

**The Limits of Political Contestation and Plurality. The Role of the State in
Agonistic Theories of Democracy**

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1. Introduction

The following work will have two main objectives. Firstly, I will argue that one can define agonistic democracy through the minimum and maximum thresholds of plurality and political contestation present in any given community. I propose to determine the aforementioned thresholds through an analysis of the fundamental postulates of the agonistic theory of democracy. Secondly, I will claim that in order to maintain the presented thresholds we need to incorporate in the theory of agonistic democracy a particular form of the agonistic state. I will argue, that the need for this particular form of the state arises from the tensions between the fundamental postulates of the theory of agonistic democracy.

The idea that contestation and plurality are inherent values of the agonistic democracy, and that they have to be limited was already developed by agonistic theorists, such as Chantal Mouffe, Bonnie Honig, or James Tully.¹ My contribution to the general theory of agonistic democracy will be the idea that political contestation and plurality have to have their maximum and minimum limits (thresholds), and that those limits can only be guaranteed by the existence of concrete institutions. I will claim, that without those limits agonistic democracy cannot exist, and that the theories, which postulate boundaries, that are too restrictive, or extensive do not capture the nature of agonistic democracy.

Although Edward Wigenbach already developed the institutional theory of the agonistic democracy, my aim will vary from his.² Whereas his objective was to see, whether different types of democratic or liberal institutions can be applied within the theory agonistic democracy, my objective is to propose institutions from the perspective of the limits of political contestation and plurality.

The importance of the state in the theory of agonistic democracy, which I will present in the second part of my work (Chapter 5), was already noticed by Chantal Mouffe. Since she has not

elaborated extensively on the theory of what she calls the “pluralistic state”, I would like to continue this debate, by presenting the concrete form and role, that the agonistic state should have.³ Other theorists such as William Connolly, or Jacques Ranciere criticize the state’s hegemony without giving constructive propositions regarding how we could accommodate the state within the theory of agonistic democracy.⁴ Bonnie Honig, and James Tully only briefly elaborate on the theory of the state, and mostly do it from the perspective of their (respective) theories of republicanism and constitutionalism.⁵ My aim will be to fill those theoretical gaps, and demonstrate why we do need the state in the theory of agonistic democracy, taking into consideration the appropriate thresholds of political contestation and plurality.

Since I will engage in the course of this work, in a very specific debate about the nature and feasibility of agonistic democracy, before developing the main argument of this work, I will present to the reader the whole theoretical framework upon which the theory of agonistic democracy is built (Chapter 1). The following exposition will not only clarify, in which debate I want to engage but also, which debates I would like to avoid while presenting my arguments. I will start with the presentation of the meaning of agonistic democracy, through the exposition of the six commonalities of the theories of agonistic democracy. Since it is going to be the first part of my work, I will use this opportunity to introduce the series of terms frequently used in the theories of agonistic democracy.

After the presentation of such a general theoretical framework, it will be possible to introduce to the reader the basic typology of agonistic democracy (Chapter 2). The differentiation of the bounded and unbounded forms of agonism will permit me to explain where we can situate the theory of agonistic democracy within the general theory of political agonism. Moreover, I will present the theories of agonistic democracy developed by Chantal Mouffe, James Tully, and Bonnie Honig, in order to present to the reader the debates on the possible boundaries of political contestation and plurality within the agonistic democracy.

In the third chapter, I will already move to the concrete argument about appropriate limits of political contestation and plurality in an agonistic democracy. Such an argument will be presented in the form of minimum and maximum thresholds of contestation and plurality, which political communities have to establish and maintain in order to be denominated as agonistic democracies. I will argue, that those thresholds can be obtained through the establishment of specific conditions of contestation and pluralization in political communities, which do not permit the transgression of the aforementioned thresholds.

The last chapter will be based on the differentiation of the ideal and non-ideal theories of agonistic democracy. As I will try to show, in the latter theory, there arises a need for a specific role of the state in agonistic democracy. The following need is created by the necessity of the presupposition of imperfect conditions, in which agonistic democracy is going to operate. I will argue that if the citizenry cannot maintain the thresholds of political contestation and plurality by itself, it will need to establish an agonistic state which will help it to maintain those thresholds in the long run.

As we can see, my model will consist of importing a particular form of the agonistic state into the theory of agonistic democracy. The need for such a state, as I will attempt to show, arises from the logic of agonistic democracy itself, and a desire to make this theory of democracy both feasible and appealing. I will investigate, what the meaning of agonistic democracy implies for us, and not attempt to transform this meaning, or to argue that agonistic democracy should be preferred over other types of democracies. In other words, the objective is to show, what one has to be prepared to encounter, and change if possible, if he or she wants to establish, and live within such a specific political community, as the agonistic democracy.

2. The Meaning of Political Agonism

What needs to be done before developing a concrete typology of agonistic democracy is to provide an explanation of what agonistic democracy is, and how it differs from other theories of democracy. The following part will constitute a conceptual foundation, upon which the next chapters of this work will be built. My introduction to the theory of agonistic democracy will consist of three parts. Firstly, on the basis of Edward C. Wigenbach's book *Institutionalizing Agonistic Democracy: Post Foundationalism and Political Liberalism*, and Mark Wenman's *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent power in the Era of Globalization*, I will present and analyze features that are common to the major theories of agonistic democracy. The list of the six commonalities of the theories of agonistic democracy should be treated as a conceptual approximation, which will clarify for us the meaning of agonistic democracy, and not the exposition of the definitive meaning of it. Secondly, I will try to elaborate more on the terms that will be introduced in the list, so that they might be repeated later with all the possible clarity. In the third part, I will present what I claim to be the philosophical foundations of the theory of agonistic democracy, namely its anti-essentialism, and anti-rationalism.

2.1 Six Commonalities of the Theories of Agonistic Democracy

As I've already written, the list of commonalities shared by the major theories of agonistic democracy consists of six propositions. Those six propositions are the conjunction of four propositions developed by Wigenbach and two propositions proposed by Wenman. My contribution to this list is, first, the simple idea of combining those two separate lists second, the clarification of the meaning of the concepts introduced in them and third, the idea of relating those concepts to each other, so as to further the coherence and intelligibility of the whole list.

Let me start from Wigenbach's four propositions, which I will try to paraphrase for the sake of brevity.

1. There are no transcendental foundations for any given political order.
2. All political orders are the result of hegemonic power.
3. All political orders produce necessary exclusions.
4. The possibility of violent conflict is always present in democratic politics.⁶

And, in order to complete my list, below I present two propositions developed by Mark Wenman.

5. Pluralism is the constitutive factor of democratic politics.
6. Certain forms of conflict can be a political good.⁷

As I have already introduced all six of the propositions, which will define the general meaning of agonistic democracy for us, I would like to clarify the concepts introduced within these propositions, and in the end, try to relate those propositions to themselves. In the following exposition, I will follow the numerical order of the list, not because it is a necessary reflection of the importance of the aforementioned propositions, but rather for the sake of clarity for the reader.

2.2 Conceptual clarification of the list

Proposition 1 (*There are no transcendental foundations for any given political order*): By political order, I mean here a concrete ordering of the social sphere, with regard to laws and institutions. In other words, the relations of social agents defined by implicit and explicit "rules of the game". The foundations of any political order consist of practices, discourses, and identities of social agents,

which give a meaning to a political order. The lack of transcendental foundations means that there is no available set of practices, discourses, and identities, which could *a priori* justify, or legitimize any given political order defined in turn by a set of laws and institutions. It does not mean that political orders cannot be justified or legitimized at all, or that those foundations can be purely arbitrary. What it means, is that, those foundations are always contingent, meaning they can be different, and that they can only be discovered *a posteriori*. As a consequence, one cannot either say what are the necessary foundations of a political order, or what are those foundations prior to the knowledge of a political order – i.e., its cultural, historical, and linguistic context. Firstly, as Mouffe writes - “[...] things could be always otherwise[...]”⁸, and secondly, as Andrew Schaap points out, you cannot say in advance what is the legitimate political character of a given community prior to the political process that determines its character.⁹

Proposition 2 (*All political orders are the result of hegemonic power*): Hegemony in this context has to be understood, in what I would like to refer here as a Gramscian sense.¹⁰ In other words, the representation of totality by particularity. Totality refers to the onto-political foundation of a political order. Particularity, on the other hand, should be understood as a particular set of practices, discourses, and identities of social agents. The fact that particularity manages to represent totality, implies that some arbitrary set of practices, discourses, and identities is instantiated as a universal for a given political community. The following instantiation is performed by the linguistic use of the so-called, master signifier – some concept, which can represent a totality, and as consequence develop a stable set of discourses, practices, and identities.¹¹ As Wigenbach notes, hegemony constitutes a closure of the range of meaning available in any political community.¹² Dominant hegemony is only particular since in any political community we will be able to find other sets of discourses, practices, and identities, which could gain such a hegemony i.e., representation of totality. Because hegemony consists in the creation of the foundation of a given political order, as a

consequence it determines the character, laws, and institutions of such a political order. By having a hegemony over foundation, one gains the hegemonic power over the whole political order.

