing to offer such a critical analysis, Giddens resigns the new social democratic model 'to accepting the present stage of capitalism', and fails to 'challenge the hegemony of neo-liberalism.'[68] In this context it would seem entirely reasonable to expect a detailed analysis on precisely the question of the economic from Mouffe. Yet, in her own response, Mouffe's most explicit discussion on the radical democratic approach to economic relations is set out in a few pages of her book *The Democratic Paradox*. Here Mouffe details only three specific proposals for re-forming economic relations. She contends that we need:

> 1) A significant reduction of the legal and effective duration of the time spent working combined with a politics of active redistribution among salaried employees.
> 2) The encouragement of a massive development of many non-profit activities by associations, interacting with both the private and the public economies, to provide for the emergence of a truly pluralistic economy, instead of a purely market one.
> 3) The ending of stigmatization of the poorest and excluded sections of society by the allocation of an unconditional minimum income (basic income) either to every person who does not enjoy the minimum level of resources, or without regard to other income, age, sex or matrimonial status. In both cases this basic income should be made in addition to (and not substitutive for) complementary resources.[69]

[67] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 60.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 126.

For Mouffe, putting these three measures in place would help to create a "plural economy" so that the market is not the only force driving the implementation of projects or the evaluation of profitability.

However, Mouffe also argues that, because of the globalised nature of capital today, it would not be sufficient to implement these economic changes at the state level.[70] She instead insists that 'a left-wing project today can only be a European one' in the sense of reaching beyond state borders and where 'the different states would unite their forces.[71] In saying this, Mouffe still distinguishes between her call for a European solution to the problems of capitalism and that of cosmopolitan citizenship,[72] because she clearly rejects the homogenising nature of the latter.[73] Within Mouffe's vision of an integrated Europe, the differences between the states are maintained, but their commonality would be drawn according to 'common policies' that prevent the states from 'competing among themselves in order to establish the more attractive deals for transnational corporations.'[74] This raises some questions regarding how accountability is to be ensured, or why the regional level is preferable. The national, state level of government is already abstracted from many citizens so it is difficult to comprehend how Mouffe envisages this ultra-state level of governing.

While Mouffe's comments are useful for teasing out part of her vision for an economic alternative, her proposals are also somewhat patchy and thin, lacking necessary detail. At times, ironically, they also appear to reiterate some the sentiments put forward by Third Way theorists that Mouffe vehemently rejects. For example, her desire for private and non-government associations to play a role in funding projects, parallels strongly with the public-private partnerships

[70] Ibid, p. 127.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', pp. 110-111.
[73] Chantal Mouffe in ibid, pp. 110-113; Chantal Mouffe 'Democracy in a Multipolar World', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2009, pp. 549-561.
[74] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 127.

(PPP) often advocated by Third Way proponents.[75] Such arrangements leave little room for the democratic discussion of how these projects will be run, because private companies are not accountable to the public, and there is little accountability for their efficiency. Similarly, the costs associated with implementing the projects, and the contractual obligations between the government and the private party, often lack transparency because they are outlined in confidential financial agreements.[76] Therefore, it would appear that they are likely to be problematic within Mouffe's approach, unless they are sufficiently linked to the other aims of the radical democratic project. Public-private partnerships do not challenge the neoliberal agenda, because they simply provide a new means to extend this economic logic. They also perpetuate the concentration of power, because business leaders are permitted to make decisions related to the interests of the public. However, these decisions are exempt from public scrutiny and accountability. Mouffe's idea of the "plural economy" means that other players beyond the state, or inter-national forms of governance, can have a role in determining social and economic policy. However, Mouffe's approach currently fails to respond to this requirement, thus displaying a surprisingly lenient, or perhaps even naively positive, attitude to non-government economic organisations. In order to develop a new economic order, their participation must be regulated by the overarching political ethic that evaluates the democratic nature of the results. Yet, without a clear articulation of the radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality, it is difficult to ground or utilise such an overarching ethic.

In other parts of her work, Mouffe is less clear about the role of capital in her approach, even suggesting that 'anti-capitalist resistances' can arise out of being a consumer.[77] Mouffe's analysis in this instance seems remarkably short sighted. While there may be acts of boycott or the consumption of fair-trade products that allow for resistance against global free-trade, this is still done within the

[75] Anthony Giddens *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 1998), p. 125.
[76] Matthew Flinders 'The Politics of Public-Private Partnerships', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, Vol. 7, I. 2, May 2005, pp. 215-239.
[77] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', p. 117.

discourse of capital and, as such, does little to challenge the overarching hegemony of capitalism and neoliberalism.[78]

-RADICAL IMPLICATIONS-

According to Mouffe, the link between liberalism and capitalism is only 'the result of an articulatory practice, and as such can therefore be broken',[79] but this important perspective is once again marred by a failure of Mouffe to provide explanatory detail. Mouffe neglects to articulate how this break can be achieved. All the same, breaking this link does still appear to be an important task, because Mouffe is adamant that radical democracy incorporates political liberalism. Her contention that one aspect of liberalism can be excised from others requires the espousal of a distinction between political and economic liberalism. Mouffe is surely required to specify how this articulation can be broken. Without this re-articulation, and without a clear understanding of the radical democratic interpretation of the principles, there is a danger that the liberal, individualist-driven understanding of liberty will be attached to the radical democratic project.

Mouffe is adamant that a radical democracy is still a liberal democracy,[80] but if she is to ensure that this relationship does not result in the privileging of individual private property rights, then an account of political liberalism and its links with radical democratic liberty, needs to be very clear. Liberalism has a consistent history in linking liberty with the right to private property and ownership, and this typically provides the justification for the capitalist system.[81] To make the case against capitalism then, Mouffe needs to provide a detailed distinction between her understanding of liberty, as opposed to that associated with liberalism, and explain how political and economic liberalism differ.

[78] See for example Silje Johnannessen 'Who Really Benefits from Fairtrade? An Analysis of Value Distribution in Fairtrade Coffee', *Globalizations*, Vol. 7. I. 4, December 2010, pp. 525-544.
[79] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 2.
[80] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', p. 145.
[81] Norman Barry 'Liberalism' in Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (Routledge: London, 2001), pp. 415-417.

Mouffe argues that 'it is important to show how the capitalist system in its present stage of big corporations constitutes a fetter to the development of pluralism and the enhancement of individual freedom',[82] because 'the struggle for democracy is the struggle against autocratic power in all its forms.'[83] Yet again, these claims do not sit easily alongside her support for non-government partnerships, and do not help to clarify how she proposes to make a distinction between political and economic liberalism. Mouffe's claim that the capitalist system impedes individualism is not at all evident, in that capitalism is often justified on the basis that it provides for pluralism and individualism. Similarly, if we accept that democracy is the prevention of 'hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of organization'[84], does this mean that the state is not permitted redistribution under a radical democratic approach? Clearly, given her suggestions regarding provision of a basic income, some form of bureaucratic governance is required.

These varied comments can lead to confusion when trying to comprehend the vision that Mouffe has for her radical democratic approach. Perhaps it is not a surprise in this context, when Mouffe writes that she 'cannot clearly envisage…what a radical alternative to capitalism would be.'[85] That being said, these comments also show that there is potential within Mouffe's approach to provide, in some form, the beginnings of a left alternative. Mouffe acknowledges the complex nature of mounting an attack on capitalist relations precisely because "capitalism" is no longer seen as a cohesive and unified structure. On this basis, she argues that it should be tackled through a "war of position" where 'a complex ensemble of struggles…take[s] place at multiple strategic sites in state apparatuses, civil society and the family.'[86] For Mouffe the anti-globalisation movement epitomises this, and she sees associated groups as

[82] Chantal Mouffe 'Pluralism and the Left Identity', in Michael Walzer (Ed.) *Toward a Global Civil Society* (Berghahn Books: Providence; Oxford, 1995), p. 297.
[83] Ibid, p. 296.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', p. 117.
[86] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary*, p. 165.

linked through a chain of equivalence.[87] However, some groups, despite viewing globalisation as the "enemy", would have little traction with a radical democratic approach. For example, a radical democratic approach would not incorporate ultra-nationalist groups that use the arguments against free-trade to justify their xenophobic attitudes towards migrant workers, or populist parties who claim that they are the only ones offering an alternative to globalisation.[88]

As Jacob Torfing writes

> [u]nification of the different kinds of democratic struggles against sexism, racism, and new forms of subordination under the banner of radical plural democracy is the primary task of the Left. However, [according to Mouffe], 'these struggles do not spontaneously converge, and in order to establish democratic equivalences, a new "common sense" is necessary'.[89]

