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Hansen, Allan Dreyer

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Radical or deliberative democracy?

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Allan Dreyer Hansen

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Abstract:

Laclau and Mouffe's political vision of a radical democracy is an attempt to rethink the emancipatory tradition of the left in light of the recognition of the impossibility of a sutured society. The classic emancipatory projects, whether liberal, anarchic or socialist shared an (ultimately eschatological or universalist) belief in the possibility of a social order without (serious) contradictions. The 20. century is marked by an increasingly distrust towards the possibility of universality. Laclau and Mouffe share this distrust, but they claim that the way they restate the relationship between (impossible) universality and particularity opens up to a radicalisation of democracy. This paper presents Laclau and Mouffe's vision of radical democracy, and argues that it has clear advantages over deliberative democracy, even though the latter to a large extent has managed to 'hegemonise' the space of the radical alternative to mainstream liberal representative democracy. However, there are certain problems in Laclau and Mouffe's position. The paper will take a closer look at the most present of these problems. Laclau and Mouffe's implicit frame has so far been the nation state. Mouffe has in later writings more explicitly dealt with the issue of globalisation. This is obviously a necessary move, but her global vision – a 'multipolar world order' – to my view so far has serious shortcomings, when viewed from their own theoretical perspective.

The paper starts with situating Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy in relation to the socialist tradition, and the attempts in the 60ies and 70ies of renewing this tradition by way of a demand for a (more) participatory democracy. It then criticises the deliberative model, and therefore refuses the dominant position this model has acquired as the heir of the participatory tradition. The criticism centres on the claim of the irreducible presence of power and exclusion in all social relations, even those which may have been established in consensus. This is exactly the point of departure for Laclau and Mouffe's conflictual vision of radical democracy. The paper presents the core concepts of this model (*hegemonic universalism*, '*agonism*', *passions* and *the people*), and argues that radical democracy must, as Derrida put it, remain a promise, a democracy to come (*a venir*). The paper ends with a critical assessment of Mouffe's attempt to solve the (obvious) shortcoming in the focus on the nation state. Even though this move must be fully appreciated, her current theorising is unsatisfactory. In stead I argue what is needed is a vision of a 'popular cosmopolitanism', i.e. a cosmopolitanism facing up to exclusions, power and disagreements.

Radical democracy, socialism and the participatory tradition

Laclau and Mouffe explicitly place their radical democracy as an attempt of a renewal of the left (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; 1987). The 'nodal point' of this renewal is the inversion of the relationship between socialism and democracy, claiming that socialism is to be seen as but one (however central) moment of the deepening of the 'democratic revolution' (Lefort 1988). As is well known the socialist – at least the Marxist - left has traditionally had an ambiguous attitude towards democracy. Within classical stagiest Marxism democracy was the ideological/ political superstructure for the bourgeoisie covering up the class struggles based on the continued relations of (indirect) usurpation in the economic sphere. Democracy was believed to become unnecessary after the proletarian revolution, since the emancipation of the working class would coincide with the emancipation of humanity as such. The closing of the ages of class struggles would make democracy – as a means of solutions of conflicts – redundant, and it would wither away together with the state. As Engels quoted Saint-Simon, the aim was to replace “the government of men by the administration of things”.

The idea behind such a political vision was the proletariat as a strictly *universal* agent. Since the proletariat was the first class to evolve which was completely devoid any form of ownership to the means of production, their liberation would not be limited to themselves, as had the liberations of the bourgeoisie been, but would be, exactly, a universal emancipation. All ready here, we can see the tricky relationship between universalism and democracy, since it obviously the idea of an 'actually existing' universal agent which leads to the jeopardising of democracy. We shall return to the tension between universality and democracy later in the paper.

After WW II, and especially the experiences with the absence of democracy in the 'real existing socialism' the so called New Left increasingly sought to integrate socialism and democracy. One of the cornerstones of such a radicalisation of democracy became the demand of revitalisation of democracy by means of *participation* (Pateman 1970; Macpherson 1977; Koch 1981 (1946); For a more recent contribution, see Barber 1984) The claim was - *pace* the self proclaimed 'realists' - that real democracy could only mean wide participation in all kinds of decision making. Wide in terms of social spheres, democracy not being limited to the political sphere but spread out to the economy, education, the relations between the sexes and so forth. Wide also in terms of the number of citizens participating in decision making relevant to their own lives. To view democracy as a simple means for choosing between elites was a far too narrow vision of democracy, and actually dangerous for democracy itself, causing the problem of 'apathy' amongst the average citizens, the excuse for the 'realist' model in the first place.