Proposition 3 (*All political orders produce necessary exclusions*): The meaning of the third proposition can be easily derived from the conjunction of the first two propositions already presented above. If any given political order cannot have transcendental foundations, and its contingent foundations are the product of hegemonic power, then any particular foundations that manage to install themselves as hegemonic, exclude other possible contingent foundations that could also gain such a hegemony, and represent totality through their particularity. In other words, what a prominent theorist of agonistic democracy, William Connolly, meant by the term “necessary injustices”¹³ was that the dominant sets of practices, discourses, and identities exclude other sets of those entities, which could also play such a dominant role. What, according to the theories of agonistic democracy, is *a priori* impossible, is the existence of a totally inclusive political order, which would be able to endorse every possible set of discourses, practices, and identities. Some options are simply mutually exclusive. We might quote the following passage from the work of Bonnie Honig, to whose theory of agonistic democracy we are going to return to later:

Every political-legal settlement generates remainders, no matter how progressive or expansive that settlement aims to be. This is in no way to suggest that all orders are equal from this perspective; only to suggest that even those that are better than others still depend upon the supplement of a politics[...].¹⁴

The supplement of politics, refers to the above-mentioned exclusion of meaning, individuals, or as we were referring to it before, sets of discourses, practices, and identities. Coming back to Connolly, in a political community, we are facing the ambiguity between the need for certain forms of discourses, practices, and identities of social agents in order to determine the character of such a community, and the impossibility of the harmonious coexistence of all of those entities.¹⁵

Proposition 4 (*The possibility of violent conflict is always present in democratic politics*): In order to fully understand the fourth proposition, we have to introduce, at least in a narrow sense, the concept of pluralism in democratic societies. The concept of pluralism implies the fact that any democratic society contains a variety of social agents, whose difference consists in the fact, that their identities are defined by different sets of onto-political foundations (practices, discourses, norms). Those agents are members of the same society, community, or, to be more illustrative, we can say that they share one symbolic space. As a consequence, because of the plurality of the whole symbolic space, agents who participate in it struggle among themselves in order to shape their society, according to the character of their identities. The plurality inherent to a common symbolic space leads to the conflictual nature of such a sphere. As Chantal Mouffe indicates - “[...] pluralism implies the permanence of conflict and division”.¹⁶ What the theorists of agonistic democracy want us to acknowledge is that without external constraints on those actors, such a struggle can have a violent character.¹⁷ By violent character, I mean a conflict which involves the use of coercion by conflicting parties. Such a conflict can take a variety of forms, from civil unrest to even civil war. Conflicts do not necessarily have to have a violent character, but it is a certain possibility, which has to be acknowledged within democratic societies.

Proposition 5 (*Pluralism is the constitutive factor of democratic politics*): The meaning of the fifth proposition can be developed through the additional remarks on the already introduced concept of plurality in the fourth proposition. As I have already mentioned, democratic societies are plural. They contain a variety of social agents, with different identities, who, due to their differences, give different meanings to their common symbolic space. What we should understand by the constitutive character of pluralism, is firstly conceiving pluralism not as a simple fact regarding the diversity of democratic societies, but rather as their constitutive factor, and secondly, the undesirability of unnecessary reduction in the diversity of democratic citizens. As we will see more extensively later,

the diversity of democratic communities can be reduced by various socio-political methods, such as homogenization, or normalization of social agents. What most of the theorists claim, is that such methods are, from the normative point of view, wrong and should not be advanced by societies, or states. Nevertheless, at the same time, they observe both the conceptual impossibility and normative undesirability of absolute pluralism.¹⁸ Some forms of differences among social actors are simply unwelcome (for example, the relation between master and slave). Moreover, as we have noted above, every political association demands a certain exclusion of meaning from itself. Constitutive pluralism, refers to the fact that different meanings given to a shared symbolic space by social agents make such a symbolic space intelligible to them, giving rise to the necessity of politics, or in other words, the necessity of ordering such a common symbolic space. As Hannah Arendt noted, human plurality – i.e, the existence of diverse equals within a political community – is the *sine qua non* of any political action.¹⁹ The concrete ordering of a common symbolic space, the establishment of concrete hegemonic sets of discourses, practices, and identities is the consequence of the constitutive pluralism of democratic societies.

Proposition 6 (*Certain forms of conflict can be a political good*): As I have already pointed out, a conflict between social agents who are members of the same society is the consequence of the constitutive pluralism of such a society. Because social agents are different, they want to establish different sets of dominant discourses, practices, and identities. We could say that there is a struggle between them, in order to establish a hegemony. Of course, such a conflict can have various characteristics. From mild forms of conflicts, where social agents accept or internalize established hegemony, and struggle over small adjustments within it, to intensive forms of struggle, which can have a violent, or at least potentially violent character. This is exactly the observation developed by German jurist, Carl Schmitt, who pointed out that the most violent forms of conflict, exemplified by the possibility of killing each other, define the meaning and sphere of the political. In other words,

the sphere of inclusions within and exclusions from the common symbolic space, or as he refers to it, the division between friends and enemies, social agents that we are ready to kill or die for.²⁰ Agonistic democrats are not supportive of the Schmittian conflict between friends and enemies, but in the same time, they want to point out, that non-violent forms of conflict within political orders can have a positive impact.²¹ It is so because through a conflict the dominant hegemony can be replaced by another hegemony defined by a different set of onto-political foundations. Through such a substitution of hegemonies, political orders can become more inclusive, simply because newly installed hegemonies will recognize discourses, practices, and identities, which the previous dominant hegemony excluded. Of course, it may also happen, that a new hegemony will be less inclusive, than the previous one. Nonetheless, in principle, certain types of conflicts, which lead to more inclusive hegemonies are certainly welcomed by them.

Moreover, peaceful forms of political struggle can decrease the probability of civic apathy and violent forms of conflict. Although I will later extensively elaborate on the theory of agonistic democracy proposed by Chantal Mouffe, I think, it is useful already at this stage, to introduce some passages from her work, which will help me to illustrate this point. The first refers to her comments on the riots of young people in the suburbs of Paris in 2005:

What surprised many observers was that their [the unorganized groups of young Parisian rioters] revolt looked like a sheer expression of blind violence without any specific claims. The rioters had so little faith in politics that they did not even formulate any demands. I think that this can be explained by the fact that no discourse was available for them to politically articulate their anger. It could only be expressed through violence.²²

What she means by no available discourse, is the fact that the young rioters did not belong to, or identify with any political group, which through the democratic struggle could try to change their socio-economic position. According to Mouffe, the violent conflict is the sheer consequence of the lack of democratic conflict, which would consist in the struggle for a hegemonic articulation of political order, according to the interests, or articulated identities of young rioters.

The second passage refers both to the problem of civic apathy and the already-mentioned aspect of violent conflicts:

Too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation lead to apathy and disaffection with political participation. Worse still, the result can be the crystallization of collective passions around issues, which cannot be managed by the democratic process and an explosion of antagonisms that can tear up the very basis of civility.²³

Again, as we see, the impossibility of identification with groups, be it political parties, social movements or political categories such as right and left, which engage in the discursive articulation of the hegemonic power can lead either to the desertion from the political life or to the violent character of it. Both phenomena, I think, are rather unwanted consequences, if one embraces a commitment to democratic politics. In general terms, we can see, that most of the agonistic democrats follow the philosophical tradition developed by Machiavelli, where conflict is seen as the indispensable condition of liberty.²⁴

2.3 The Philosophical Foundations of Agonistic democracy: Anti-Rationalism, and Anti-Essentialism

Although I've managed to introduce to the reader both the list and its conceptual clarification, I would like to present two crucial philosophical aspects of agonistic democracy, which could not be, I think, inferred by a reader from the list itself or the exposition above. The most fundamental philosophical aspect of agonistic democracy in the arena of epistemology is anti-rationalism. Agonistic theories of democracy are not so much opposed to the idea that reason can determine in some way a political order, but rather to the idea, that reason should be the prime determinant of any political order, and that it should exclude other possible factors, which could perform the role of such determinants. Agonistic democrats are opposed to the conceptualization of democracy

proposed by Jürgen Habermas, and John Rawls, who postulate that the foundations of democracy can and should be specified solely through human reason, or intersubjective exchange of rational arguments.²⁵ As we have seen in the second proposition of our list, foundations of political orders, including democracies, are determined by hegemonic power. The hegemonic (re)articulation of the foundations of political orders can be achieved through an exchange of reasons, or rational introspection performed by individuals, but such possibilities do not exhaust the range of available options. For the sake of clarity, the hegemonic (re)articulation can be identified by a reader with the general meaning of rhetoric. Again, the change of the dominant set of practices, discourses, and identities can be achieved through the exchange of reasons subject to valid and sound principles of reasoning, but rhetoric can include other means of communicative interaction. The range of styles that can be used for the sake of persuasion includes polemics, parody, scientific reference, or emotional appeal moreover, as Alan Finlayson points out “[...] political rhetoric shapes arguments not only out of words, but moods, feelings, and aspirations”.²⁶ The way in which we can communicate as citizens should not be simply derived from a larger theory of political truth. In theory of agonistic democracy, politics comes before philosophy, or in other words, a decision comes before reason. As agonistic democrats claim, in politics there are many more factors at play, than human reason.