Therefore, what is needed to inform the radical democratic chain is a shared conception on the ethico-political values – the principles of liberty and equality. Mouffe does acknowledge this in her joint work with Laclau, saying that

> [i]f one is to build a chain of equivalences among democratic struggles, one needs to establish a frontier and define an adversary, but this is not enough. One also needs to know what one is fighting, what kind of society one wants to establish.[90]

However, this enunciation of an alternative society can only occur through 'a process of re-articulation'.[91] This is by no means straightforward or self-evident. Mouffe herself has noted that she accepts Bobbio's argument that equality is 'the backbone of the left vision',[92] and yet Mouffe pays very little attention to detailing what this means for her approach. While there is evidence of attempts by Mouffe to deal with the economic aspects of her approach, that can inform the left element of her project, many questions have not been addressed. Overall her work provides some insight into how a radical democratic approach could provide the catalyst for a new left paradigm, but it is clear that further theorisation is required. As will be shown in the following

[87] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension', pp. 117-120.
[88] Chantal Mouffe 'Chantal Mouffe', *Parallax*, Vo. 9, No. 3, 2003, p. 62.
[89] Chantal Mouffe as quoted by Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse*, p. 257.
[90] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. xix.
[91] Chantal Mouffe 'Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism', *Open*, No. 16, 2009, p. 39.
[92] Chantal Mouffe 'The Radical Centre', p. 20.

section, focusing on a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality can provide a pivotal foundation for re-working the left alternative.

-THE PRINCIPLES AS KEY-

Perhaps Mouffe's most useful statement arises when she says that a left approach is one that provides a 'democratization of the economy'.[93] However, if "democratisation" invokes the principle of equality, and if equality is the backbone of the Left,[94] then surely a radical democratic interpretation of equality could be the starting point for this left alternative. Mouffe herself stresses that the new left-wing project requires this focus on equality, because the 'struggle for equality…has always been at the core of social democracy.'[95] In this way, a radical democratic approach can provide the impetus for the critique of capitalism and neoliberalism, while simultaneously absorbing the claims of the social movements (provided that they fit within the stated political ethic of the radical democratic approach). In this way, Mouffe could provide a temporary fixity that can address the current failings of liberal democracies, while also mounting the much-needed challenge to capitalism. This can further help to lay the foundation for a left alternative.

A radical democratic interpretation of equality could, for example, justify economic redistribution, but also address the gender inequities associated with basing this on a traditional conception of the worker. Providing more work, or better income distribution, can no longer be regarded as the best solution, because the focus on the worker misses the gender inequalities that persist to keep women in less permanent and lower paying jobs. By utilising a radical democratic interpretation of equality, the left potential of Mouffe's approach can be fully exploited and built upon to provide for a more substantial alternative.

[93] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 90.
[94] Chantal Mouffe 'The Radical Centre', p. 20.
[95] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 123.

Jules Townshend notes inconsistencies in the type of alternative provided by Mouffe's approach, but concludes that 'the egalitarian logic of her own position…could just as easily lead to…an alternative.'[96] Adrian Little has also noted the absence of economic debate within radical democratic circles calling it a 'significant lacuna in the radical democratic literature'.[97] However, noting that radical democracy, in its adherence to unfixity, will not be able to provide a complete, homogenised economic model, capable of simply replacing the current one, Little nevertheless argues that 'it is the absence of fixity and the prospect of change which gives radical democratic thought its dynamism and opens up avenues for political renewal', especially with regard to issues related to the political economy, like welfare and redistribution.[98] While this lack of fixity does provide "dynamism" and can help to provide for difference, in order for the alternative to be workable, it is still necessary to have some degree of (temporary) fixity. Mouffe herself has warned against the never-ending plethora of positions, and she acknowledges that there must be limits to pluralism.[99] Therefore, arresting the definition of liberty and equality along radical democratic lines can help to provide the basis for a substantive, radical democratic approach to the political economy.

Furthermore, while Anna-Marie Smith has noted that 'political economy themes have not been given a prominent place in Laclau and Mouffe's texts',[100] she goes onto to conclude that it is possible to utilise their work in order to create a radical democratic approach. According to Smith

> [i]n a radical democratic society, there would be equal access not only to the material resources necessary for self-development, but also to meaningful participation in social, cultural, political and economic decision-making.[101]

However, the provisions within Mouffe's work that provide guidance into *how* this can be achieved are somewhat limiting and inconsistent. They require

[96] Jules Townshend 'Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemonic Project: The Story So Far', *Political Studies*, Vol. 52, 2004, endnote 10, p. 287.
[97] Adrian Little 'Community and Radical Democracy' *Journal of Political Ideologies,* Vol. 7, I .3, 2002, p. 376.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', pp. 136-137.
[100] Anna Marie Smith *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 30.
[101] Ibid, p. 31.

linking to the overall "ethic" of the radical democratic approach, which can be provided for through a radical interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality, but Mouffe neglects to articulate this understanding.

Requiring that one theorist address all the practical issues of the field is perhaps an unfair expectation, but the problem in Mouffe's work is that she herself insists that the radical democratic approach must attend to the economic. Her under-theorisation, however, unnecessarily impedes the goals that she sets for her approach. Considering that Mouffe's work in this area now straddles nearly three decades, this does feel like an important lacuna. Radical democratic theory is certainly not meant to be completely prescriptive and there is evidence in Mouffe's work of ideas to tease out, so that they can be applied practically, but the credibility of the approach often rests on being able to address questions of practicality and application in a consistent manner. Mouffe's failure to provide for this diminishes the standing of her approach. A radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality does provide an important grounding for the basis of the radical democratic alternative. However, Mouffe's failure to clarify her understanding means that this potential is not fully capitalised upon.

- CONCLUSION -

While there is evidence that Mouffe attempts to critique the capitalist and neoliberal agenda, the analysis is quite minimal and hence it exemplifies an area of under-theorisation within her work. Like her failure to address the interpretation of equality and liberty, this lacuna hinders the overall radical potential of her approach. Mouffe says that an anti-capitalist approach is a necessary but not sufficient element of radical democracy.[102] Therefore, I argue, because it is *necessary*, it must also be detailed and consistent. Where it does exist, Mouffe's critique of capitalism moves beyond the paradigm of production and class, and is instead informed by her emphasis on the political nature of

[102] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* p. 178.

discourse, the instability of hegemonies, and the fluidity of identities. Nevertheless, the analysis fails to offer a position that can sufficiently challenge the hegemony of existing capitalist relations. There is a related failure to clarify what a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality could contribute to this critique of capitalism. Mouffe writes that

> [o]ne of the crucial stakes for left democratic politics is to begin providing an alternative to neo-liberalism [and that] [i]t is the current unchallenged hegemony of the neo-liberal discourse which explains why the left is without any credible project.[103]

Yet overall, Mouffe's work, in its current form, does little to facilitate this objective. In order to make the best use of the radical democratic elements, the approach needs to be re-examined in order to establish a consistent approach that can inform further strategies. Utilising a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality can help to guide this process.

Mouffe writes that '[w]e won't transform the world simply by writing the last word on equality. But it is important in constructing new political subjects, so it is one dimension of the struggle.'[104] In fact, in order to be able to establish the hegemony of the radical democratic approach, provide a basis for radical democratic citizenship, and inform a left alternative, a radical democratic interpretation of equality and liberty is vital. The failure of Mouffe to provide an alternative, as will be shown in the following chapter, means that the radical elements of her approach are not utilised. Instead of capitalising on the disruptive, different, and radical components of her approach, Mouffe undermines her ability to provide a useful, different, and therefore radical alternative.

Despite Mouffe's own failure to address the problems of capitalism and provide a detailed critique, and in a similar fashion to the other critiques I make of Mouffe, I do not conclude that all is lost. Rather, despite the significant lacunae, there is still much potential within the radical democratic approach that can

[103] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 118.
[104] Chantal Mouffe 'New Political Subjects', p. 104.

contribute to a radical alternative, if it is properly drawn out and highlighted. This argument will be explored in the following chapter.

7 A Radically Different Approach?

By discussing Mouffe's work in the context of the other political alternatives that she places herself against, this thesis has been able to present clear distinctions between Mouffe's work and the work of the other theorists discussed. This juxtaposition should indicate that, in terms of offering a radically *different* approach, Mouffe is highly successful; but this conclusion is not so simple, and so the argument pursued in this chapter differs slightly from the one outlined in the preceding chapter.