Participation in democracy as a way out of the alleged 'apathy' was one of the three typical arguments in favour of participatory democracy. The claim was simply that (wo)man is not born a good democrat, it is something she becomes by participating in democratic settings. As was pointed out, this argument was not invented by the advocates of a radicalised participatory democracy, but by wholehearted liberals such as John Stuart Mills (Mill 1991 (1861)) (C.f. Alf Ross who despite his severe criticism of Koch and advocates of direct democracy has a clear view of the necessity of democratic 'upbringing' of the populace (Ross 1967 (1946)).) The second point made in favour of participation was equality. Democracy means rule by the people, inherent in which must be a relatively high degree of equality in influence and decision making powers. At the least what was wanted was a much more equal distribution than is the case when democracy simply means choosing between elites. The third point was that it is only through participation that agreement on the *common good* can be established. To advocates of a participatory democracy the liberal denial of a common good is antithetical to the very idea of democracy¹ As 'rule by the people' the very purpose of democracy includes some kind of *common good*, not reducible to the (aggregated) sum of individual wills. The common good argument meets with the idea of upbringing to democracy, since it is through participation that we come to realise the particularity of our 'spontaneous' interests and come to identify with the 'higher' general purpose or the common good. (as Pateman notes, this will eventually make citizens more akin to accept decisions taken on higher (national) levels, thereby strengthening also the representative parts of a well functioning democracy. (Pateman 1970))

As is probably well known the number of advocates of traditional participatory democracy is quite limited these days. The decrease in their number might be due to disappointment from sad experience of participation or stem from a more philosophical critique of the idea of participation. No matter whether it is the one or the other – a most likely a combination of the two – there can be no doubt that there is a set of serious difficulties in the theory of participation. The first problem has been pointed out by Robert A Dahl, who calls it the “democratic paradox of size”. The point is that the issues that matter involve a huge number of citizens, making the individual citizens influence rather superficial, whereas the cases in which we might gain real influence are generally not of a kind that anyone would consider essential. As he puts it:

“In very small systems a citizen may be able to participate in decisions that do not matter much but cannot participate much in decisions that really matter a great

1 Cf. Alf Ross who from a strictly representative ideal of democracy argues in favour of a common good as the essence of democracy. To him, however, it takes the best men of the country to be able to lift oneself above narrow self-interest and realise “better than would have been the case if the people had done it themselves, the true and lasting interests of the people” (Ross 1967 (1946))

deal; whereas very large systems may be able to cope with problems that matter more to a citizen, the opportunities for the citizen to participate in and greatly influence decisions are vastly reduced. Taken to an extreme but perhaps not wholly fanciful limit, the paradox would pose a choice between a tiny unit in which citizens could exercise perfect control over, say, the location and upkeep of footpaths; or a world government necessary for preserving life on the planet by preventing acute environmental degradation, but over which citizens had only symbolic democratic control.” (Dahl 1994: 28)

Dahl's invocation of a global problematic is something I return to, suffice it here to claim that he's point is undeniable, and leads to the recognition of some kind of representative body, holding decision making powers beyond what can be established solely by means of broad citizens participation. Of course many participatory thinkers have realised this (e.g. Pateman and Koch, more than MacPherson), but it raises two further problems, only insufficiently dealt with in the tradition. The first is the possibility of 'learning democracy' through participation in issues that does not really matter that much; the second is the problem of reaching agreement. Regarding the first, Jon Elster has been one the sternest critics pointing out, that upbringing to democracy must be “essentially a bi-product”, i.e. something that cannot be aquired if we aim at it in a direct way (Elster 1983). Regarding de Tocqueville's analysis of lay magistrates he points out that their verdicts are actually not always legally correct. According to de Tocqueville this deficiency is outweighed by the citizens upbringing brought about by the participation in the courts. However, as Elster points out, the upbringing effect is lost the moment the lay magistrates come to realise that their verdicts are not as good as could be. To Elster this conclusion is transferable to participatory democracy, and he points out that we only learn something, that we actually become good democratic citizens, to the extent that the issues we participate in matters to us. I believe Elster is absolutely right, hence the problem for participatory democracy. The same problem can be traced in Pateman's criticism of J. S. Mill and his indigenous idea of bringing local men (of lower grade) in contact with the educated men holding the executive places, thereby educating them to (responsible) citizens (Mill, 1991: 289f). Pateman rightly asks why we should be willing to engage in processes the result of which we do not influence? (Pateman, 1970: 33). Convincingly, her own answer is in the negative. However this cannot but weaken her own optimism on the degree of agreement it is possible to reach between lower participatory and higher representative levels of democracy. As we shall see, this optimism is based in a belief in the common good, articulated in strict universalist terms.

If participation in all areas of life – and especially in those that really matters – is impossible, how do deal with the likely event of disagreements between higher and lower levels? Basically, none of the participatory thinkers really deals with problem, and it is easy to why. The reason is of

course that upbringing to democracy turns us all into good citizens identifying with the common good. MacPherson points out how his model can only be realised in the absence of “fundamental oppositions”, which to him is basically economic. Pateman only touches upon the problem indirectly, if telling. In a footnote she approvingly quotes Rousseau stating that “the whole point of the participatory situation is that each independent but interdependent individual is ‘forced’ to appreciate that there is only one right answer, to apply the word ‘each’ to himself.” (Pateman: 24 n.1).

