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## *Stasis* and Politics: On the Forgotten Role of Violence

### Abstract:

One of the major questions emerging in present-day reflections on politics is related to violence and its relation to institutional order and law. In the paper, an issue of concern for a very particular form of political conflict, that is, civil war, is addressed. Violence in politics, and particularly its specific form, that is, *stasis* (civil war), has been omitted from philosophical reflection on the origins of politics. Contrary to the traditional representation of the constitution of the political sphere, contemporary political philosophy attempts to grasp the fundamental place of violence in politics. This paper will analyze two major ways of representing politics: the traditional one, which suppresses violence, and the contemporary one, which brings to the forefront of reflection its presence. The comparison of these two depictions of politics affords us a comprehension of the evolution of contemporary reflection on politics, and deeply modifies how we understand politics. This article focuses on the reinterpretation of the view of politics offered by Nicole Loraux and Chantal Mouffe and discloses the influence of their reflection on our understanding of politics.

### Keywords:

civil war, conflict, politics, democracy, Mouffe, Loraux, Agamben, Arendt

Violence always posed a problem for philosophical reflection, but recently and quite unexpectedly it has become a truly existential question for Europeans. This sudden appearance of violence in its various forms may seem paradoxical when compared to the enormous intellectual, as well as political, effort to prevent such events. We witness political struggles taking the form of very dynamic and sometimes violent demonstrations and fights (the first

example would be the London Riots in 2011; the second, would be the Yellow Vests [*Gilets Jaunes*] Movement that poses an undeniable challenge for the existing French political order). But the violence in current politics manifests itself as the rising popularity of right movements, which explicitly found their political programs and demands on the interpretation of politics as the endless struggle with an enemy viewed as an existential threat. Regardless of the concern that those phenomena may cause, replacing the almost ritual lament over the present situation with reflection on its possible origins might be more beneficial for our present-day and future politics.

From the very beginning, the problem of violence has shaped the trajectory of the Western reflection on politics. It suffices to recall discussions on just war or the debates concerning the limits of the use of power by the state.<sup>1</sup> What seems to be a distinctive trait of the contemporary reflection in political thought concerning the problem of violence is the visible change in the modes of its apprehension. The usual dismissal of violence in politics has been replaced with the recognition that violence and conflicts are constitutive traits of politics. The transformation of the general attitude towards the problem of violence is, in a way, confirmed by the significance of Carl Schmitt's legacy in the current continental reflection on politics. Schmitt, who for biographical reasons for a long time was a *persona non grata*, returns as one of the most significant philosophers of the twentieth century. The reappearance of the legacy of this conservative thinker, an active supporter of the Third Reich, in contemporary leftist political reflection can be puzzling. Yet it can be explained by the fundamental redefinition of the understanding of politics underway, resulting from reinterpreting the latter in terms of political and friend-enemy opposition. Consequently, politics is apprehended as not only a natural space for manifesting conflict, but conflict – it must be added, that this constitutive conflict takes the form of possible war – becomes the condition of possibility for politics.

Apart from the growing interest in Carl Schmitt's thought,<sup>2</sup> what seems to be the most distinctive trait of contemporary philosophy of politics is its tendency to overcome, or simply reject, the vocabulary of the former philosophical generation. Although philosophers like Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have reintroduced ideas borrowed from Schmitt and Antonio Gramsci,<sup>3</sup> it should not escape our attention that bringing back their legacy is accompanied by the process of obliterating or overcoming the oppositions constitutive for modern political thought. The latter is understood here as a particular form of reflection on politics that supports the system of parliamentary democracy. However, such a theoretical support should not be comprehended in a narrow sense, that is, as a set of claims providing a necessary grounds for the system of parliamentary democracy, but rather should be understood in a broader sense as propositions and – what is equally important – preferences explicitly or tacitly sustaining that particular political system. This explains the vital role of the historical reflection on the origins of the political, disclosing the fundamental characteristics of Western politics, or to put it differently, determining the conditions of possibility for politics.

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1) The reader can find a very detailed analysis of the problem of just war in the book *Znaczenie wojny* by Magdalena Baran. Her book offers an excellent introduction to the history of the problem, as well as to contemporary discussions concerning the issue of just war. Magdalena Baran, *Znaczenie wojny. Pytając o wojnę sprawiedliwą* (Łódź: Fundacja Liberté, 2018).