In my analysis of how democratic and how left Mouffe's approach is, it was a straightforward conclusion to determine that these two elements were important to Mouffe, and thus they represented fair points upon which to judge her work. On the determination of radical difference (leading to disruption) though, the evaluation is problematic. At the theoretical level, Mouffe's work does differ markedly from some other political alternatives, like the Marxist or deliberative democratic models, and Mouffe successfully challenges and disrupts their logics. However, from her earliest writings on radical democracy, through to her most recent, Mouffe has been consistent in stressing that her version of radical democracy should not be seen as a completely new, or different system of democracy, that would *replace* the liberal one.[1] For Mouffe, this is because, at its

[1] See for example, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Second Edition, (Verso: London; New York, 2001), p. 176; and Chantal Mouffe in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'Hegemony and Socialism: An Interview with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe', *Palinurus*, I. 14, 2007, first accessed November 2010 at http://anselmocarranco.tripod.com/id68.html.

core, radical democracy works within the liberal democratic regime in order to critique it and make improvements where necessary. Therefore, her radical democracy supports, rather than challenges liberal democracy.

Furthermore, unlike the other alternatives discussed in this thesis, Mouffe's radical democracy does not outline procedures for governance. Instead, Mouffe focuses on re-theorising at the philosophical level, and she rarely considers matters of practical application, or ways to institutionalise her approach. The consequence of this decision is that Mouffe places her approach within the liberal democratic paradigm, and accepts its institutions and methods of governance. Therefore, when it comes to the practical aspects of organising society, Mouffe's approach does not provide a different alternative, and she is happy to maintain current practices (like, for example, parliaments, constitutions, the judiciary and human rights).[2]

Throughout this chapter I will illustrate that, despite her claims of maintaining the liberal democratic paradigm, Mouffe's philosophical differences mean that this agenda is more complicated than she suggests. My argument is that, given the nature of Mouffe's approach, which involves re-conceptualising and re-theorising fundamental concepts like democracy, the political, the subject, and the citizen, Mouffe's approach does (inadvertently) present a completely different paradigm from the liberal democratic one, in which to consider democratic politics. Therefore, the radical democratic approach *is* capable of disrupting the status quo, and it is this nature that, I argue, is the source of most potential for the future of radical democracy.

The theoretical differences of Mouffe's radical democracy also come into tension with many of the practical, liberal democratic elements that she is so keen to maintain. I conclude, therefore, that by limiting her approach to the liberal paradigm of democracy, the aims and proposals of Mouffe's can be hindered. The radical potential of Mouffe's approach is severely diminished by

[2] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 105.

its adherence to the status quo and important, practical changes to the ways of "doing" democracy that could be offered by the radical democratic approach are left wanting by this partnership. In order to fully capitalise on its radical elements then, Mouffe should welcome the disruptive effect that her re-theorising has, and present radical democracy as the paradigm changing approach that it can be.

- CHALLENGING THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTNERSHIP -

For Mouffe, radical democracy comes under the umbrella of liberal democracy so that, rather than being an alternative to liberal democracy, radical democracy is simply a reformation of the dominant approach. Mouffe's approach, like that of other radical democratic theorists, is part of the wider liberal democratic discourse, and as such, is not seen as a system-changing alternative.[3] Mouffe writes that her approach should

> not be seen as a radical alternative to liberal democracy. It is not that at some point we will abandon liberal democracy and move to a radical democratic society. A radical democratic society will still be a liberal democratic society, in the sense that we are not going to put into question the basic institution of political liberalism. The purpose of the project is to radicalize it by extending the sphere of equality and liberty to many more social relations. In a sense, it could be called radical *liberal* democracy. *It is not an alternative to liberal democracy*.[4]

However, within this section I examine whether it is necessary, desirable and even possible, for radical democracy to adopt the "liberal" part of liberal democracy. I acknowledge that like other radical democratic writers in the field, my argument does not apply this same analysis to democracy, and it takes for granted the value of democracy.[5] Within her work, Mouffe does not examine the specific elements of democracy that she wants to adopt or reject, but rather

[3] Aletta J. Norval 'Radical Democracy', in Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (Routledge: London, 2001), p. 587; and Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', in Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little (Eds.) *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2009), p. 5.
[4] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, Caroline Bayard, Sev Isajiw and Gary Madison 'On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe', *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 49, Spring 1996, p. 145, emphasis added.
[5] Adrian Little 'Democratic Melancholy: On the Sacrosanct Place of Democracy in Radical Democratic Theory', *Political Studies*, Vol. 58, 2010, pp. 971-987.

she simply understands democracy to refer to equality and popular sovereignty.[6] Mouffe's understanding of democracy is also influenced by Derrida's notion of "democracy to come" and she follows in the trend of other radical democratic writers who argue 'that democracy is not a form of government or set of institutions but rather a *moment* marking the practice of politics itself'.[7] Therefore, Mouffe, already, does not reflect the traditional proceduralist or consensus driven conception of democracy, so this section focuses on the liberal elements that Mouffe has discussed.

In highlighting how a radical democratic notion of these concepts differs from the liberal one, this section illustrates that Mouffe's approach has radical implications at both the theoretical and practical levels, for the liberal democratic paradigm. Drawing out these "radical ruptures" will show that Mouffe's approach (inadvertently on her behalf), does challenge and disrupt liberal democratic conceptions of the subject, pluralism, and politics, and so has the potential to provide a new way of conceiving democracy. In this context, radical democracy can be seen to be a radical, paradigm-changing alternative.

-RADICAL RUPTURE: THE CONSTRUCTED SUBJECT-

A vital feature of every theory of democracy is a conception of the political subject. For Mouffe, this subject is affected and constructed through discourse, leading her to reject the *a priori* notion of subjectivity. This radical approach is in direct contrast to liberal conceptions that rely on understanding the subject prior to society. Within liberal theorising, individualism is therefore of paramount importance, and it 'sees the individual as the starting point and destination of social action'.[8] Such an understanding therefore contributes to the liberal view of democracy as being about the pursuit of, and competition between, individual interests. This liberal conception of the *a priori* subject also provides the foundation to the concept of human rights.

[6] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000), p. 2.
[7] Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', p. 3, emphasis added.
[8] Jacob Torfing *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 1999), p. 251.

In contrast to the radical democratic approach, under liberalism, '[r]ights circumscribe the individual, drawing a line around the political subject that power shall not cross. Liberalism…assumes that subjects can exist, performed and ready-made, outside of power.'[9] Mouffe's analysis of power, and her re-theorising of the subject, fundamentally challenges this view. In doing so, Mouffe's approach disrupts the foundation of human rights (as they are employed in liberalism). In order for the concept of rights to be utilised in a radical democratic approach then, it must be re-examined and re-articulated. According to Mouffe, 'it is necessary to overcome the framework of individualism' if we are to provide a new left, democratic alternative.[10] The 'abstract universalism inherent in liberal discourse',[11] and its reliance on an *a priori* conception of the subject are, for Mouffe, fetters to the actualisation of democracy, because it means that liberalism fails to acknowledge the us/them distinction inherent in every social relation. In this context, Mouffe's theorisation regarding the constructed nature of subjects, and the role of the constitutive outside, fundamentally challenges the liberal conception of rights, with radical consequences.

For example, rather than basing rights on an individualised and universal notion of equality, a radical democratic approach would acknowledge that equality depends upon a distinction regarding who is part of the *demos* and who is not.[12] Therefore, as Mouffe writes, 'equalities always entail, as their very condition of possibility, some form of inequality.'[13] This contradicts the universalism implicit in liberalism, and so has the ability to challenge the liberal conception of rights. Similarly, because of the role of the social in constructing subjectivities, Mouffe further argues that rights need 'to be understood in terms of "collective rights"

[9] Samuel A. Chambers 'Giving Up (on) Rights? The Future of Rights and the Project of Radical Democracy', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 2, April 2004, p. 187.
[10] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', in Judith Squires (Ed.) *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1993), p. 78.
[11] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 44.
[12] Ibid, p. 40.
[13] Ibid, p. 39.

that are ascribed to specific communities.'[14] Accordingly, under a radical democratic approach, it is recognised that rights are part of the construction of the social. Therefore, '[i]t is through [his/]her inscription in specific social relations, rather than as an individual outside of society, that a social agent is granted rights.[15] In this context, the radical democratic approach does provide a radically different way to conceive of rights,[16] and it challenges the liberal view regarding the primacy of the individualised subject. In doing so, however, radical democracy disrupts one of the fundamental elements of the liberal democratic approach.