The second important philosophical aspect of the theory of agnostic democracy is its anti-essentialism in the field of metaphysics. This point must be mentioned, although it is much easier to derive it from our list, than the last point concerning the epistemology of agonistic democracy. The anti-essentialism of agonistic democracy is visible in the first proposition of our list. Agonistic democrats claim that there is no such thing, as the essence of an individual, political community, or humanity. The subject is thrown into the world, situated in, and determined by the concrete historical, linguistic, and cultural context that he finds himself in. Of course, those structures might be changed through hegemonic articulation, but they cannot be essentially fixed.²⁷ As I’ve

mentioned in the first proposition, there are no transcendental foundations of political orders. This point is strictly connected to the following philosophical stance of the theory of agonistic democracy in the field of metaphysics. Although it may be a simplification, it will be useful for us to bear in mind that in the theories of agonistic democracy, entities are neither necessary, nor essential, but contingent and relative to a given contexts. The type of subject, that we are dealing with in the agonistic democracy is what Heidegger proposed with his concept of *desein*, a mortal being, who finds himself thrown into time and historicity.²⁸ Despite the above-mentioned similarities of the theories of agonistic democracy, there are some major differences, one to which we should turn in the next chapter, in order to clarify further the conceptual framework of my study.

3. A Basic Typology of Agonistic Democracy: Distinguishing Bounded and Unbounded

Agonism

The following part of my work will consist in the differentiation of the two types of agonistic democracy, namely, a bounded and unbounded one. Such an exposition will serve firstly as a further conceptual clarification of the concept of agonistic democracy, and secondly, as an introduction to the whole idea of bounding agonistic democracy, which is strictly connected to the next arguments of my work. In order to establish how to bound the agonistic democracy, whether some boundaries are appropriate, and who is to bound agonistic democracies, we first have to introduce the meaning of political boundaries, as such. In other words, what are we to bound in an agonistic democracy?

3.1 Unbounded Agonism

In order to fully understand the postulates of the theory of unbounded agonism, it is useful to start from what Edward Wigenbach refers to as ‘anti–foundationalism’.²⁹ I would like to start from this particular aspect since I claim, it is the essential part of the theory of unbounded agonism, and the one from which other postulates of it follow or may be grasped much more easily by the reader. As we have already pointed out, every political order is founded upon a set of hegemonic practices, discourses, and identities, which produce necessary exclusions of other possible sets, which could fulfill the same role within a given political order. Because of the exclusions produced by political orders, theorists of unbounded democracy, such as Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, or Sheldon Wolin, identify the political agon, or democratic actions, with the disruption of those foundations. The idea of emancipation or collective freedom is identified in their notion of democracy with resistance and opposition to established institutions, norms or laws, which citizens are expected to comply with. Struggles are not to be performed within established rules of a game of any political community but over those rules. As Rancière claims, institutional politics can be identified with the general meaning of police, whereas democracy, according to him, manifests itself in the opposition to such practices of limiting the possibilities of the *demos*.³⁰

Another strategy is not to oppose established institutions, but as Chantal Mouffe points out in her elaboration of the work of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*, to desert, ignore and act beyond those institutions.³¹ Such attitudes focus mostly on emancipation through bottom-up approaches realized on the basis of social movements. Although, these two approaches differ in their content, they manifest the same philosophical position of anti-foundationalism. Opposition to existing hegemonies either through their disruption, or simple desertion.

The second important feature of the theory of unbounded agonism is its general tendency to associate the meaning of democracy with political agonism, or in other words, the struggle against hegemony. Let us for example, analyze the following passage from Rancière:

Strictly speaking, democracy is not a form of State. It is always beneath and beyond these forms. Beneath, insofar as it is the necessarily egalitarian, and necessarily forgotten, foundation of the oligarchic state. Beyond, insofar as it is the public activity that counteracts the tendency of every State to monopolize and depoliticize the public sphere. Every State is oligarchic.³²

As we can see here, democracy is identified not with the concrete form of the state, but with collective action, and particularly with collective action against established forms of the state, which tries to control our public sphere. It is as if democracy was embodied in oppositional and collective action, and vice versa such collective resistance signifies what is, or should be, meant by the word democracy. As Sheldon Wolin argues - "Democracy is not about where the political is located, but how it is experienced".³³ What Wolin wants us to acknowledge, is that democracy is not about the traditional meaning of popular sovereignty, where the power is claimed to be in the hands of the *demos*. It is rather about the phenomenological aspect present in the fact of acting together, where diverse individuals can enjoy moments of commonality, in which they transgress their inherited norms and political forms. According to Wolin, "[...] the access to political experience is opened through revolution which activates political community and '[...] destroys the boundaries'".³⁴

In my opinion, the cause of the lack of boundaries in the case of these theories is not that they identify democracy with agonism. The important conceptual point is that, what they really do, is to put agonism prior to democracy. Most of those theorists are simply committed to a much bigger extent to the idea of contestation and resistance, then to the idea of popular sovereignty. As Christa Davis Acampora argues - "[...] if one is truly committed to agonism as a model of potentially liberating political practice, one must be willing to risk a democratic order in the

process”.³⁵ This is the above-mentioned commitment that characterizes, what I refer to as unbounded agonism, or others, as radical democracy. Although such a commitment, can be obstructed by the identification of democracy with agonism by some theorists within this tradition, it is precisely this commitment to agonism that differentiates them from other theories of agonistic democracy. The commitment to agonism, the priority of struggle over the possibility of collective decision-making.

The difference between bounded and unbounded forms of agonism can be also grasped through the distinction developed by Thomas Fossen regarding emancipatory and perfectionist agonism.³⁶ In the emancipatory and unbounded agonisms, conflict is instrumental for the emancipation from hegemonic power, whereas in the perfectionist, and partly in the bounded models of agonism, the same conflict serves as a means to the perfection of individual, groups, or a whole political community. Although, in the bounded model of agonism, individuals can struggle for the sake of emancipation, in the same time, their objective transgress the emancipatory aim. They conflict with the existing order not only to disrupt it, but also to improve it. As I will claim in the next chapters of my study, the possibility of such an improvement may require the limitation of plurality, and political contestation within the agonistic democracy.

3.2 Bounded Agonism

As I have introduced in the previous chapter of this thesis, what it means to lack boundaries in agonistic democracy, in the following part, I would like to present what would it mean to have those boundaries and what form and content they might have. The part concerning the meaning of agonism will mostly refer to the concepts introduced in the previous chapters, what will be new in this part, is the concept of boundaries. I will present and analyze the theories of agonistic democracy developed by Chantal Mouffe, James Tully, and Bonnie Honig. The analysis and exposition of those theories will not focus on their overall content, but rather on the concrete postulates of what are or should be the boundaries of plurality and political contestation in possible agonistic democracies. It is necessary to introduce the concept of boundaries, or what one might call the limits of conflicts and diversity in agonistic democracy, since the rest of this study will consist of testing those limits (boundaries), checking whether they are appropriate, and analyzing how they might be concretely applied and maintained in the long run.

3.2.1 Chantal Mouffe. *From Enemy to Adversary.*

In the writings of Chantal Mouffe, we can see three main postulates concerning the form of possible political boundaries in agonistic democracy. The first postulate refers to the meaning of democratic citizenship, the second to the transformation of the notion of the enemy to that of the adversary, and finally, the third one, to the Oakeshottian concept of *societas*.

Let us start with the first point concerning the meaning of citizenship. Mouffe develops her conception of citizenship very much in opposition to the previous conceptions proposed by theorists of deliberative and procedural democracy. In those theories, citizenship is identified with the endorsement of certain rational principles, or procedures, which are to govern a given democratic

community. What Mouffe wants us to acknowledge, is that citizenship is not grounded upon rational justification, but “[...] the ensemble of practices, that make possible the creation of democratic citizens”.³⁷ Citizenship is a certain form of individuality and subjectivity, that one has to develop in one’s intercourse with other members of democratic society. There has to be a multiplicity of discourses, practices, and forms of life so that individuals could endorse such a dominant form of identity. The meaning of democratic citizenship in Mouffe’s theory of agonistic democracy is identified with adherence to the ethico–political grounds of liberal democracy, namely liberty and equality. To be a citizen of a democratic community is to commit oneself to the values of liberty and equality through a series of practices, discourses, and forms of life enacted by one in one’s life as a citizen. Even though the identity of a citizen, according to Mouffe, is a dominant form of identity within any democratic community, and it has to prevail over other types of associational identities, that individuals or groups might happen to have, its meaning nevertheless can be a subject of dispute. As a consequence, even though we cannot dispute the very identity of citizenship or the adherence to the values of liberty and equality, we may nonetheless, dispute the meaning of being a citizen of a democratic community, and therefore what liberty and equality mean for us.