2) Schmitt's political philosophy appears as the main reference in Jacques Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*. Moreover, Agamben used his concept of sovereign power in his genealogy of modernity presented in *Homo Sacer*. Aside from Derrida and Agamben, Chantal Mouffe includes Schmitt's concept of the political and the distinction between friend and enemy in her project on adversarial democracy. The discussion concerning the possible reinterpretation of Schmitt's legacy for the purposes of democratic politics has its continuation in Benjamin Arditi's works, in which he questions Mouffe's interpretation of Schmitt's concept. Benjamin Arditi, "On the Political: Schmitt contra Schmitt," *Telos* 142 (Spring 2008): 7–28.

3) To put it briefly, the theory of power developed by Laclau and Mouffe is based upon two major ideas taken from other thinkers, that is, the Gramscian concept of hegemony (which in Gramsci's philosophy refers to the constitutive mechanism of power in modern democracies) and the Lefortian concept of the democratic imaginary (which in Lefort's philosophy replaced the type of representation of power that supports monarchy).

## The Forgotten Violence

In what follows, the two most significant interpretations of modern Western politics and its origins will be juxtaposed. The first one, represented by Hannah Arendt and Christian Meier could be named traditional, due to the depiction of politics as a distinct realm having its own normativity and goals. What is crucial for the argument is that politics in this perspective emerges as a transgression of violence. The second one, which can be found in Nicole Loraux's rereading of the history of the Greek *polis*, and which constitutes the background of Chantal Mouffe's project of radical democracy, emphasizes the conflictual nature of politics and tends to preserve violence as the essential element of politics.

A perfect illustration of how a political philosophy strives to provide a conceptual framework capable of grasping the subtle differences between various phenomena related to violence, force, power, and conflict is Hannah Arendt's thought. In her essay *On Violence*, Arendt points out that we should meticulously differentiate between force, violence, and power. As she claims: "To use them as synonyms not only indicates a certain deafness to linguistic meanings, which would be serious enough, but it has also resulted in a kind of blindness to the realities they correspond to."<sup>4</sup> According to this perspective, an elaborate conceptual framework is vital in order to fathom the complexity of politics. Due to Arendt's inclination to establish nuanced terminology referring to the problem of violence, her thought can be viewed as an epitome of a prominent current in Western philosophy, one founded upon the distinction between pre-political and political phenomena. According to Arendt, the fundamental incompatibility between violence and politics arises from the instrumental nature of the former and its pre-linguistic character.<sup>5</sup> In consequence, violence is by nature excluded from the realm of politics. Arendt concludes her reflection on the relation between these phenomena as follows: "Power and violence are opposites: where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent."<sup>6</sup>

Arendt's interpretation of ancient and modern politics will serve as the point of reference for further analysis, since her thought seems to contain all the main elements of what may be called the grand narrative shaping the Western philosophy of politics. It is worth mentioning that a very similar interpretation of the origins of Greek politics can be found in Christian Meier's writings. What is more important, however, is that his concept of politics is indebted to Carl Schmitt's notion of the political, although he significantly redefines most of Schmitt's ideas.<sup>7</sup> Although Meier considers Schmitt's reinterpretation of politics as vital for understanding the process of the constitution of political communities, his main goal is to situate Schmitt's concept within democratic politics.<sup>8</sup> The attempt to democratize Schmitt's political philosophy seems to pose a challenge to many contemporary thinkers. As it will be argued below, a similar goal governs Mouffe's interpretation of Schmitt's concept of the political and the friend-enemy dichotomy. Nevertheless, the final reading of the politics emerging from her works differs significantly from Meier's interpretation, for she puts the emphasis on the inherently conflictual character of politics, a characteristic that Meier tends to diminish.

What both Arendt and Meier share is a fundamental presupposition about the character of politics, or more precisely, its autonomy from the economic or, as Arendt would say, the social sphere.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the first

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4) Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, in *The Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 142.

5) Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 19.

6) Arendt, *On Violence*, 155.

7) Christian Meier, *The Greek Discovery of Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 15–19.

8) This explanation can be found in the introduction to the Polish edition of his book. Christian Meier, "Wstęp do wydania polskiego," in *Powstanie polityczności u Greków*, trans. Marek A. Cichocki (Warszawa: Teologia Polityczna, 2012), 15.

9) *Ibid.*, 21; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 24.

dichotomy shaping this type of interpretation is founded upon the distinction between natural needs and political goals. Arendt consistently founds upon this distinction between the natural sphere of reproduction and politics not only her interpretation of the nature of Greek politics, but also her genealogy of modern Western politics, which results from the obliteration of this original difference.