It is therefore difficult to conceive how Mouffe's radical democratic approach will still fit into the liberal democratic regime. As Susan Hekman notes, in re-theorising a non-individualist theory of liberalism,

> Mouffe is now articulating a liberalism that would be anathema to most liberals and, furthermore, verges on incoherence. What, exactly, are we to make of a "non- individualistic conception of the individual," not to mention a "plural" definition of universality? Not only are these conceptions confused, but it is hard to imagine a liberalism that can accommodate them. It is even harder to imagine a liberalism that can accommodate a conception of the subject as a multiplicity of intersecting identities.[17]

Therefore, despite Mouffe's insistence that 'the critique of individualism implies neither the abandonment of "rights" nor that of pluralism',[18] it is difficult to comprehend, with all of Mouffe's re-theorising, what makes these features still "liberal". Similarly, if the liberal versions are so unsatisfactory, why maintain an allegiance to the liberal democratic paradigm, especially given that the radical democratic approach can provide a useful alternative?

In terms of rights, Mouffe notes that the meaning and understanding of rights can be interpreted (and therefore practiced) according to various discourses,

[14] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 97.
[15] Ibid.
[16] For an example of a radical democratic approach to rights as "empty signifiers" see Samuel A. Chambers 'Giving Up (on) Rights?', pp. 185-200.
[17] Susan Hekman 'Radical Plural Democracy: A New Theory For the Left?', *Negations*, Vol. 1, 1996, first accessed February 2011 at http://www.negationsjournal.org/index.php/Negations/article/view/3/4.
[18] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 33.

because the meaning of rights is never fully fixed. Therefore, she writes (with Laclau) that 'just as this unfixity permits their articulation with elements of conservative discourse, it also permits different forms of articulation and redefinition which accentuate the democratic moment.'[19] However, if Mouffe rejects the essentialist, *a priori* foundation that informs the liberal democratic conception of rights, then a radical democratic interpretation would *necessarily* be different. Furthermore, basing its conception on a poststructuralist notion of the subject, while simultaneously advocating for collective rights that can be applied through a prism of difference, rather than along universal lines, the radical democratic approach to rights radically undermines the basis of the liberal democratic approach. As Mouffe and Laclau note, following the radical democratic approach,

> [t]he idea of "natural" rights prior to society – and, indeed, the whole of the false dichotomy individual/society – should be abandoned, and replaced by another manner of posing the problem of rights. It is never possible for individual rights to be defined in isolation, but only in the context of social relations which define determinant subject positions.[20]

Therefore, the radical democratic approach does necessitate a completely different way to conceive one of the fundamental elements of liberal democracies. This idea is taken further in the following section that looks at the way in which, according to Mouffe, liberalism deals unsatisfactorily with pluralism and the political.

-RADICAL RUPTURE: AGONISM & THE POLITICAL-

Like the liberal approach to rights, Mouffe is very critical of liberalism's ability to fully comprehend the nature of pluralism and the political. By her own account, Mouffe argues that '[l]iberalism, in so far as it is formulated within a rationalistic and individualistic framework, is, necessarily, blind to the existence of "the political".'[21] She warns that this is problematic because, 'negating the political does not make it disappear; it only leads to bewilderment at its

[19] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 176.
[20] Ibid, p. 184.
[21] Chantal Mouffe 'Political Liberalism, Neutrality and the Political', *Ratio Juris,* Vol. 7, No. 3, December 1994, p. 319.

manifestations and to impotence in attempting to deal with them.'[22] In order to recognise the role of power, Mouffe's approach re-theorises the ontology of the subject, and the social, so that it is seen as always involving the political and, potentially, agonism. Unlike the liberal conception of pluralism, Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism recognises that power is always part of any interaction. Therefore democracy cannot simply involve rational, self-interested individuals competing for their own atomistic goals; nor can it focus simply on consensus and harmony. Reducing the role of democracy to such functions overlooks the role of power and the inherently antagonistic nature of politics. In contrast, Mouffe's re-theorisation illustrates that there is no space free from power and therefore, agonism is always capable of surfacing. Accepting the presence of power and agonism, together with the role of discourse in effecting the subject, therefore has implications with regard to the adoption of some liberal institutions.

One practical effect of recognising the role of power is the challenge to the liberal maxim of equality before the law. As Mouffe's work shows, understanding the constitutive role of power means that there are never any power neutral spaces, thereby disrupting the fallacy of the neutral judicial system. As Wendy Brown explains, the legal system is bound-up with certain forms of power that are tied to both the state and capitalism. Therefore,

> [w]hen you are upholding the law or addressing the law, you are actually enmeshed in a form of power that has been instrumentalized and tacticalized by something else, by capital, by biopower, or disciplinary power. We need to be non-naïve about this[23].

The critique that the judicial system produces inequalities or is laden with power is not unique to the radical democratic approach, and there are already mechanisms trying to mitigate these problems. For example, in Australia there are specific and different procedures that are followed in some cases that

[22] Ibid.
[23] Wendy Brown in Wendy Brown, Christina Colegate, John Dalton, Timothy Rayner, Cate Thill 'Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown', *Contretemps 6*, January 2006, p. 34.

involve Indigenous defendants and victims, in an effort to recognise their customary laws and traditions, and re-address power inequalities. However, Mouffe writes that 'we should not have different legal systems according to the different communities', although there must always be a space and recognition of difference within these institutions.[24] How Mouffe hopes to achieve this is not outlined in her work, and this highlights another important lacuna. Like other elements within her work, this area represents an area of contradiction and under-theorisation. How does Mouffe propose to facilitate power and difference that is in keeping with the liberal institution of the judiciary that she is so keen to maintain? By not acknowledging the implicit power relations of the liberal judicial system, some of Mouffe's goals for radical democracy are brought into tension with this liberal institution. Such contradictions make it difficult for her approach to be considered a useful democratic alternative. Mouffe needs to address the conflicts between the disruptive effects of her re-theorisation, and the consequences these have for status quo institutions.

Although Mouffe has not capitalised on the radical, disruptive, potential that her approach offers in relation to the judicial system, Claudia Ruitenberg represents an example of an author utilising Mouffe's work for radical purposes. Using Mouffe's concepts of the political and antagonism to reorient citizenship education, Ruitenberg challenges the deliberative democratic and Rawlsian approaches that are currently trending in the field. Like Mouffe, Ruitenberg criticises the other approaches for relegating difference to the realm of the private, and for perpetuating the illusion that power relations can be overcome.[25] By further incorporating Barbara Koziak's notion of *thumos* (the emotional dimension that "give[s] meaning to action, guide[s] decisions, and [has] the power to transform political orientations"),[26] with Mouffe's understanding of the political, Ruitenberg shows that emotions are effective but do not have to be seen in purely moral terms. This is similar to Mouffe's

[24] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', p. 135.
[25] Claudia W. Ruitenberg 'Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education' *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, Vol. 28, No. 3, May 2009, pp. 269-281.
[26] Barbara Koziak as quoted by ibid, p. 274.

argument regarding the role of passions. When emotion or passion can be read as being a moral response or reaction, it is relegated to the private sphere, and its political effect is overlooked. By recognising that it is an important dimension in the public realm though, emotion and passion can be directed to democratic outlets. This helps to tame extreme positions that are exacerbated by the sense of being silenced or ignored.[27]

The framing of political issues as moral issues is particularly undemocratic because resistance and dissent are constructed as immoral, rather than simply oppositional. This limits democratic debate and perpetuates the silencing of certain views. The power of this discursive framing has not gone unnoticed by political players, and it has been a common tool used in a number of arguments. In Australia the most pertinent example is in regard to the debate about climate change. On both sides the argument has been framed as a moral issue, and each position is seen as absolute. Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, on the side calling for climate action, for example, famously said that (in addition to being an economic and environmental problem), climate change is also one of the greatest *moral* challenges of our times.[28] As Leader of the Opposition, Rudd also tried to push the climate change debate away from the political realm, arguing that it was time for it to be considered an issue that was "beyond politics".[29] Meanwhile, on the opposing side of the debate, activists against the proposed carbon tax in Australia have called such action (addressing climate change) "*immoral*".[30]

Part of the problem with framing the issue in this way is that *political* debate is limited. The strict dichotomy between the two *moral* sides creates an environment of fear that prevents people discussing the intricacies of the debate. For example, discrepancies and differences in the scientific modelling

[27] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 30.
[28] Kevin Rudd 'Address to the United Nations Bali Conference on Climate Change', December 2007, first accessed April 2011 at http://australianpolitics.com/2007/12/12/rudd-address-to-bali-climate-change-conference.html.
[29] Kevin Rudd as quoted by 'Climate Change Too Big For Partisan Politics, Rudd Says', *ABC News*, March 31, 2007, first accessed April 2011 at http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200703/s1886401.htm.
[30] Bill Hunt as quoted by 'Farmers Slam National Carbon Tax', *The Border Watch*, March 7, 2011, first accessed April 2011 at http://www.borderwatch.com.au/archives/8850, emphasis added.

on climate change may not be publicly discussed for fear of this being used as evidence that climate change does not exist, rather than it being part of the scientific process. The "Climategate" affair is a good example of this. In November 2009, the server at the University of East Anglia was hacked, and a number of emails from the Climatic Research Institute were stolen. It was alleged that these emails showed a deliberate cover-up of research and scientific conclusions on behalf of the climate scientists, in order to manipulate the data in support of human induced climate change. Although a House of Commons Committee investigation eventually cleared the Research Unit, the Committee also noted a level of secrecy in regards to the research that was made available to the investigators.[31] In doing so, this case helps to highlight the complexities of the political issue of climate change that is being hidden or misrepresented by viewing the issue through the moral lens. Furthermore, leaders who want to debate the various effects of climate change policy may be unwilling to engage for fear of being labelled "for" or "against" the cause. This is particularly pertinent in Australia, as this issue has been one of the major causes in the loss of leadership for both Malcolm Turnbull (as Leader of the Opposition) and Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister.