The second aim of democratic politics, after creating such a form of citizenship centered around the dispute over the meaning of liberty and equality, is to develop the relationships of adversaries between democratic citizens and make it less likely for the Schmittian distinction between friend and enemy to emerge within the boundaries of the body politic. The conceptual difference between the notion of the enemy and adversary, is that in the first case, we combat his or her ideas, and in the second one, we combat those ideas, but at the same time, we respect their right to have those ideas.³⁸ If we make a conjunction of the following point with the previous one concerning the meaning of citizenship, a clear picture of Mouffe’s theory emerges. Democratic citizens are struggling between themselves in order to determine the dominant meaning of

citizenship, but at the same time, they respect their right to have different opinions, or different modes of identification with those values. Because of such a combination of struggle and respect, they can share one symbolic space, and in a non-violent way transform it, without an unnecessary reduction in their plurality.

Let us now outline, the third point, which refers to the distinction developed by Michael Oakeshott, between two models of civil association: *universitas*, and *societas*. In the first type of association its members are bound together, because they pursue a common cause, end or goal. In the *societas*, Oakeshott argues, members recognize themselves as commons, as members of the same community, because they have an adherence to common rules.³⁹ The rules that they identify with, are the rules of civil intercourse. Forms of life, discourses, and practices, which are responsible for the production of their identity as citizens. Of course, as I have mentioned before, such an Oakeshottian *res publica* and its meaning determined by the meaning of democratic citizenship, and therefore the meaning of liberty and equality can be challenged and disputed. We can say, that Mouffe appropriates the model developed by Oakeshott, in order to radicalize it, so that it better serves her project of agonistic democracy.⁴⁰

I claim that the concepts of citizenship, adversary, and *societas*, developed by Mouffe, mark the possible range of plurality and contestation within her model of agonistic democracy. Being a citizen in the agonistic democracy limits the possibility of who you can be as an individual, and therefore determines the horizon of possible identities, that you might happen to have, or be determined by. Even though you can dispute what it means to endorse the values of liberty and equality, you cannot dispute those values as such. You might have a plurality of identifications with the values of liberty and equality, or at least have identifications compatible with those values, but not identifications which would negate those values. Once you negate those values as such, there is no possibility within a democratic community, of creating a specific relationship between adversaries, which Mouffe advocates for. What we encounter then, according to Mouffe, are the

conditions upon which the relations between friends and enemies are likely to emerge. We can struggle between each other, but only if we respect our right to have different opinions, and modes of identification. The recognition and active endorsement of such a right forms a condition for the existence of Mouffe's modified model of Oakeshottian *societas*. We might disagree about common ends, that we happen to pursue within our community, but there is no place for a struggle over the common rules of civil intercourse that bind us together, although of course, we might dispute the meaning of such common rules.

I think, that the last point is the most troubling and the one that I will try to analyze further in the following chapters, namely, what are the limits to the meaning itself and who decides in the end, which meaning should be treated as a correct one, and therefore dominant and enforceable within a given community. The meaning of citizenship, liberty, equality, or rules of civil intercourse might be of course elastic, but there has to be some limit to their elasticity, or otherwise, they will not have any meaning at all.⁴¹ As a consequence, there has to be something, or someone, who will be able to say, or be entitled to say, that a given meaning is not a correct one and should not even be a subject of dispute.

3.2.2 James Tully: Democratic Struggles for Recognition

The central point of James Tully's theory of agonistic democracy is his definition of freedom as the independence from arbitrary forms of power. As we remember from our list of six commonalities of the theories of agonistic democracy, every political order is a result of hegemonic power. The point, which Tully wants to make within his theory of agonistic democracy, is that although we are not able to eradicate power from political orders, we are nevertheless in a position to dispute it. The contestation of power relations, dominant forms of recognition, distribution of economic and

political privileges is performed through the process of inter-subjective dialogue between citizens. Power as a consequence is not arbitrary because we are free to contest it.⁴²

The process of the contestation of power relations through dialogue embodies the meaning of civic freedom and is directed towards mutual understanding and agreement between citizens. Such an understanding and agreement can be reached because citizens respect each other within the process of the dialogue itself. It means that the demands of recognition that they make are both intelligible, (meaning understandable under present shared principles, goals, and values), and reciprocal, (meaning citizens mutually recognize their right to make those demands). Of course, the norms of intelligibility – i.e., dominant norms, values, and goods – can also be an object of dispute. Nevertheless, some of them constitute a temporary constitutional basis upon which such a dispute might be itself intelligible. Some principles, goods, or values that a community endorses, are temporarily placed outside of the political contestation, so that other principles or goods might be changed, and so that their change can be intelligible to the members of a community.⁴³

Moreover, according to Tully, the principles of intelligibility, and reciprocity are immanent to the performed dialogue, but not universal to it. In order to illustrate this point better, let us quote one of Tully's passages, where he elaborates on the status of those immanent conventions:

They cannot be represented in universal principles or in universal institutions. Nevertheless, they gradually gain their authority and are given the 'appearance of a transcendental standard' by acts in conformity with them on all sides.⁴⁴

Individuals and groups, who do not respect other individuals, or in other words, do not internalize in the process of dialogue the principles of reciprocity and intelligibility, are excluded from the dialogue, and as a consequence from agonistic society itself. Those who participate in the dialogue, respecting the aforementioned immanent principles, generate bonds of solidarity, a sense of belonging, and are even ready to accept some forms of power incompatible with their identities since they know and experience that they will be in a position to dispute them in the future.⁴⁵

Let us conclude, by relating the presented theory to the core of the present chapter, namely the boundaries of agonistic democracy. As we have seen, Tully claims that we can dispute, contest, and oppose dominant forms of recognition but only on the condition that the demands we make, are reasonable, intelligible, or we could say, understandable to other citizens from the perspective of present goods, values, and principles. The radicality of any citizen has to stop at this point, otherwise, their specificity, or plurality won't be recognized by agonistic society, and they will be excluded from it. The problem with the boundaries that Tully draws in his model of agonistic democracy, is that they seem to be too narrow. As Hans Lindahl points out, agon within any political order is not contesting whether or not certain things or acts are legal or illegal, or acceptable from the perspective of presently endorsed values, goods, and principles, but rather the very distinction between legality and illegality.⁴⁶ It does not undermine our judgment regarding the application of given cases to what we share as a community, but the very idea of what we should share as a community. In my opinion, Tully is putting too many restrictions on the possibilities of political agon, by reducing its possibilities of contestation to certain forms of dialogue. Such a deliberative form of democracy, which focuses on the contestation of existing political norms, cannot capture the very radicality of agonistic democracy, which can go beyond communicative forms of politics, and dispute within the range of presently endorsed values.

3.2.3 Bonnie Honig: For the Virtù form of Politics

Let us start the following presentation of Honig's theory of agonistic democracy, by reminding ourselves of the quotation introduced in Section 2.2, which indicated, that every political order generates so-called remainders. Since political orders exhibit such a feature, Honig claims, that we should engage with those remainders, firstly, by being attentive to their particular excluded differences, and, secondly, by permitting such excluded individuals to dispute and contest political

orders, which are a cause of their exclusion. The following attitude of engagement with remainders of political orders, Honig calls, a *virtù* form of politics.

What she refers to, as a virtue form of politics, on the other hand, is the attitude, or we could say political methodology, of displacing politics, by reducing it to administrative, or judicial problems, and eradicating the possibility of conflict within existing societies.⁴⁷ In the *virtù* form of politics, we should engage with the remainders of the system, that we live in, through as Honig writes, “[...] civic commitment to practices of agonistic respect and ethos of pluralization”.⁴⁸ other words, as citizens, we should be open to, and respectful towards the *Other* of our community. Such an engagement does not only permit us to peacefully pluralize our society, but also to diminish the probability of its disruption, since its remainders, by being included in the process of contestation, do not have an incentive to violently attack the system as such.⁴⁹

I think that Honig’s theory exhibits a very interesting feature regarding the limits of contestation and plurality in agonistic democracy. It does not only bound conflict with a certain agonistic respect in order to diminish the probability of its violent character, but it also wants to permit for it, so that the whole community would not be endangered from outside by its remainders, which by necessity it generates. It is as if we were trying to permit for the conflict, in order to pluralize our society and try to pluralize it, to make a given conflict possible on more peaceful terms. In Honig’s model of agonistic democracy, those two coordinates of plurality and contestation seem to mutually reinforce each other, creating the possibility of a vibrant and stable democratic community.