The emphasis Arendt puts on the process of the degeneration of politics into the sphere of economy and administration of natural needs has become one of the major problems discussed in contemporary thought, despite that the majority of philosophers would probably not suggest a complete separation of politics from social, economic matters. For instance, Meier and Mouffe share the same concern about the reduction of all political questions and demands to the economic sphere.<sup>10</sup> A similar concern permeates Mouffe's analysis of the progressive degeneration of politics into the governance of economic needs. Politics and its inherent problems tend to be replaced with different rationality and goals. Thus, the most imminent task for political reflection is to re-establish the autonomy of politics.

The other thematic, equally important for the interpretation of politics, is already mentioned, namely, the exclusion of violence as non-political by nature. Consequently, all forms of competition or political struggle are apprehended as phenomena that are by definition incompatible with violence.

### The Return of the Suppressed

The nature of political conflict has recently been brought to light by philosophers attempting to undermine Arendt's and Meier's perception of politics. Despite the radical character of various critiques of this representation of politics, contemporary thinkers retain some elements of the depiction of politics presented by Arendt and Meier. For example, they preserve the fundamental distinction between persuasion and violent confrontation, which still shapes reflections on politics.

Current political philosophy seems to abandon the consensual model of politics, which was characteristic for the preceding generation. Of course, there are present-day proponents of the consensual model, which emphasizes the independent character of the political sphere. Nevertheless, contemporary political thought – contrary to the traditional model – focuses on the hidden, yet fundamental, presence of violence within politics.

This visible redefinition of politics began in the late 1970s with the works of philosophers inspired by Nietzsche. The *oeuvre* of Michel Foucault is an example of the way intellectual thought fundamentally transforms the mode in which politics is apprehended. The reversal of Clausewitz maxim, which opens Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended*, inaugurates an understanding of politics in which constant war replaces the view of politics as the abolition of violence. As he writes:

And while it is true that political power puts an end to war and establishes or attempts to establish the reign of peace in civil society, it certainly does not do so in order to suspend the effects of power or to neutralize the disequilibrium revealed by the last battle of the war. According to this hypothesis, the role of political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force, and to reinscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals.<sup>11</sup>

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10) In his introduction, Meier echoes Arendt's stance from *The Human Condition* concerning the transformation of the political sphere into a mere function of economy. Meier, "Wstęp do wydania polskiego," 19.

11) Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 15–16.

Foucault indicates that peace is the name of the strategic situation that only veils the constant war permeating society. However, Foucault's thesis goes much further and presumes that politics does not abolish war but rather alters it into the permanent strategic situation. Thus, the latent war, instead of eliminating the possibility of politics, transforms into its essential, positive condition.

### *Stasis* – the Origin of Politics

The issue of the interrelation between a specific social, conflictual ontology and the political regime returns not only with the concepts of politics inspired by Foucault's or Schmitt's works, but has recently emerged also in Nicole Loraux's book *The Divided City*.<sup>12</sup> Her work undermines the traditional depiction of the origins of politics upon which Arendt's and Meier's thought is founded. Contrary to the depiction of the Greek origins of politics supporting the political philosophy of Arendt and Meier, Loraux aims at revealing a forgotten legacy of Greek politics, that is its inherently conflictual character. That is why her analysis focuses on the most extreme form of political conflict, that is, *stasis* (civil war). War has always been an ambiguous phenomenon, due to its possible outcomes. While the victory over enemies provides the ultimate confirmation of the political community, the lost war puts it at risk. In contrast to the war waged against external enemies, the civil war has always been perceived as the highest danger for every community, for it means the war against fellow citizens. Her goal is not limited to the simple debunking of the founding myth of politics. From the very beginning, her analysis grasps the complex relations between the conflictual ontology of politics and the original act of forgetting the warlike nature of the political.

The significance of her work is in a way confirmed by the fact that in his recent book devoted to the problem of *stasis*, Giorgio Agamben chooses her book as the privileged point of reference. While in his previous work, *State of Exception*, Agamben explored other dimensions of politicization specific to European culture, that is, the state of exception, in *Stasis* Agamben aims at disclosing civil war as the second pillar of Western politics. Both phenomena, although different in nature, are, in fact, two sides of the same process and thus constitute the necessary elements of the apparatus of Western politics.