Therefore, rather than framing issues as moral concerns, Mouffe's radical democratic approach ensures that the *political* nature of the debate is always visible. According to Mouffe,

> [l]iberal theorists are unable to acknowledge not only the presence of strife in social life and the impossibility of finding rational, impartial solutions to political issues, but also to the integrative role that conflict plays in modern democracy.[32]

In contrast, Mouffe's radical democratic approach is always acknowledging and facilitating the presence of power, and the potential agonism that can arise. As has been explained in previous chapters, Mouffe achieves this by reinscribing

[31] House of Commons Science and Technology Committee *The Reviews into the University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit's Emails,* (House of Commons: London, January 2011), first accessed April 2011 at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmsctech/444/444.pdf.
[32] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy' (Centre for the Study of Democracy: London, 2002), first accessed January 2005 at http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/pdf/Mouffe%PDF%20.pdf, p. 10.

liberal democracy through agonistic pluralism.[33] In doing this, however, Mouffe changes the nature of democracy, and therefore creates different possibilities when it comes to institutionalising her approach. Therefore, in order to fully capitalise on the radical aspects of her re-theorising, Mouffe needs to accept and exploit these consequences and allow them to challenge the current status quo. It may not always be possible for radical democracy to accept the institutions of liberal democracy, like the ones discussed above, and because this is the case, more work is required in terms of discussing what practical elements would be conducive under a radical democratic approach.

-RADICAL RUPTURE: THE PRINCIPLES AS EMPTY SIGNIFIERS-

According to Mouffe, the goal of radical democracy is to radicalise liberalism by forcing it to be accountable for its professed ideals,[34] extending the principles of liberty and equality to more spheres of life,[35] and democratising liberalism.[36] Accordingly for Mouffe, the liberal democratic 'regime' offers the greatest hope for the achievement of the new Left project that values these principles.[37] Despite this insistence on the primacy of liberal democracies, Mouffe does not believe that this argument reinforces the "end of history" proposal,[38] and she states that 'to assert the victory of liberal democracy does not mean to resign oneself to the status quo.'[39] Instead, Mouffe sees liberal democracies as providing the best option because the regime's principles of liberty and equality 'have provided the political language with which many struggles against subordination have been articulated and won and with which many others can

[33] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 9.
[34] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 2.
[35] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', p. 145.
[36] Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', p. 5.
[37] Chantal Mouffe in Chantal Mouffe, et al 'On the Itineraries of Democracy', p. 142.
[38] Chantal Mouffe 'Liberal Socialism and Pluralism: Which Citizenship?', p. 69; Chantal Mouffe 'Pluralism and the Left Identity', in Michael Walzer (Ed.) *Toward a Global Civil Society* (Berghahn Books: Providence; Oxford, 1995), p. 295; and Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 90.
[39] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', in David Trend (Ed.) *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (Routledge: New York, 1996), p. 25.

still be fought.'[40] In order to maintain respect for these principles then, Mouffe follows the pattern of adopting the liberal paradigm.

Against these ideas though, I argue that, while the principles of liberty and equality may have a history and tradition within liberalism and democracy, as Chapter Six illustrated and as Mouffe herself argues,[41] these principles do not have an essential or universal meaning. Instead, they can be articulated through different discourses. Therefore, a radical democratic interpretation will be different to neoliberal, deliberative, socialist *and* liberal democratic understandings. Most importantly though, and contributing to the radical nature of Mouffe's approach (if she capitalised on this), the radical democratic interpretation of the principles does not assume or claim fixity. Instead of trying to uncover *the* meaning of the principles, a radical democratic approach highlights the process of meaning *construction*.

This approach to the principles is in contrast to the liberal democratic understanding that relies on appeals to universal ethical conceptions and founds its argument on the notion of an *a priori* subject. Mouffe's discourse analysis illustrates that it is not possible to base ethical considerations on such foundations. Instead, they need to be seen as *political* decisions and, as such, embroiled with power relations.

The meaning behind the principles of liberty and equality are 'infinitely contestable and perpetually susceptible to reformulation'.[42] Therefore, it is not necessary for radical democracy to adopt the liberal interpretation of these principles. Similarly, the application of a radical democratic interpretation of these principles can produce effects at the practical level that may challenge current practice and procedures. Think for example of the restrictions that could be placed on politicians also holding prominent roles within business if Mouffe was to endorse (and elaborate on) the notion of complex equality.

[40] Ibid.
[41] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', p. 14.
[42] Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little 'Introduction', p. 5.

Therefore, it is important for Mouffe to distinguish between the liberal democratic and the radical democratic understanding of the principles, and recognise (and celebrate) the possible flow on effects.

Following poststructuralist theory it is indeed difficult to specify the exact limitations with regard to what is part of a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality. However, the paradoxical nature of the task is not prohibitive. Instead, any response regarding the radical interpretation of the principles is recognised as being historically located, and only temporarily stabilised. As Judith Butler explains, it would be *undemocratic* to assume, in advance, what the radical democratic interpretation of equality entails, because it is always being reformulated in response to the claims being made by various groups.[43] That being said, some understanding of radical democratic equality is required because, we are currently historically located, and groups are making claims, so there is a need to respond. Such an understanding can be utilised to explain why certain demands made by activists in the Tea Party Movement (such as a completely unfettered free-market) would not be considered part of the radical democratic project, while others in the new social movements could be. According to Mouffe, writing with Laclau, this positive affirmation is crucial if the project of radical democracy is to participate in the construction of a new hegemony.[44]

I therefore offer, as a suggestion, the following understanding of radical democratic liberty and equality. Firstly, the principle of equality would reiterate the history of left struggles. To do this, radical democratic equality would stand for equal (read as the same) or equivalent (read as different but comparable) access to resources and employment (or equivalent means that enable self determination), supporting policies of redistribution (at state and local levels) if this would help to achieve these ends. Such an approach addresses difference within the community, in that same treatment does not always produce the most

[43] Judith Butler in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Reinaldo Laddaga 'The Uses of Equality', *Diacritics*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Spring 1997, p. 5.
[44] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 198.

equal ends, while also acknowledging the notion of solidarity. In a radical democracy, members of the *demos* have equivalent claims to the capital of the community, and so should share in this capital. Such an approach is in contrast to more individualistic driven notions of equality of opportunity. This conception of equality is also important because, as Wendy Hamblet (following Rancière) argues,

> [w]ithout a substantial share in the goods of the society, the poor are but unfettered slaves, and what is named "democracy" is really plutocracy, governed by those who enjoy real benefits.[45]

The concept of the collective would also influence a radical democratic interpretation of liberty so that this understanding of the principle could be distinguished from notions that advocate complete autonomy and freedom. In contrast to the more libertarian understanding of freedom *from* influence, a radical democratic interpretation of liberty sees worth in collective action (for more than self-interested ends), and thereby would advocate the freedom *to* participate and contribute to the social. A good example of this is participatory economics, particularly the theory outlined by Michael Albert,[46] where citizens are directly involved in determining the production and uses of assets within a community.

Mouffe acknowledges that 'liberalism is the embodiment of a specific set of values',[47] which may be at odds with many aspects of the radical democratic approach. In this context then, it is vital that the radical democratic approach distinguish itself from the liberal democratic tradition, as the suggestions above do. Doing so does not mean that radical democracy will abandon a respect or prioritisation of the principles, but it instead highlights that they are empty signifiers capable of re-articulation. Therefore, the radical democratic understanding will be one among many other interpretations. As Mouffe notes,

[45] Wendy Hamblet 'Jacques Rancière: The Philosopher and his Poor on the Shores of Democratic Politics', *Appraisal*, Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2009, p. 7.
[46] Michael Albert *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* (Verso: London, 2003); and Michael Albert *Realizing Hope: Life Beyond Capitalism* (Zed Books: London; New York, 2006).
[47] Chantal Mouffe 'Political Liberalism, Neutrality and the Political', p. 314.