3.3 The Need to Formalize the Boundaries of Agonistic Democracy

In the last chapter, I focused on the postulates regarding the possible boundaries of agonistic democracy. My aim was to locate the form and extent those boundaries might have, according to particular theorists of agonistic democracy. The postulates regarding the boundaries, which I presented to the reader, are scattered around different writings, and do not always indicate, what we are to bound within the agonistic democracy. As I tried to argue, theorists of unbounded agonism do not propose any boundaries in agonistic democracy. Mouffe, Tully, and Honig, whose theories I included in the group of bounded agonisms, propose arguments which can be interpreted as propositions of particular boundaries within the agonistic democracy. My objective, in the next chapters of this study, will be to formalize those boundaries in terms of the concrete thresholds of contestation and plurality, and argue that we can define agonistic democracy with reference to those thresholds. My claim is that without certain boundaries of contestation and plurality, agonistic democracy cannot exist. As a consequence, I will argue that the theories, which do not postulate such boundaries, or postulate boundaries which are too extensive or restrictive, cannot netiher capture the nature of agonistic democracy, nor make this specific form of political community feasible.

4. The Limits of Political Contestation and Plurality

In the following chapter, I would like to argue, that one can bound agonistic democracy in terms of appropriate limits of political contestation and plurality present in a given political community. The above-mentioned limits refer to both minimal and maximal amounts of contestation and plurality, which have to obtain, if we want to postulate the existence of agonistic democracy. In other words, my claim goes as follows: A given community is an agonistic democracy, if and only if its degree of

contestation and plurality does not fall below, or exceed certain limits. Of course, within such a spectrum, one will be able to speak about varieties of agonistic democracies, with higher or lower degrees of contestation and plurality. It may happen, depending upon a context, that in a certain community it will be better to have a more radical citizenry than a plural one, or vice-versa. As we will see, sometimes, we can even face trade-offs in the desired amounts of contestation and plurality, or the effects of enhancement of one value by another.

Agonistic democracy is composed of two main principles: agonism and democracy. In general, we can say, that the appropriate limits of contestation and plurality are determined by the necessity of maintaining those two principles. As we will see, democracy demands those limits to be rather low, and agonism high. As a consequence, political communities in order to be denominated as agonistic democracies have to balance those two coordinates and fall within the presented spectrum of contestation and plurality. What has to be pointed out at the beginning, is that it is not so much an actual amount of contestation or pluralization that we expect to be present in a society, but rather a certain capacity for contestation and pluralization. It is not perceived as wrong when you do not contest, but when you cannot do it. As a consequence, I will write not about concrete limits of contestation or plurality, but conditions, that will enable those limits to be present.

4.1 The Minimum Threshold of Political Contestation and Plurality

Let me present a very important relation between the values of contestation and plurality, which will substantially clarify the following exposition of their minimal limits. Firstly, the more plural a given community is, the more propensity it will have to be radical. Let us suppose that the contrary holds, and our imaginable community is homogenized – i.e., its members endorse and internalize a dominant set of practices, discourses, and identities. What then will be a reason to struggle against a hegemonic power, or for the establishment of a new hegemonic power? We would face very much

contradictory circumstances, in which citizens would struggle against themselves, or against things that they endorse, internalize, and are determined by. As a consequence, citizens have to be plural, at least to a minimal extent, in order to be willing and able to contest dominant forms of power.

On the other hand, if citizens do not struggle against dominant forms of power, or are not able to do so for some reason, then it is very likely, that they will not be able to be plural. The following relation between the possibility of pluralization and political contestation obtains, since, as I've mentioned in the second chapter, political orders produce necessary exclusions, and are results of hegemonic power. If citizens won't be able to contest dominant forms of power, then in the long run their differences will be dominated by hegemonic sets of discourses, practices, and identities, or forgotten, because of the impossibility of their expression in the public space, and therefore their acknowledgment by other citizens. As we can see, those two values may have the possibility of mutual enhancement.

Since I've managed to present the relation between the possibility of pluralization and political contestation, let me right now pass to the argument about the minimal extent of contestation and plurality that has to obtain within any agonistic democracy. Firstly, what has to be in place in a given community, is what I will call, the objective conditions of contestation. In other words, citizens have to have institutional possibilities in order to oppose dominant forms of power. For example, they must have the possibility of appealing to legislative or judicial powers, and opportunities to express themselves in media, associating themselves and demonstrating in the streets, or being a part of a political party. Such a set of civil and political rights is, I claim, the necessary condition for any agonistic democracy. As Wigenbach argues, citizens must have 'tools' to engage with dominant forms of power.⁵⁰ The role of such tools can be partly performed by the mentioned set of political and civil rights.

Secondly, we have to consider the importance of the social rights of citizens, which might enable them to contest power, and form their own hegemonic articulations. It is rather improbable

that without appropriate education, a certain amount of property, the access to the system of social insurance or healthcare, citizens will be able to engage with power and contest it. Moreover, even if the above-mentioned conditions exist in the circumstances of high economic or social inequality, certain disenfranchised groups of citizens might not be able to influence dominant forms of power, even if they have a formal political right to do so. Even though it may not be necessarily true, it is highly probable, that more egalitarian democracies will have more chances to become agonistic democracies.

As Dana Villa points out in her analysis of Hannah Arendt's theory of political agonism - "[...] in order to be 'free for the world' - in order to appreciate and value the play of perspectives for its own sake – one must, to some degree, be free of the most pressing concerns of life".⁵¹ As I pointed out, it may not only be the freedom from such "pressing concerns of life" that determines the possibility of one's engagement with power, but also his or her freedom in this area relative to others - i.e., the equality of the opportunity to participate in the public sphere. We could say, partly referring to Arendt, that there has to exist equality of the freedom from the private sphere, that citizens may enjoy.⁵² The sphere of biological necessity, repetitive behavior, and subjection to mere life (i.e., social/private sphere), partly exclude the possibility of participation in the public sphere. Such an alienation can be acquired through the extensive range of social rights granted to citizens in any agonistic democracy. The competition over the dominant hegemonic articulation between different groups of citizens has to be performed under relative economic and social equality.

Thirdly, a given community cannot be too stable or static, both in terms of laws, and their foundations. As Bonnie Honig showed, the question for agonistic democracy is not how to make certain laws unchangeable, but how to prevent them from having such a character.⁵³ The aim of agonistic society is how to make its citizenry more politicized, and how to prevent too much order within their community, or as Honig refers to it, how to cultivate the *virtù* and not the virtue, form of politics. In agonistic democracy, we expect citizens to be attentive to exclusionary effects of their

laws, and be willing to change them, if it is useful, or necessary. If not, then both laws and their foundations will become internalized by the citizenry, and difficult to change. Moreover, they won't adjust to changing circumstances of society, excluding, for example, newly emerging identities, or practices.

Fourthly, in any agonistic democracy there have to be in place the subjective conditions of contestation. Power relations, which are present in a community, have to be visible and transparent. Citizens have to be able to perceive them, and know where and how they operate. In other words, agonistic citizens have to be suspicious towards power relations, and ready, and willing to contest them. Hegemonic articulations, which establish dominant sets of practices, discourses and identities should be seen as political decisions, which promote certain interests, and are subject to amendment, change, or nullification, and not as naturalized, or moralized decisions, outside of the sphere of political contestation.⁵⁴ As I have pointed out in the first chapter, there are no transcendental foundations of political orders, and agonistic democracy should prevent some foundations from pretending to perform such a role.

Fifthly, the range of contestation cannot be limited to the judicial, or administrative spheres demarcated by explicit laws and procedures, that citizens have to comply with. The conflictual character of any agonistic democracy has to be able to extend over the whole of civil society and reach the very social and cultural practices of citizenry. What is a subject of contestation is not only a political order, but a set of dominant practices, discourses, and identities that determines such a political order. The exclusion of the latter form of contestation would imply the eradication of the political agon as such. The boundaries of what counts as private or public within the agonistic democracy have to be open, and subject to possible revision.⁵⁵ There cannot be anything that counts as the private sphere *per se*, and therefore outside of possible political contestation. Nevertheless, as I will show later, there might be spheres, which are established as private ones in the process of

political contestation, or spheres, which are excluded from the political contestation for the sake of maintenance of the above-mentioned contestation in the long run.

4.2 The Maximum Threshold of Political Contestation and Plurality

In the following section, I will analyze the conditions that make the necessary maximum limits of contestation and plurality possible, or conditions, which make the transgression of those limits improbable, if not impossible. As I have already mentioned, agonistic democracy is a conjunction of two principles: democracy, and agonism. In this part of my work, I will show, that the appropriate limits of contestation and plurality can guarantee the existence of those two principles, and therefore agonistic democracy itself. The question, which I will try to answer, is why do we need those upper limits, and why, once we transgress those limits we lose the possibility of the existence of agonistic democracy?