Agamben's interpretation of *stasis* is of great importance as an example of philosophy attempting to reformulate the traditional concept of politics, even though its significance is limited since the phenomenon of *stasis* is inscribed in the more general problem of the interlacement of natural, biological life and its normative, political form.<sup>13</sup> Agamben is more concerned with undermining the fundamental distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, yet by underlining the necessary bond between the social and the political, he questions the autonomy of politics and consequently challenges one of the fundamental elements of the traditional representation of politics. This reading of *stasis* accentuates the constant possibility of the latter as the hidden and at the same time constitutive aspect of politics. However, it is not clear what consequences for current politics Agamben would like to draw from his theses. Whereas *State of Exception* only adumbrates the possibility of restoring politics understood as the rupture of the bond between violence and law,<sup>14</sup> *Stasis* concludes with a reflection on civil war understood as an inherent danger of politics. At this point, Agamben's interpretation is fully compliant with the traditional concept of politics which he *expressis verbis* dismisses. The reduction of *stasis* to a simple danger is perfectly consistent with the representation of politics as the neutralization of initial conflicts.

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12) Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

13) Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, trans. Nicholas Heron (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 11–12.

14) Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 88, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226009261.001.0001>.



Compared to Agamben's concept of *stasis*, Loraux's interpretation is arguably more radical, since *stasis* is viewed as political *par excellence*.<sup>15</sup> She seems to go much further in the reconstruction of the suppressed dimension of politics, not only when she suggests that a conflictual, violent dimension constantly pervades political institutions – for example, the *agora* – which is usually conceived as political space, bereft of any type of violence and where the best argument prevails – but above all when she treats civil war as the paradigm of political order. Contrary to the traditional understanding of the *agora*, Loraux brings to the forefront of her interpretation the existence of violence within the political struggle. At first sight, the aim of Loraux's analysis seems to be compatible with the contemporary projects of political community founded upon disagreement,<sup>16</sup> but when Loraux makes clear that she sees *stasis* as the model of this conflictual community, it is clear that the radicality of her perspective is hardly reconcilable with the former. Recall where Loraux states: "Stasis, then, would in fact be something like the cement of the community."<sup>17</sup> It is highly questionable whether Chantal Mouffe who is the most renowned proponent of conflictual democracy, would agree that conflict transformed into civil war could provide a necessary political bond.

As Loraux reminds us, even the term "democracy", contains a trace of the original conflicts. Democracy, interpreted literally, as "*demos*" and "*kratos*", means the victory of the people.<sup>18</sup> However, as Loraux underlines, the term "democracy" was to some extent troublesome, and consequently the Greek tradition developed various strategies of avoiding both the term and its practical implications. What constitutes the core argument in Loraux's study is the ambivalence of both terms. As she argues, "*kratos*" means not only victory but also the supremacy of one of the factions over another, and "*demos*" can refer to all citizens as well as to only a particular group. Thus, from this perspective democracy refers first and foremost to the original division, not to the unity of *demos*. Moreover, the line between fight and persuasion, which is the key element in Arendt's and Meier's interpretations, is being obliterated by Loraux. As she remarks: "The gap between speaking and fighting may be smaller than it seems there."<sup>19</sup> The quoted phrase suggests that the supposed crucial crossing of the transformational threshold from political struggle to a form of a dispute may not be different from the clash on the battlefield. This question concerning the nature of political conflicts is central in contemporary discussions.<sup>20</sup> Can we legitimately claim that dispute can be devoid of any type of violence? Perhaps dispute itself is an operator of violence, of violence that can never be eradicated because it is an integral part of every discursive practice.

Apart from disclosing the similarity between *agon* and the violence of war, Loraux indicates the ambiguity of *stasis* in the Greek tradition. On the one hand, the possibility of *stasis* appeared as a constant and dreaded

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15) Loraux, *The Divided City*, 66.

16) Mouffe's project of adversarial democracy would be an excellent example of such a community. As it will be argued below, aside from a similar idea of the conflictual community, there are some divergences between the model emerging from Mouffe's works and the conflictual model described by Loraux.

17) Loraux, *The Divided City*, 67.

18) Ibid., 250.

19) Ibid., 99.