> [i]n a democratic society the ranking of values should always remain a terrain of contestation and there can never be a final ranking that could be imposed as the true, rational one. A crucial dimension of the political struggle in a pluralist democracy concerns the ways its constitutive values of liberty and equality should be interpreted and ranked, and it is vital that no group could ever pretend to have found *the* solution to the problem.[48]

Although Mouffe argues that this debate regarding the articulation of the principles is '*constitutive* of the liberal democratic society',[49] I argue that this opinion overlooks key features of the radical democratic critique. By her own account, Mouffe recognises that the liberal argument for democracy is based on appeals to rationality, universalism and *a priori* individualism – all elements that Mouffe either restructures or rejects.[50] However, as has been shown in the previous sections, Mouffe's re-theorising of the subject, pluralism, and the political, have radical implications for the liberal democratic approach, and it is inconsistent for Mouffe to maintain that her approach does not offer a challenge to the status quo. Although Mouffe values pluralism and political equality, and thus equates her position with the wider liberal democratic approach, the understanding of these elements is substantially different. Furthermore, it is within this different approach, which, if fully capitalised on by Mouffe, could provide the most radical aspects of her approach. To use Mouffe's conception of the constitutive outside as an analogy for the purpose of radical democracy,

> [i]n order to be a true outside, the outside has to be incommensurable with the inside, and at the same time, the condition of emergence of the latter. This is only possible if what is "outside" is not simply outside of a concrete content but something which *puts into question* "concreteness" as such.[51]

Therefore, in order to be truly radical, Mouffe should acknowledge where her approach challenges the liberal democratic model, and the implications of this disruption, such that the radical democratic approach can be seen as paradigm changing. By really challenging key features of the liberal democratic approach,

[48] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics, Democratic Action, and Solidarity', *Inquiry*, Vol. 38, I. 1, 1995, p. 106, emphasis in original.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 7.
[51] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 12, emphasis added.

radical democracy can bring the liberal model's "concreteness" into question. Furthermore, rather than merely critiquing, the radical democratic approach, if fully capitalised on, can also offer new ways of conceptualising political elements, and so offer practical alternatives in terms of governing procedures. As will be discussed in the following section, this re-conceptualisation can help to pave the way for a new paradigm of democracy, so that Mouffe's approach can become a truly radical alternative.

- A NEW PARADIGM FOR DEMOCRACY -

The tensions between the liberal and radical aspects of democracy make it difficult to say that a radical democratic approach is still a liberal approach. While radical democracy may be considered a branch of democratic theorising, it is not as easy for Mouffe's approach to fall under the umbrella of the *liberal* democratic philosophy. Although radical democracy appeals to some elements that are common to political liberalism, Mouffe's re-theorising makes it difficult to recognise these elements as specifically liberal. For example, Mouffe's re-conceptualisation of the constructed nature of subjectivity, which includes Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, and the role of the constituted outside, challenges the fundamental liberal notion of the *a priori* individual. As Mouffe herself notes, '[t]o come to accept the position of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity'.[52] Therefore, the radical democratic approach is fundamentally different to the liberal democratic one, and it should be considered as such.

Following the convention used by Mouffe and Laclau when discussing their relationship to Marxism,[53] perhaps the radical democratic approach should be understood as being post-*liberal* and *post*-liberal. In the words of Mouffe and Laclau (when discussing Marxism), these labels would illustrate their 'process of reappropriation of an intellectual tradition, as well as the process of going

[52] Chantal Mouffe 'The Radical Centre: A Politics Without Adversary', *Soundings*, I. 9, Summer 1998, p. 16.
[53] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 4.

beyond it.'[54] In this way, the radical democratic approach will not provide a completely new or equivalent *model* or blueprint for democracy, but it would provide different ways of doing, and articulating, common democratic practices and institutions, thereby challenging and disrupting the status quo. It is not unreasonable for the radical democratic approach to not provide an equivalent, replacement model of democracy, because there will always be ongoing discussion regarding the meaning of the democratic principles, and their interpretation and application will be dependant on time and place. Therefore, the radical democratic approach is reflexive, and applies its critical lens to its own proposals as well, thereby ensuring that the pursuit of democracy is never-ending.

While its inherent fluidity and reflexivity prevents radical democracy from providing a fully conceived, static model to replace current models, the re-theorising that Mouffe provides, does result in a substantially different way to conceive of democratic politics. According to Mouffe and Laclau, '[a]ny substantial change in the *ontic* content of a field of research leads also to a new *ontological* paradigm',[55] and Mouffe considers her work to be 'located at the "ontic" level.'[56] Therefore, in reconceptualising democracy, the political and the subject, radical democracy does provide a new paradigm for democratic theorising; it challenges and disrupts traditional conceptions of institutionalised and procedural democracy and it rejects that consensus and rationalist based models are the most democratic. According to Adrian Little, the disruptive effects and fluidity of radical democracy are where the approach's potential is greatest. He says that

> [t]he radical democratic conception is one which allows for more fluidity and dynamic change in the way we understand political structures and the transitory nature of political arrangements. It comprehends the need for contingent notions of democracy and the fragile way in which polities are held together in complex societies. While its inability to articulate a model or

[54] Ibid, p. ix.
[55] Ibid, p. x, emphasis in original.
[56] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political*, p. 9.

> prototype for democracy can therefore be seen as a weakness, it is simultaneously a strength in allowing for the political to reflect social and cultural change.[57]

The danger in Mouffe's work, as it currently stands, however, is that it does not *capitalise* on its disruptive effects. Instead, Mouffe maintains that her approach is part of the overall liberal democratic regime, arguing that this is the best means to achieve socialist ends. Upon reflection though, this position of Mouffe's fails to consider the paradigm altering effects of her poststructuralist theorising, and her argument can end up looking like a middle position between socialism and liberalism – a position, given her attack on the Third Way, that she is at pains to distance herself from. Furthermore, by Mouffe's own standards, '[r]adical politics cannot be located at the centre because to be radical…is to aim at a profound transformation of power relations.'[58] By not moving beyond the status quo of liberal democracy though, Mouffe does not fully challenge this hegemony. Instead, her approach, while full of radical *potential*, is ultimately left wanting by the various lacunae and failure to capitalise on its disruptive effects.

It is true that the radical democratic approach is the result of the liberal democratic tradition, but it also comes out of Marxism and socialism – both of which Mouffe has no trouble moving on from. While elements from all of these histories can be appropriated and reconceptualised for the radical democratic approach, it is important to ensure that these bonds do not paralyse the project of radical democracy. According to David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, 'a political project will attempt to weave together different strands of discourse', but the purpose is 'to dominate or organise a field of meaning so as to fix the identities of objects and practices, while providing (subject) positions with which social agents can identify.'[59] However, this is difficult for Mouffe to achieve if her approach accepts the hegemony of the liberal

[57] Adrian Little 'The Northern Island Paradox', in Moya Lloyd and Adrian Little (Eds.) *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2009), p. 185.
[58] Chantal Mouffe 'The Radical Centre', pp. 19-20.
[59] David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis 'Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', in David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, (Eds.) *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2000), p. 3.

democratic paradigm. More importantly, Mouffe's re-theorising *can* offer a new paradigm that can create a radical democratic citizenship in which to identify, if the disruptive elements are capitalised on.

This is particularly the case if a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality is clearly articulated because, for example, in a radical democratic space, a sense of common identity is created through chains of equivalence that are linked by an "allegiance" to a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality. By analysing Mouffe's work, it is possible to conclude that the radical democratic interpretation aims to facilitate a formal and substantive equality, like access to resources,[60] and access to decision making.[61] It is against the concentration of power,[62] but it also recognises the constitutive nature of this power. Therefore, rather than trying to completely eliminate it, radical democracy provides a way to analyse power relations and the established hegemony, so that they can both be challenged. The radical democratic approach sees individual liberty as important,[63] although it also recognises that an absolute priority of the individual is problematic, and so needs to be tempered with equality, with neither being elevated to the absolute privileged position.[64] Therefore, radical democracy does not aim to overcome this tension; rather it sees its constant renegotiation as part of the way that the radical approach facilitates democracy.