Let me start with the question asked by Chantal Mouffe, which appears in her essay - “Democratic Politics Today”:

How can the maximum of pluralism be defended – in order to respect the rights of the widest possible groups – without destroying the very framework of the political community as constituted by the institutions and practices that construct modern democracy and define our identity as citizens?⁵⁶

In other words, how can we reconcile the maximum amount of pluralism and contestation with the maintenance of democratic community? How to permit for the *agon* without destroying the *demos*, or as Wigenbach refers to it, “the conditions of association that make community possible”.⁵⁷ Those conditions are to be identified with Mouffe’s “institutions and practices that construct modern democracy”, or the set of things that binds us together as a political community, and permit us to collectively decide upon its faith.

As I pointed out in the last chapter, an agonistic democracy must be a political community, in which power is to be visible and open to contestation, laws adjustable and changeable, and its citizens constantly attentive to, and engaging with the remainders of their community. It is an unstable community, and even a community that perceives its instability as something positive. Nevertheless, it is still a community that wants to survive, and maintain itself in the long run. The survival and preservation of its democratic character is dependent upon the existence of authority and order in such a community.

Despite the conservative connotation of those two notions, they are nevertheless, the necessary conditions for such a progressive community. Certainly, there does not have to be too much order and authority, however there has to be a certain amount, which will enable such a community to maintain itself, legislate, and enforce its decisions. Once those conditions disappear, there is no reason why a community, which is both radical and plural, has to have a supreme authority, or why the individuals which form it, should comply with its decisions.

I claim that the minimum order and authority within the agonistic democracy, cannot be contested. You cannot oppose the fact, that the community as such exists, has a supreme authority, and is democratic. As Keith Breen shows in his analysis of Arendt's political theory, the objective is to

meld the revolutionary consciousness, the awareness that the terms of the political association must periodically undergo deep-seated revision with the 'old virtue of moderation', of caution, and wariness as regards the capriciousness of human deeds.⁵⁸

As aforementioned, where there is great risk, there has to be caution. There is a need for a minimum amount of order, authority, and finally stability, which would permit for contingency of the public realm, which we will inevitably encounter in agonistic democracy.

Agonistic democracy cannot put into question, or recognize the contingency of, its democratic and agonistic character. *Agon* and *demos*, within such a community, are outside of the possible political

contestation. This is the very reason, why in the previous chapters, I wanted to draw a distinction between bounded and unbounded forms of agonism. Whereas in the latter form, the contestation could include values such as democratic citizenship, plurality, in the former, such a contestation is not, or should not be permitted.

So let me ask, what follows from the above-mentioned remarks upon the limits of contestation and plurality in the agonistic democracy? I would like to argue that taking into consideration what has been said so far in any agonistic democracy there has to be established a hegemonic articulation of dominant discourses, practices, and identities, which would exclude the possibility of the contestation of minimum authority, order, and agonistic and democratic character of such a political community. Citizens cannot differ with respect to the issue of whether their community should have a supreme authority, be it democratic, or plural. As I have already mentioned, in the case of the analysis of Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy, agonistic citizenship should be a prevalent form of identity, which partly limits the possibilities of the pluralization of agonistic citizens. Moreover, as William Conolly indicates in his book *Identity, Difference, and Democracy*, what is needed is a certain "[...]self-idealization of a contingent relational identity, that takes itself to be natural and independent".⁵⁹ The achievement of such a naturalization, and independence can only be gained through the already-mentioned hegemonic articulation of the foundations of agonistic democracy.

Of course, we should be wary of the question of how extensive such a universalization of the values of democracy, political community, plurality, or conflictuality should be? In the end, those values may have an elastic meaning, and therefore lead to different results, than those intended. Leaving plurality, democracy and the minimum amount of order and authority outside of the sphere of political contestation, may result in too much authority, order, social homogenization, and political apathy. Nevertheless, this does not imply, that they should be the objects of contestation, but rather that their meaning, which is outside of political contestation should be minimal and

precise. The following point is exactly what Mouffe lacks in her theory, where she claims that the meaning of democratic citizenship is open to contestation. Again, it can be, but some elements that create this meaning should be outside of it. Otherwise, in the long run we run the risk that the former general contestation will become impossible. Unfortunately, in this case, we have to face some trade-offs.

What should be attempted is the creation of political homogeneity. As Sheldon Wolin indicates, such a homogeneity does not have to be necessarily equated with dreadful uniformity.⁶⁰ What we would expect, is a common acceptance, and internalization of the values, which make agonistic democracy possible, and not homogenization with respect to aspects such as ethnicity, culture, nationality, or religion. Although, it is certainly true, that everything is in principle politicizable, it is not true, that everything has to be politicized. As Andrew Schaap argues:

Mouffe's assertion that a well-functioning democracy is one that is highly politicized might be viewed, as naive, since it may sometimes be the case that democracy is only possible by taking certain divisive issues off the political agenda.⁶¹

What I am trying to argue for, is taking values such as plurality, democracy, and the minimal extent of authority and order off the political agenda. That is to say, consciously, refraining from making them politicized issues, through the political homogeneity of democratic citizens established on the basis of the hegemonic articulation of the dominant set of discourses, practices, and identities.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, such a political conception has to become a moral one. Individuals within the agonistic democracy, have to include it within their "[...] larger and more encompassing moral perspectives and identities".⁶² In any agonistic democracy, agonism, and democracy constitute the basic laws, substantive values, or we could say, the spirit of such a community. They are not constitutional laws, but a constitution itself, which is not subject to amendment. The set of values, and goods, prior to the legal structure of a community, without which agonistic democracy would not be what it is, or can be.⁶³ They constitute the political unity,

or as we referred to it earlier, political homogeneity, within which agonistic democracy can achieve the maximum degree of plurality and political contestation.

The necessity of the achievement and maintenance, of such a political homogeneity, demands the exclusion of sets of discourses, practices, and identities that contradict them. In other words, the identification, and exclusion, of what Carl Schmitt calls, internal and external enemies. Ways of being, doing, and speaking, which are not compatible with the above-mentioned substantive values of agonistic democracy.

Let me refer one more time to Carl Schmitt, in order to give a clearer picture, of what I am trying to argue for.

Only parties, which are bound to uphold the constitution should be allowed “an equal chance” to struggle. Parties, which threaten the existing order and use constitutional means to challenge the constitution, should be subjected to rigorous control.⁶⁴

Of course, agonistic citizens have to be attentive to the excluded of their community, and constantly verify, whether such an exclusion is really necessary, or in accordance with the endorsed principles of democracy and agonism. Nevertheless, at the same time, they have to be aware, as Joel Olson argues, that “[...] some enemies cannot be turned into friends and some conflicts are inherently antagonistic”.⁶⁵ In other words, some differences and conflicts, even in an agonistic democracy, cannot be reconciled.

In the end, let me elaborate on the last reason, why plurality and contestation within the agonistic democracy have to be restricted. As in any political community, so in agonistic democracy, we run the risk of the lack of cohesion. This time, it is not so much a cohesion, which permits citizens to create one political community and avoid disintegration, but rather the cohesion that permits them to act together, and improve such a community. The problem with political agonism, and especially, with the unbounded form of it, is that it provides only a negative sense of

public participation based on the political contestation. Nevertheless, what is needed is, as Mouffe points out, “[...] social positivity in the face of the subversive logic of democracy”.⁶⁶ The presence of a shared public space, in which we can talk to each other, and act together. In such an Arendtian public realm citizens may increase their plurality by differentiating themselves through their acts, and speeches, and create power through the recognition of common objectives, and cooperation.

What is needed is civic cohesion, which permits citizens not only to stay together but also to act in concert. For that very reason, agonistic citizens may be very often encouraged not to pluralize themselves more, or contest existing political structures, but to act together on the basis of the already existing commonalities, laws, and institutions. In other words, sometimes it might be better for agonistic democracy, when homogeneity prevails over diversity, and acceptance over contestation.

5. The State and Agonistic Democracy

In this chapter, I would like to analyze when, and why, we need such an entity as the state in the agonistic democracy. I will argue for a particular role and form of it in agonistic democracy. The presentation of why do we need the state in the an agonistic democracy, and what should be its role and form within it, will be based on the already presented account of what agonistic democracy is, and what the appropriate limits of contestation and plurality are within it. I take such an exposition as especially valuable for the theory of agonistic democracy, since as Wigenbach writes:

Politics involves institutions, and among those institutions, is the state; to the extent, agonistic democracy proposes a theory of politics, it must also account for the institutions, including state.⁶⁷

Before going into the details of the specific relationship between the state and agonistic democracy, let me firstly indicate, what I will mean by the term state, in the course of the next

chapter. By the term state, I mean a concrete social agent that can act rationally – i.e, advance a certain set of goals through means, that it takes as appropriate for their achievement. Such a social agent, is composed of the set of agencies, through which it can act, and interact with other social agents – i.e., citizens, and other states.⁶⁸ Principally, it is a territorial and administrative entity, which has the monopoly over the use of the means of coercion, and power to enforce decisions taken by a sovereign within a state (e.g., people, monarch, aristocracy). In a given territory, it has the supreme authority, and therefore, it is the last instance of appeal for citizens. I will be useful to remind ourselves right now, that as any political entity, it is a result of hegemonic articulation, through which social agents accept its nature and partly internalize it. Of course, as a concrete social agent, it may also form its own hegemonic articulations, or enforce articulations proposed by others.