20) The problem of the violence hidden in language stands at the center of many contemporary discussions. The problem of this presumed difference between persuasion and violence is one of the points of discord between Ernesto Laclau (with whom Mouffe co-authored one of her books, *Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy*. Laclau develops this thematic in his works that deal with the idea of a radical, adversary model of democracy) and Richard Rorty. The Laclau/Rorty debate is interesting, for it brings to the surface assumptions present in the stances, which at first sight seem to be very progressive. To put it briefly, Laclau claims that Rorty consistently omits the elements of violence which are inevitable moments of every discursive practice or political interaction. Unfortunately, Laclau's argument focuses on the internal difficulties of Rorty's stance, resulting from this strategic elimination of the problem of violence, but it leaves aside the historical background from which this stance clearly stems from. Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 2007), 85–125.

possibility, but on the other hand, there is evidence that *stasis* was inscribed within the dynamic of political life as its most extreme form. To illustrate her thesis, Loraux refers to the passage from Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens*, where one of Solon's laws is recalled: the law imposing active participation in the civil war under the threat of the deprivation of civil rights.<sup>21</sup> So, the question arises: why encourage citizens to take part in a conflict that endangers the city?

### The Ambivalent Political Unity

Loraux explains this apparent paradox by pointing to the internal connection between the political order and the conflictual realm of social relations, which subsequently was repressed by political memory. In her perspective, the unity of the city has always been problematic and temporary, always prone to dissolution under the pressure of internal dynamics. If the city is by nature torn apart by incessant conflicts, civil war would appear rather as a natural extension of this fundamental social diversity, which by nature leads to conflict. In sum, Solon's law only reflects the duality of the political realm, which requires unity as well as division as introduced by civil war. Loraux's argument goes even further by interpreting the unity of the city as something which paradoxically is being confirmed by the division initiated by *stasis*. The strange logic of division that indeed turns to the confirmation of the unity, refers to the ambiguity of the notion of *stasis*, which for the Greeks meant both rest and movement. Loraux decides to go further and reads this opposition as referring to division and unity.<sup>22</sup> Her argument focuses on the paradoxical dynamics brought to the surface by *stasis*. At first sight, the only function of the latter is to divide what previously was united, but a closer examination reveals the surprising ability of civil war to re-establish unity. This time the unity originates from the fact that this internal war spares no one. This is the reasoning that explains why, according to Solon's rule, participation in *stasis* was a political duty.<sup>23</sup>

Contrary to Arendt's and Meier's perspectives, Loraux depicts the dynamics inherent to politics as instituted and permeated by violence. So, in contrast to Arendt and Meier, she claims that power not only is not the opposite of violence but requires it.

Regardless of all differences, Arendt's and Loraux's interpretations of Greek politics show unexpected similarities when it comes to the problem of mortality and death. When in *On Revolution* Arendt ponders the mode in which man experiences his own mortality, she depicts the individual experience of mortality as disclosing our "loneliness and impotence,"<sup>24</sup> and yet she discerns the true political potential in the experience of mortality when it is shared with others. Arendt indicates that usually the awareness of inevitable death signifies the most radical equality and is a foretaste of the immortality appertaining to the species. Even though she perceives the force of this experience, which can work as a catalyst in establishing a collective identity, she rejects, at the same time, the possibility of creating the state on the basis of this form of equality. In sum, she once again draws a line between natural phenomena and the political sphere.

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21) Ibid., 106.

22) Ibid, 105.

23) The problem of the bond between division and unity brought to the forefront of Loraux's analysis shows some similarities to the concept of politics in Rancière's works. Politics in Rancière's philosophy is understood as the original division leading to the emergence of two camps: those who are recognized as legitimate citizens and the rest who are devoid of such political significance. Aside from the question concerning the validity of the historical reconstruction supporting Rancière's argument, his main thesis seems quite paradoxical. For he claims that, although politics emerges only as the practice of division, the very act of dividing, in the last instance affirms preexisting unity. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 18.

24) Arendt, *On Revolution*, 165.

In contrast to Arendt, Loraux notices the truly political value in the near-death experience, which is not limited to the emotional basis of the identity of “brothers in arms”. She uses the Trojan War as evidence confirming that the key notions of unity and equality emerge from the confrontation of opposing forces sharing the common possibility of killing or being killed.<sup>25</sup> What may be the most striking point in her presentation, is the form of unity that arises not from experience of a shared lot of fellow soldiers representing one side of the conflict, but rather from what becomes a general experience connecting everyone engaged in the fight. The unity found on the battlefield surpasses the solidarity of brothers in arms joined by the common goal, and springs from *neikos homoion*, or as Loraux translates it, from the “conflict that spares no one.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the equality born from this experience of the battlefield serves to build an analogy between the assigning functions in democratic society and “the reversibility of killing and being killed.”<sup>27</sup>

What is at stake in this reinterpretation of the origins of Greek experience is a radical redefinition of the traditional dichotomies between the internal and external, or between adversary and enemy. This radical reinterpretation supports the traditional representation of politics, but is also present in the contemporary concept of politics and democracy inspired by Schmitt.