Furthermore, with regard to the overall debate about the interpretation of the principles, Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism allows for this, but it also requires that a radical democratic approach convey how it comes to understand what the principles entail. For Mouffe

> [i]t is the tension between consensus – on the values – and dissensus on their interpretation – that makes possible the agonistic dynamics of pluralist democracy…[However,] its survival depends on the possibility of forming

[60] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. xviii.
[61] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political*, p. 100.
[62] Ibid, p. 99.
[63] Ibid, p. 56.
[64] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 4-5.

> collective political identities *around clearly differentiated positions* and the choice among *real alternatives*.[65]

Therefore, in order to participate in the agonistic debate, radical democracy needs to provide its paradigm for democracy and clearly distinguish its approach from the other alternatives. As Mouffe and Laclau write, the struggle for hegemony is the struggle for the "'construction of a new world order".'[66] However, without challenging the current paradigm, this goal is unreachable. If Mouffe is to truly achieve her goal to 'radicalize and further democratize our present institutions',[67] then she should capitalise on all of the radical elements within her approach, especially when they disrupt the current hegemony.

- CONCLUSION -

Although Mouffe does not necessarily set out to offer and alternative to liberal democracy, her re-theorisation of key concepts has a flow on effect that disrupts the status quo. In doing so, the radical democratic approach can be seen to provide a new way of conceptualising and practising democracy. Furthermore, if these ruptures are capitalised on, Mouffe's radical democracy can be seen as a truly radical, and different, paradigm of democracy. Mouffe does see her approach as an important alternative to the aggregative and deliberative models of democracy,[68] but her work can also be seen to challenge liberal democracy. Although it will not offer a blueprint to replace the liberal democratic model, radical democracy does create many opportunities for rethinking and redoing many liberal democratic elements. In doing so, Mouffe's radical democracy does offer a new paradigm of democracy that challenges and destabilises the status quo.

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[65] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics, Democratic Action, and Solidarity', p. 107, emphasis added.
[66] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 189.
[67] Chantal Mouffe 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?', p. 19.
[68] Chantal Mouffe 'Politics and Passions', p. 8. Andrew Schaap argues though that without a substantial 'conceptualisation of the implication of an agonistic politics for democratic institutions, agonistic theories of democracy can be too easily dismissed as failing to offer a real alternative to dialogical liberalism (Andrew Schaap 'Political Theory and the Agony of Politics', *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 5, 2007, p. 72).

This ability parallels a "war of position" whereby challenges are made across many fronts, but the change is slowly developed rather than conclusively implemented. As Mouffe and Laclau explain, '[t]he concept of a "war of position" implies precisely the *process* character of every radical transformation – the revolutionary act is, simply, an internal moment of this process.'[69] Therefore, rather than *replacing* the liberal democratic model, radical democracy can challenge its hegemony by offering alternatives on a range of fronts. Radical democracy offers new ways to: interpret liberty and equality; conceive of the subject and therefore citizenship; organise society; understand the role of the political and power; and value the presence of agonistic pluralism. As Mouffe herself acknowledges,

> one of the main problems nowadays is that the left's acceptance of pluralism and liberal democratic institutions has become accompanied by the mistaken belief that this meant abandoning any attempt to offer an alternative to the present hegemonic order.[70]

However, by capitalising on its radical potential, Mouffe's approach does not have to fall into the same trap. The radical democratic re-theorising provides a challenge to the current hegemony on a range of fronts, and so offers a new and different theoretical and practical, radical paradigm of democracy.

[69] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* p. 178, emphasis in original.
[70] Chantal Mouffe 'The End of Politics and the Rise of the Radical Right', *Dissent*, Fall 1995, p. 501.

Conclusion

"[P]olitics is not the science of setting up a permanently impregnable society, it is the art of knowing where to go next in the explanation of an already existing traditional kind of society."[1]

As Oakeshott's words explain, the political and theoretical debate about democracy is important because it helps to set the trajectory for the future of our society. This thesis has focused on this debate, highlighting the importance of Mouffe's contribution to the field of democratic theory. Unlike some of the other political alternatives discussed in this thesis, Mouffe's radical democratic approach does not aim to replace our current system, once and for all, but rather it provides different ways to conceive of the elements related to democratic theory. As Mouffe articulates, 'what is urgently needed, [is] not a new *system*, but a *profound shift in the way we approach political questions*.'[2] Mouffe's re-theorisation of concepts like citizenship, the subject, and the political certainly provide such new ways of conceiving democracy, and so her radical democratic approach provides a useful, democratic alternative.

However, what is not fully achieved by Mouffe is an utilisation of the radical aspects of her work. Rather than presenting radical democracy as a new political paradigm, Mouffe maintains that her approach is still part of the wider liberal democratic system. As has been clearly articulated, this argument of Mouffe's overlooks the radical ways that her approach challenges and disrupts the status quo, and so radical democracy should capitalise on its radical effects.

[1] Michael Oakeshott as quoted by Andrew Vincent *The Nature of Political Theory* (Oxford University Press: Oxford; New York, 2004), p. 152.
[2] Chantal Mouffe *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso: London, 2000), p. 61, emphasis added.

By failing to do this, Mouffe is severely limited and unable to reach the goals that she sets for her political project. If the radical elements, particularly a radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality, were utilised and further theorised, Mouffe's work could provide new and exciting changes to the field of democratic theory. For example, clarifying the principles of liberty and equality along radical democratic lines can help to prevent the 'hijacking' of democracy by capitalism and neoliberalism.[3] Radical democracy, if the principles are clearly articulated, could provide a nodal point around which new democratic chains of equivalence could rally, thereby extending the project for radical democratic hegemony.

Oliver Marchart argues that, from a philosophical point of view, the battle for democracy is over the meaning that is attached to the signifier of "democracy". At the present time, Western liberalism has won this fight. In fact, the project of liberal democratic hegemonisation has been so successful that it has come to represent itself as *the* democratic horizon, thereby negating most other alternatives.[4] By not presenting radical democracy as having, at least the potential, to fill the signifier with an alternative meaning, and so redefine the democratic horizon, Mouffe perpetuates this idea. This is despite the fact that there are, implicit and explicit, areas within her work that substantially challenge the liberal democratic hegemony. Marchart goes on to explain that, even when a horizon does exist, it is always possible to redefine it, even if this challenge comes from within. My analysis throughout this thesis shows that this is exactly what Mouffe's radical democratic approach offers. Despite starting the project in the discourse of liberal democracy, Mouffe's re-theorising provides substantial challenges, and so radically disrupts this discourse. The problem is that Mouffe does not capitalise on these effects.

[3] Wendy Brown in Wendy Brown, Christina Colegate, John Dalton, Timothy Rayner, Cate Thill 'Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown', *Contretemps 6*, January 2006, p. 29.
[4] Oliver Marchart 'Enacting the Unrealized: Political Theory and the Role of "Radical Democratic Activism"', in Okwui Enwezor, Carols Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya (Eds.) *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta11_Platform1* (Hatje Cantz: Germany, 2002), pp. 256-257.

Throughout this thesis I have mapped Mouffe's understanding of the radical democratic approach, and I have evaluated its radical potential. Through Part One I was able to show where Mouffe differs from some of the other political and democratic alternatives. This placement of Mouffe's work helped to highlight the radically different ways that Mouffe conceptualised concepts like the subject, the political, and the nature of pluralism. This examination of Mouffe's theorisation was taken further in the exegetical chapters of Part Two. Here I provided a detailed account of the specific elements of Mouffe's radical democratic approach, and the implications that this has for the concept of citizenship. Within these two chapters, however, some of Mouffe's lacunae began to surface, and they were explicitly dealt with in Part Three. Here I provided a comprehensive evaluation of the "radical" aspects of Mouffe's approach, following the criteria outlined in my introduction: is it radically *democratic*; is it radically *left*; and is it radically *different* and *disruptive*? These three questions helped to determine whether there is worth in Mouffe's approach, and whether she can offer an important contribution to the field of democratic theory. What this evaluation showed was that, despite the lacunae and contradictions, there is still much potential within Mouffe's approach. The problem is that it is not fully capitalised on by Mouffe. There are certainly areas within the approach that require further theorisation, particularly with regard to the radical democratic interpretation of liberty and equality. However, the radical democratic approach can still be useful for reframing the wider field of democratic theory.

Mouffe's approach is successful in pinpointing the various problems of other alternatives, and as an analytical lens, the radical democratic approach has purpose. Mouffe's approach raises questions, poses new questions, and re-orders the way we think about the elements of democracy. As a theoretical approach then, Mouffe's work is very useful, and it moves away from evaluating democracy through empirical methodologies, which look at elections and voter participation. Instead, Mouffe's work draws the focus to the theoretical

foundations informing democracy in order to provide new ways of conceptualising core concepts like the political and the political subject.