5.1 The Role of the State in an Agonistic Democracy.

Firstly, we have to ask, why do we need the particular form of agonistic state that I would like to propose in this section? Or, are there some conditions, or circumstances, in which the state is not necessary for this specific type of political community? The answer to this question is provided, I claim, by the differentiation between ideal and non-ideal theory of agonistic democracy. By the former, I mean, agonistic democracy, in which citizens exhibit a perfect, or nearly perfect adherence to the values that define agonistic democracy. Referring to what has been presented in the third chapter, a type of agonistic democracy in which the appropriate thresholds of political contestation and plurality are established and maintained through the spontaneous interaction of citizens. In such a spontaneous interaction, citizens always treat themselves not as enemies but as adversaries, oppose dominant forms of recognition in a reasonable and intelligible way, and finally endorse agonistic respect and the ethos of pluralization.

I intentionally refer to the features of the theories of agonistic democracy, that were presented in the second chapter, since I claim, that Mouffe, Tully, and Honig do not take into the account the following differentiation between ideal and non-ideal theories of agonistic democracy. They may prescribe a certain ethics to be followed by agonistic citizens, in order to make their community peaceful and efficient. Nonetheless, they do not ask the question, what if such an ethics won't be endorsed by everyone. This question is of high importance, especially in the non-ideal theory of agonistic democracy, where not every individual or group will endorse a prescribed ethics. Although they do recognize, that this ethics may not be followed, they do not specify how to prevent such transgressions, or what institutional mechanisms have to be in place, in order to respond to them.

I claim that in the non-ideal theory of agonistic democracy, there arises the need for a certain form of a state. We need the state in the conditions where there are not only adversaries, but also enemies, where not every opposition is intelligible and reasonable, or where not everyone is committed to agonistic respect, or the ethos of pluralization. In other words, where the appropriate thresholds of contestation and plurality, which define agonistic democracy cannot be maintained by the citizens themselves, there arises a need for a state that could help citizens to maintain them.

As I illustrated why we need a state in agonistic democracy taking into consideration appropriate thresholds of contestation and plurality, let me continue to the question of its role. Firstly, as has been already said, it has to maintain the appropriate thresholds of contestation and plurality. It has to step in, where the unity of the agonistic democracy is threatened. In other words, where the political homogeneity of agonistic citizens based on the principles of agonism and democracy is undermined by certain groups or individuals within or outside a community. It has to intervene, where the respectful conflict among adversaries transforms itself, or with high probability may transform itself, into a violent conflict among enemies. In such conditions, the state may be

illustrated as the embodiment of the minimal amount of order and authority necessary for agonistic democracy, that I have described in the section 3.2.

Secondly, the state has to coordinate the relations among different associations within civil society, the adherence of those associations to the basic values of agonistic democracy, and the relation between itself and those associations. What is important to point out on this step of my argument is that I do not intend to establish the state is “the owner and licenser of politics”⁶⁹, or try to promote, as Robinson and Tormey refer to it, “a creeping project of expanding state’s control”.⁷⁰ What is intended, is rather the control of the main center of politics, which is the civil society, according to the basic values of agonistic democracy. The state’s role is to ensure that, associations within civil society do not try to homogenize their members or members of other associations, or deny them the possibility of political contestation. On the one hand, the state’s role is to preserve political homogeneity based on the values of agonistic democracy, and on the other hand, maintain and enhance social plurality, which is present in the civil society. As Michael Walzer argues, “only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society, only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state”.⁷¹ In our case, we could say, that only an agonistic state can create an agonistic civil society, and only an agonistic civil society can sustain an agonistic state.

Thirdly, apart from the supervision of the civil society, the state has to prevent associations from taking control of it. Let me quote one more time Carl Schmitt, in order to illustrate this point, “[...] it’s a dangerous deception when one single group pursues its special interest in the name of the whole”.⁷² In Claude Lefort’s words, the place of power has to stay empty.⁷³ No association should be able to control the state, and enforce its hegemonic articulation, through the coercive apparatus of the state, dominating, and in the same time representing the social totality. If such conditions are obtained, then not only one association would start to dominate the whole society, but also the state itself, could lose its claims to fidelity and loyalty. As a consequence, the state has

to, on the one hand, encourage associations, and its members towards political contestation, and on the other hand, try to neutralize them with regard to its sovereign power.

It partly needs to control hegemonic articulations, which through their promoted discourses, practices, and identities may undermine the basic order and values of agonistic democracy, and the state's supreme authority. It may do this through intentional depoliticization of certain issues, which as I pointed out in the third chapter, should not be politicized in order to maintain the thresholds of contestation and plurality. Again, what we have to be aware of, is that even in an agonistic democracy there are going to be enemies of the social order, which will have to be excluded, or subjected to rigorous control. The state cannot permit for the transgression of the thresholds of contestation and plurality, through various ways of acting and speaking incompatible with agonistic democracy.

Fourthly, the state cannot limit its role only to the maintenance of order, authority and peace within the agonistic democracy. Sometimes it also has to play an active role, enhancing the possibilities of citizens towards political contestation, and pluralization. Such an enhancement may be performed through granting or strengthening of civil, political, and social rights. As I have pointed out in the section 3.1, citizens may need access to certain institutional sites, material resources, or even the equality of those resources, in order to be able to contest power relations and pluralize themselves. The provision of such political, economic, and social goods may be efficiently achieved by the state where citizens themselves cannot acquire them. Again, as we can see, the state is necessary, where conditions for agonistic democracy are not in place, or where citizens themselves cannot assure the existence of such conditions.

5.2 The Form of the State in the Agonistic Democracy

In this final subsection, I would like to analyze the form a state has to have, or should have, in an agonistic democracy. In other words, what form of it is implied by its role in agonistic democracy, which I have described in the last chapter. I won't focus here on the specific institutions that an agonistic state should have, such as for example, representative or participatory institutions, but rather on its general form. By the general form, I mean its strength, extension, and neutrality towards civil society.

Let me start with the question, which has no simple answer; which form of the state are we confronted with in an agonistic democracy? A strong or a weak form? On the one hand, we are confronted with the weak pluralistic state, threatened by its dissolution.⁷⁴ To reiterate, agonistic democracy is a political community, which contains a multiplicity of associations, which struggle among themselves over the establishment of their preferred hegemonic articulation. We have to be aware that in the non-ideal theory of agonistic democracy, they will not only attempt to articulate the dominant set of discourses, practices, and identities in accordance with the basic values of agonistic democracy but also contrary to them, and what's more important, they will attempt to gain control of the state. Such an imperfect high degree of pluralization and political contestation may substantially weaken the state, or even undermine its supreme authority.

On the other hand, the need for the state to control such hegemonic articulations within civil society, and attempts to take a control of itself, would suggest a rather strong state, which could neutralize those associations and protect itself, and its citizens. As David Dyzenhaus writes in his analysis of Carl Schmitt's theory of the state - "[...] if one values individual freedom and autonomy, one should see that see that a strong state is a necessary precondition of this value[...]"⁷⁵ The same observation applies, I claim, to the political community based on the principles, such as agonism and democracy. If there is to be a high degree of political contestation, and social pluralization,

there also has to be in place a strong state, which would be in a position to preserve the unity, of such a radical and plural community based on the specific political homogeneity of its citizens. Even though, the conditions of agonistic democracy would rather suggest a weak state, the need to preserve those conditions, calls for a strong state.

Secondly, let me ask, whether the agonistic state is to be total or partial with respect to civil society? In other words, whether there are some social spheres, in which state does not, or should not intervene, or if every aspect of society may be influenced by the state? As I have pointed out in the previous chapters of this work, contrary to liberal theories of democracy, in agonistic theories of democracy, there cannot be, *a priori*, private spheres, beyond the reach of political contestation. Apart from the basic values of agonistic democracy, which I have described in the fourth chapter, every social arrangement may be contested by citizens.