### Political Bond: Friendship Versus Hostility

The terms “*inimicus*” and “*hostis*” refer to the adversary, but while the first one designates internal opposition, the second one names an external enemy. The above mentioned distinction plays a vital role in Chantal Mouffe’s thought because it serves as a model of understanding political and social ontology and the normative model for her project of radical democracy. From this perspective, the reflection on the complexity of the constitution of the political sphere developed by Loraux brings some valuable insights into the traditional conception of politics, its specific ontology and dynamics.

In addition to the problems neglected or omitted by historians and philosophers, Loraux’s book addresses the question directly concerned with the founding myth of Western politics, that is, the above mentioned problem of the connection between the constitutive division of the city and its supposed unity. Even though Loraux to some extent challenges this myth and recognizes its significance for the philosophical discourse on politics, she finally abstains herself from deciding on what status should be attributed to the depiction of initial conflict and its relation towards politics. Loraux builds her perspective on elements that she finds constitutive for the process of the institution of politics: the initial conflict and the act of amnesty understood as an erasure of past injustices. Thus, politics – understood as the politics of consensus – is born from the act of leaving the past behind. Quoting the Aristotelian tradition, Loraux claims that politics begins where vengeance stops, but she leaves open the question as to whether this potential of repressed injustices remains or is effectively eliminated.

The problem of a community based on disagreement still poses a challenge for political philosophy, since the conflictual community, or the adversary model of democracy, occupies a central point in contemporary reflection. Loraux’s discourse might be an excellent point of reference for allowing us to understand and correct some of the difficulties of the concept of radical democracy defended by Mouffe. Although Mouffe does not make any references to Loraux’s works, she is deeply indebted to Schmitt’s concept of the political as a fundamentally conflictual sphere. Mouffe inscribes Schmitt’s ideas into a project which aims at deepening

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25) Loraux, *The Divided City*, 112.

26) Ibid.

27) Ibid.



existing Western democracy.<sup>28</sup> This process consists of consistent elimination of some philosophical assumptions supporting the current political order, but it also requires the necessary transformation of existing institutions.<sup>29</sup> To put it briefly, the radical character of this project means above all the recognition that democracy cannot be reduced to laws, institutions, and so forth. Democracy is radical when it accepts its own historical and contingent character, and thus acknowledges its unfinished status.

Although Mouffe's philosophy challenges the key idea shaping the ideal of Western democracy, that is, the idea of consensus, nevertheless it may be argued that the idea of radical democracy preserves some fundamental assumptions upon which the traditional model is founded. Mouffe offers virulent critiques aimed at the consensual model of democracy, the idea of universal communication, and the tradition of rationalism, but her model of radical democracy presumes some minimal agreement concerning basic rules. Radical democracy, as presented in her most renowned book, *On the Political* – whose French title, *L'illusion du consensus*, clearly indicates Mouffe's major opponents – appears to guarantee the required means to deepen democratic aspects of the contemporary Western liberal parliamentary system (the discrepancy between liberal and democratic goals is the issue of critical importance for Mouffe, and it merits noticing that she privileges the democratic over the liberal aspect).<sup>30</sup>

Mouffe defends the concept of politics that takes into account its contingent character, the fundamental place of emotions, and the lack of a neutral language that would allow us to solve the most important problems of the multicultural world. This advocacy for politics based on the recognition of its historical status is accompanied by the rejection of the illusions of past philosophy, aiming at the transformation of politics into a purely rational sphere and searching for universal rules.

Apparently, the concept of radical democracy avoids the pitfalls of former political philosophy and its untenable presumptions. Nevertheless, a closer examination discloses some problematic points, which cannot be resolved within Mouffe's concepts of the political and politics. Although, it may seem that her project of radical democracy, understood as an ongoing, agonistic confrontation, is a very promising alternative to the consensual model, in the end, when it is transposed to the global level, it turns out to be as problematic as the existing political order.