Therefore, while this thesis has focused heavily on the theoretical dimensions of Mouffe's work, and has stressed that these are vital for the *project* of radical democracy, I do not argue that the relationship between theory and practice be seen in binary terms. Instead I recognise the role that political *practice* plays in informing theory. Rearticulating the principles of liberty and equality, for example, in line with radical democracy is crucial. But this will not *finalise* the project (or indeed the theorising) of radical democracy, because, in the words of José Mariá Arizmendiarreta "[w]e have realized that theory is necessary, yet, it is not sufficient: we build the road as we travel."[5] This is important to recognise if we are to encourage political practice, while the rearticulation is taking place.

This thesis does not advocate that there should be no political activism before the discrepancies of an approach are formulated, and rather it acknowledges that there will always be gaps between theoretical/abstract components and their practical application. These spaces, or "intervals" are especially important because they provide an area free from direction, where possibilities are infinite and where we can experiment with different responses.[6] As Brown notes, these spaces ensure that activism is not prohibited when

> our heads are swimming with theoretical questions, where we are in deep discussion with one another about the kinds of significations that we make, [and] about how something we are doing is read.[7]

Instead, we can still participate in political ways and help to inform the theoretical aspects through our activities. It is important to allow and encourage such political engagement, especially in a radical democratic approach, because political participation and fluidity are key elements.

[5] José Mariá Arizmendiarreta as quoted by Paul Nursey-Bray 'What Directions are Left?', in Paul Nursey-Bray and Carol Lee Bacchi (Eds.) *Left Directions: Is There a Third Way?* (University of Western Australia Press: Crawley, WA, 2001), p. 66.
[6] Wendy Brown in Wendy Brown, et al 'Learning to Love Again', p. 37.
[7] Wendy Brown in ibid.

The evaluation of Mouffe's approach is therefore timely given the changing dynamics in Western democracies. It is true that, in general, public participation in Western democracies has been waning. As Mouffe articulates,

> [t]here are many reasons for the crisis of the democratic political public sphere, some having to do with the predominance of a neo-liberal regime of globalisation, others with the type of individualistic consumer culture now pervading most advanced industrial societies. From a strictly political perspective, it is clear that the collapse of communism and the disappearance of the political frontiers that structured the political imaginary during most of the twentieth century have led to the crumbling of the political markers of society. The blurring of frontiers between right and left that we have witnessed in Western countries constitutes, in my view one of the main reasons for the growing irrelevance of the democratic political public sphere.[8]

However, in a number of Western countries, governments are more recently comprised of coalitions that are not always politically and ideologically aligned,[9] thereby suggesting, in line with Mouffe's thesis, that the centre position has become unsatisfactory to the *demos*. The difficulty is, though, that parliamentary procedures still require consensus and compromise, so many of these governments are struggling to balance their ideals with their role as policy makers, in a system that requires a majority in order to legislate.[10] By reorientating policy making in a way that facilitates difference and agonism, a radical democratic approach could provide different ways to conceive of this process. In addition, we are witnessing the emergence of new antagonisms in the political realm. The recent reinvigoration of public, political participation that was seen in the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and the responding Tea Party Movement in the United States, suggests that democratic participation is following a parabola, and that '[w]e have moved along its length to a new

[8] Chantal Mouffe, 'For an Agonistic Public Sphere', in Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (Eds.) *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester University Press: Manchester; New York, 2005), p. 123.
[9] Notable examples include the Australian Labor Party forming Government only with the support of Independent Members; the coalition between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats in the UK; and the Memorandum of Understanding between the National and Green Parties in New Zealand.
[10] The drastic policy change by the Liberal Democrats in the UK regarding tuition fees is a pertinent example. Prior to the election the Party campaigned not to raise fees, but their new role as partners in government meant that they were forced to compromise, and ultimately abandon this promise. In Australia, Prime Minister Julia Gillard had advocated that her Government would not introduce a carbon tax, but with pressure from the Independents and the Greens Member in the Lower House, this policy position was also abandoned.

historic point'.[11] Far from being disengaged and apathetic, these movements show that there are new means that citizens are capitalising on to facilitate their passions. From a democratic point of view, it is crucial though that these outlets and debates be framed in *political* rather than moral terms. As has been explained throughout this thesis, the construction of antagonisms along non-political lines creates a dangerous environment that threatens democracy. A radical democratic approach is useful in that it helps to ensure that such debates are framed in political terms and given a democratic outlet.

However, if some of the lacunae in Mouffe's approach were addressed and the radical elements fully utilised, the radical democratic approach could also establish itself as a worthwhile, comprehensive, alternative, and capitalise on the reinvigorating energy of the new social movements. In responding to their demands, the radical democratic approach can be further enriched and strengthened, while at the same time providing an alternative framework to unite the movement. This is the purpose of the political *project* of radical democracy.

Within this thesis I have worked within Mouffe's framework and, in doing so, I have avoided aiming my critiques at the core assumptions underlying Mouffe's arguments. The objective of this technique was to try and work within the discourse of radical democracy so that, in the same way that Mouffe tried to work within liberalism to strengthen the theory and make it accountable for its ideals,[12] this was the aim of this thesis. In identifying the various lacunae, these areas were highlighted for further attention and work.

Therefore, although somewhat limiting, the recognition of the lacunae in Mouffe's radical democratic theory do not have to be completely arresting or paralysing. This is especially true because, even once they have been addressed, theory is never fixed. It will always be responsive to new demands and activism.

[11] Colin Crouch *Post-Democracy* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA, 2004), p. 112.
[12] Chantal Mouffe 'Preface: Democratic Politics Today', in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso: London; New York, 1992), p. 2.

Addressing the problems of Mouffe's work, and proposing radical interpretations of the principles may stabilise the approach, but it will always be able to be re-worked and reconceived in new historical contexts and in response to new challenges. One of the most radical aspects of Mouffe's approach is that it celebrates that it is provisional, while simultaneously advocating for a new hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe explain this seeming paradox:

> The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be *a* meaning…Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre…a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic.[13]

By clarifying the radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality, Mouffe's approach can avoid getting lost in the incessant sliding of meaning, and provide a hegemonic articulation to inform the project.

Clearly Mouffe's radical democratic approach is full of potential when it comes to outlaying a radical (left, different and disruptive, and democratic) alternative. In order to seize upon this opportunity, I argue that there are specific elements of Mouffe's work that can be re-worked and expanded in order to provide for a future course. One of the most important tasks is to clarify what the radical democratic interpretations of liberty and equality are. As discussed, this grounding helps to inform the boundaries of the *respublica* and citizenship, and it helps to ensure that the radical democratic approach has a clear position in the agonistic debate between the other alternatives discussed.

Furthermore, a radical understanding of these principles would enable Mouffe to challenge the status quo of liberal democracy. Although she is at pains not to do this, as I have shown in previous chapters, the disruptive effects of Mouffe's re-theorising are undeniable, giving the radical democratic approach a unique

[13] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Second Edition (Verso: London; New York, 2001), p. 112, emphasis in original.

and vital role in disrupting current political systems. Mouffe has noted herself that, part of being radical is to set out to transform 'existing power relations and the establishment of a new hegemony.'[14] Therefore, it is because this is embedded in the ontology of radicalism that this becomes a crucial factor in the agenda of radical democracy. Remaining within the paradigm of liberal democracy tames this potential, so it is important that this radicalness be reclaimed and cultivated.

The lacunae and points of contradiction in Mouffe's work can actually provide the perfect opportunity to challenge the status quo, and provide a reinvigoration of democratic theory, because they allow space for further development and articulation. The fact that Mouffe's approach is unfinished provides an opportunity for further exploration and analysis, so that the conversation about democracy, and the contribution of the radical approach, can continue. As Mouffe articulates, '[t]he point is no longer to provide an apologia for democracy but to analyse its principles, examine its operations, discover its limitations and bring out its potentialities.'[15] This can be best achieved by utilising the gaps and fissures within Mouffe's work. The considerations regarding the filling of the lacunae, in addition to building upon existing radical democratic concepts, aid the debate about the future of democracy, helping to propel Mouffe's approach to be recognised as an important, paradigm-changing contribution. The gaps in Mouffe's approach can be seen as empty spaces, pregnant with potential, and capable of being written and re-written. Rather than limiting her approach, these lacunae can offer an opportunity to reassert the radical democratic position, and redirect democratic theory to an exciting new horizon.

[14] Chantal Mouffe *On the Political* (Routledge: London; New York, 2005), p. 52.
[15] Chantal Mouffe *The Return of the Political* (Verso: London; New York, 2005), p. 117.

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