According to Kirstie McClure, agonistic democracy “[...] extends the terrain of political contestation to the everyday enactment of social practices and the routine reiteration of cultural representations.”⁷⁶ This implies, that the agonistic state may be in a position to be obliged to enforce hegemonic articulations, which will concern the most elementary forms of life of citizens, such as child education, nutrition, sexual life, or consumption patterns. It does not necessarily, have to do this, but it has to be in a position to be able to perform such tasks. Of course, it may happen that the dominant set of discourses, practices and identities will establish quite an extensive private sphere, but it may also happen otherwise, and the agonistic democratic state has to be prepared for such a state of affairs. As a consequence, I claim that the agonistic state is rather an extensive state, or we could even say, a total one, in which society and state “penetrate each other”.⁷⁷

Finally, the agonistic state cannot claim to be neutral with respect to its citizens. Firstly, it’s going to promote the maintenance of agonistic democracy through the control of the compatibility of hegemonic articulations with the basic values of agonistic democracy. In other words, bounded plurality and contestation may have a priority over other types of values, that citizens may happen

to promote. Secondly, the state will enforce hegemonic articulations, which will favor certain sets of discourses, practices, and identities over the others. Even though such an enforcement might be temporal, and subject to political contestation, it nonetheless happens to promote certain values that contradict possible claims towards the state's neutrality.

6. Conclusion

Agonistic democracy is a specific type of political community. As I have tried to show in the third chapter of my work, it is primarily a political community that is defined by its two main principles: democracy and agonism. Those two principles can be maintained through the proper balance of the degree of political contestation and plurality present in a given political community.

Firstly, I presented the minimum threshold of contestation and plurality, which could be maintained by the establishment of the subjective and objective conditions of contestation. In other words, a specific set of institutions, which enables citizens to be willing and able to contest power and pluralize themselves.

Secondly, I tried to convince my reader that the maximum threshold of contestation, and plurality is to be maintained through the preservation of the minimal extent of order and authority, and a partial exclusion of the basic values of agonistic democracy from the sphere of political contestation. As I claimed, the presence of those two thresholds implies the existence, or at least the possibility of establishing the agonistic democracy.

In the fifth chapter, I then argued, that if we are working with the non-ideal theory of agonistic democracy, then we cannot presuppose, that the presented thresholds will be maintained by citizens themselves. As a consequence, I have postulated a particular form and role of the agonistic state, which would be in a position, to help the citizenry to maintain the aforementioned thresholds.

In the model of agonistic democracy developed in this work, the state, where it is necessary, intervenes in the civil society, and as a consequence guarantees the possibility of maintaining the thresholds of political contestation and plurality. Is the establishment of such an agonistic state probable? Maybe it is not, but the probability of its establishment was not, the aim of my argument. The aforementioned form of the agonistic state is implied by the need to establish the limits of political contestation, and plurality within the agonistic democracy. The form of the agonistic state may be neither desirable, nor probable to establish, but it is nonetheless necessary, if one wants to construct such a political community as the agonistic democracy.

I think that the model of the agonistic state developed above, is that which makes the instantiation of agonistic democracy possible. Even though, the establishment of the thresholds of contestation and plurality, and the agonistic state, which would be at the same time prone and averse to resistance is not within the reach of most democratic societies. It is certainly a political project, which in the long run could be endorsed and realized by them. Moreover, because of the open character of agonistic democracy, it is a theory of democracy, which, I claim, could be appealing for citizens of most modern democratic societies. Such a combination of inducement, and possibility may one day make this political community a reality.

Nevertheless, if one wants to make it real, not only do we need more political practice in case of actual democratic communities, but also, more theoretical works on the nature, and possibilities of agonistic democracy. With my work on the limits of political contestation and plurality, and the role of the state in agonistic democracy, I have tried to engage in the theoretical study of agonistic democracy, hoping that it will not only clarify the meaning of agonistic democracy, but also make it more feasible for contemporary democratic societies to achieve.

Notes

1. See Chantal Mouffe (2000), p.22; Bonnie Honig (1993), p.15; James Tully (1995), p.183.
2. See Edward Wigenbach (2011), Part II.
3. Chantal Mouffe (1993), p.99-100.
4. William Connolly (2002), p.201-203; Jacques Ranciere (2006), p.71.
5. Bonnie Honig (1993), p.112; James Tully (2008), p.300.
6. Edward Wigenbach (2011), chap. 3, para.4.
7. Mark Wenman (2015), p.18.
8. Chantal Mouffe (2013), p.14.
9. Andrew Schapp (2006), p.257.
10. See Antonio Gramsci (1999), p.145. Gramsci elaborates on the topic of social hegemony, where he refers to the dominant fundamental group, which imposes “the general direction” on the social life.
11. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001), p.xi. In the terminology used by Laclau and Mouffe, this concept is referred to as “the nodal point”.
12. Wigenbach (2001), ch.6, para.15.
13. William Connolly (2002), p.160. As a matter of fact, Connolly employs the term “the necessary injustice” claiming, that it would be the term potentially used by Nietzsche.
14. Bonnie Honig (2011), p.120.
15. Connolly (2002), p.159.
16. Chantal Mouffe (2000), p.33.
17. See Joel Olson (2009), p.175-176. In the following paper, Olson distinguishes conflicts between “friendly enemies”, and the ones, in which the aim is to “defeat one’s opponent”.
18. See Chantal Mouffe (1995), p.13. “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.”
19. Hannah Arendt (1958), p.188,189.
20. Carl Schmitt (2007), p.32-33.

21. Mouffe (2000), p.5; Connolly (2002), p.87.
22. Mouffe (2013), p.98.
23. Ibid., p.18.
24. See Niccolò Machiavelli (1996), p.16. “They do not consider that in every republic are two diverse humors, that of the people and that of the great, and that all the laws that are made in favor of freedom arise from their disunion, as can easily be seen to have occurred Rome.”
25. John Rawls (1993), p.253: “[...] this content has two parts: substantive principles of justice for the basic structure (the political values of justice); and guidelines of enquiry and conceptions of virtue that make public reason possible (the political values of public reason)”; For the presentation of the Habermasian discourse model see Seyla Benhabib (1994), p.31.
26. Adam Finlayson (2009), p.28.
27. See Laclau and Mouffe (2001), p.xii.
28. See Martin Heidegger (1996), p.208.
29. See Wigenbach (2011), ch.1, para.9.
30. See Jacques Ranciere (2006), p.55.
31. See Chantal Mouffe (2013), p.62.
32. Ranciere (2006), p.71.
33. Sheldon Wolin (2006), p.23.
34. Ibid.
35. Christa Acampora (2003), p.375.
36. Thomas Fossen (2008), p.390.
37. Mouffe (2000), p.95.
38. Ibid., p.102.
39. Michael Oakeshott (1975), p.149-158.
40. See Mouffe (2000), p.95-96.
41. See Doreen Massey (1995), p.288.
42. See James Tully (2008), p.147.

43. Tully (2008), p.199. “Any rule of recognition is thus in principle open to dissent, discussion, consideration and, if necessary, alteration, in accord with the totality of rules that are not in question in any particular case.”
44. From Wenman (2015), p.159.
45. Tully (2008), p.146.
46. Hans Lindahl (2009), p.65. Lindahl criticizes Tully for the lack of distinction between contestation with respect to legality and illegality.
47. Bonnie Honig (1993), p.2-3.
48. Honig (2011), p.29.
49. Honig (1993), p.15.
50. Wigenbach (2011), ch.3, para.4.
51. Dana Villa (2001), p.123.
52. See Arendt (1958), p. 22-23. In the second chapter, Arendt elaborates on the distinction between private and public realm.
53. See Bonnie Honig (1993), p. 116. “*Virtù* theories of politics rejects, problematize, or resist any attempt to ground political authority unproblematically in a law of laws that is immune to contestation or amendment.”
54. See Mouffe (2000), p.93. “[...] the political nature of the limits should be acknowledged instead of being presented as requirements of morality or rationality.”
55. Ibid., p.28. Mouffe criticizes Rawls for his *a priori* distinction on public and private spheres.
56. Mouffe (1995), p.3.
57. Wigenbach (2011), ch.2, para.3.
58. Keith Breen (2009), p.143.
59. Connolly (2002), p.177.
60. Wolin (2006), p.26.
61. Schaap (2006), p.270.
62. Wigenbach (2011), ch.7, para.14.
63. See Ulrich Preuss (1999), p. 166. Preuss on the basis of Schmitt’s work differentiates the concepts of Constitution, and Constitutional Law.

64. Paul Hirst (1999), p.14.
65. Olson (2009), p.168.
66. See Laclau and Mouffe (2001), p. 189.
67. Wigenbach (2011), ch.4, para.7.
68. See Phillip Pettit (2014), p.133. Pettit gives a clear account, of what it means for the state to be a rational agent.
69. Honig (1993), p.13.
70. Robinson and Tormey (2009), p.140.
71. Michael Walzer (1995), p. 104.
72. Carl Schmitt (1999), p.205.
73. Claude Lefort (1985), p.305.
74. See Hirst (1999), p.10.
75. David Dyzenhaus (1999), p.80.
76. Kirstie McClure (1995), p.123.
77. Hirst (1999), p.10.

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