Mouffe attempts not only to replace the cosmopolitan order with the alternative of the multipolar world, but also to enlarge the way in which we apprehend political subjects, by including or rather providing for forms of a political organization different than the state. The prospects for this new, multifaced order seem very promising; however, there is a significant lack in her project concerning the unclear status of this multipolar world and, more precisely, the hidden presumptions upon which such order is based.

Mouffe aims at convincing us that it is possible to construct such a conceptual framework, compatible with the latter institutional structure that would provide unity – although she consistently avoids speaking of unity – of different cultures and their fundamental values, but without subjugating them to the rules and values specific to any one of them. So, it seems that Mouffe strives to construct the alternative model of trans-cultural unity bereft of cultural imperialism. Although her project precisely identifies the main disadvantages of the former model of westernization, it is not obvious if her alternative model of mutual recognition does not imply an assumption that is very similar to the universalist model which she rejects. The recognition of fundamental

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28) Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (New York: Verso, 2013), 67.

29) Mouffe assumes that the problems of contemporary Western democracies cannot be sufficiently resolved without deeper reflection on the philosophical foundations providing them intellectual background content. It is one of the major reasons for her critique of the consensual model of politics, as well as for her reflection on the function of the "rights of man".

30) Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (New York: Verso, 1993), 7.

differences presupposes, however, the existence of shared values that provide the necessary foundation for dialogue and mutual understanding.<sup>31</sup> In short, this global model of, for lack of a better term, the agonistic federation, transposes on the global level the limitations inherent to agonistic, radical democracy.

In various texts Mouffe emphasizes that her model of democracy is based on an acknowledgment of the historical and contingent character of our cultural model; thus, the latter becomes a subject of constant reinterpretation and negotiation. Even though Mouffe points out that everything – including fundamental values – could become the object of such reinterpretation, she must implicitly assume that certain rules of reinterpretation are in fact inviolable. Thus, the question arises, what status should be attributed to those rules of negotiation? Maybe, contrary to what Mouffe admits, her project is not completely open to reinterpretation, and the basic and non-negotiable rules it presumes could be a legacy of her Western intellectual heritage, supporting a form of universalism.

Apart from the problematic status of the tacit rules implied in the project of radical democracy, there is another type of objection that could be raised against Mouffe's standpoint. The division between agonism and antagonism at first sight questions the traditional concept of politics understood as a purely rational exchange of arguments, but further analysis discloses that, except for the conflictual and emotional nature of the political struggle, Mouffe sustains a vision of politics very similar to the model she criticizes. It suffices to mention that the distinctive trait of agonistic struggle is its non-violent character. In fact, one could say that Mouffe's agonistic model is the traditional concept of politics only fortified with affective elements. Thus, one could ask if Mouffe is indeed able to introduce a truly conflictual aspect of politics. Viewed from the historical perspective developed by Loraux, the type of conflicts that Mouffe finds acceptable cannot be apprehended as genuine conflicts. The type of unity resulting directly from warlike conflict is of a different nature than the agonistic fight, which is possible only within the already existing unity.

All the difficulties of the radical, adversary model of democracy seem to stem from the specific topology of the political sustaining both the traditional as well as Mouffe's model, of democracy. As was mentioned above, the dichotomy supporting the traditional representation of politics is founded upon a very particular representation of the process leading to the constitution of the political sphere. According to Arendt and Meier, the latter emerges when violence and warlike struggles are transposed beyond the realm of internal struggles. So, in fact, the origins of the political sphere are related to the establishment of the fundamental line dividing the unpolitical outside, ruled by violence, and the political inside, governed by the force of arguments. In consequence, the representation of politics is inevitably interlinked with a certain topology of the political. In Mouffe's concept of radical democracy this representation of space is preserved, due to the fact that the enemy-adversary dichotomy is established according to the above mentioned line separating the outside from the inside. In addition, this enemy-adversary opposition is strengthened by the notion of the constitutive outside, borrowed from Derrida.<sup>32</sup> As a result, Mouffe is not able to redefine the internal (political) relation in terms of real conflict, since the latter is excluded from politics. This is also an argument for using the more radical concept of politics presented by Loraux to imagine what the true conflictual community could be. So, it is thus indeed possible that radical politics should be reinterpreted as the community of "brothers in *stasis*."<sup>33</sup>

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31) Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 121.

32) Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000), 12.

33) Loraux, *The Divided City*, 211.

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