At the danger of giving too much weight to a footnote I claim that this is the highly questionable logic behind all the participatory models: the hope that democracy itself would be able to 'raise us' to the level of universality, 'forcing us to appreciate that there is *only one right* answer'. This implicit universalism is, as mentioned, never really established in the participatory tradition, it is simply taken for granted. As I will show later, it is unsustainable, and the case for a radicalisation of democracy must look somewhere else for its “foundations”. However first it is necessary to pass by the democratic tradition which in its own and many others view is the heir of the radical tradition, i.e. the so-called deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy

The idea that deliberative democracy is *the* radical version of democracy is quite common. One of its major exponents, John Dryzek for example states: “Deliberative democracy has been the dominant theme in democratic theory for past decade and a half... In its emphasis on informed and critical citizen deliberation, deliberative democracy was a successor to models of participatory [democracy, adh] popular in the 1960s and 1970s...” (Dryzek 2007: 265). Since the deliberative model is definitely not the only radical vision, this strictly hegemonising move by deliberative theorists unfortunately covers up, what should be the real debates of radicalisation of democracy.

It is true that deliberative democracy comes after the participatory models, and it is true that it maintains certain of its themes while excludes other. Deliberative democracy maintains certain of the positive injunctions from participatory democracy. The aims of deliberative theorists are commendable: To reintroduce morality and justice into politics against realist and economic inspired 'realists' and aggregative thinkers. As Mouffe suggests, “they seek to give new meaning to traditional democratic notions such as autonomy, popular sovereignty and equality. They aim at restating the classical idea of the public sphere, giving it a central place in the democratic project.” (Mouffe 2007: 36) (See also (Mouffe 2000b: 45). What deliberative democracy does is to maintain the idea of consensus and the common good, but re-interpret these within the frame of Habermasian

theory of rationality: the aim of democracy is to facilitate – as close as possible – power-free communications, which will lead to rational decisions (Habermas 1987). Beside from the explicit introduction of rationality, what deliberative democracy also does is to refrain from the demand of broad participation. As Carleheden puts it, democratic legitimacy stems not from everybody having actually been heard, but from everybody having had *the opportunities* for being heard (Carleheden 1994).

It is easy to see how deliberative democracy is based on a re-interpretation of the possibility of universalism in democracy. To the traditional Marxist-socialist projects, universalism arose from the universality of the agent of change: the proletariat was the Revolutionary Subject due to its place in the relations of production. (In this sense it was of course only an inversion of Hegel's belief in Bureaucracy). Habermas and the deliberative democrats avoid pointing out privileged positions from where universality can be ensured. But they maintain the very ideal of reaching universality, namely through the “force-less force” of the better argument in the ideal speech situation.

From a post-foundational perspective the idea of the force-less force and the very possibility of reaching rationality appear doubtful. When translated to democratic theory as in the case of deliberative democracy (at least) two sets of problems appear. The first is that consensus is unlikely, and should it be achieved it is not rational. The second is that the combination of the (faulty) belief in rationality through agreement *and* the weakening of the demand of general or broad participation easily lead the protagonists of deliberative democracy into an elitist position.

Even though Habermas (as well as some of his prominent followers as e.g. Axel Honneth) in his latest writings appear to have renounced on the demand for consensus as well as the possibility of rationality in the strict sense, there is no doubt that rationality still functions as some kind of regulative ideal, and that democracy, in the last instance is preferred because it is a social order which allows for the closest approximations of this ideal. As Mouffe has pointed out on several occasions the problem with the ideal of rationality is that it blinds us to the use of power and exclusions inherent in any process of decision. On a first, immediate level it is quite obvious that consensus and agreements are not the dominant picture of politics in modern societies. Of course deliberatists might well, as did the participatorists, argue that this is a sign of illness that needs to be cured, and that it can be cured under the right circumstances: if actual decision making was organised according to the principles of deliberative democracy, (much more) consensus would be the result.

However, on a more philosophical level, the problem is whether decisions can be made rationally,

and without any use of force. If this is not the case, the very idea of rationality as the aim of democracy is problematised.

What this means is, that even in the (unlikely) situation of actually reaching consensus exclusion and coercion has been involved. Why? Consensus is to be reached, it is not there from the beginning – this is why we need 'the better argument'. However, unless the 'grounds' on which what counts for 'a better argument' are themselves transcendently given, some alternatives must have been excluded on less than absolute or rational grounds (Laclau 1991). The problem is that when we decided on something, that something cannot be completely exhausted by rational rules. This is what is implied in Derrida's notion of undecidability: nowhere – not even in the most refined philosophical systems – can the principle of rational necessity establish it self without some kind of 'originary' decision, with out the introduction of some element that is not given by the principles of the system it self (Derrida 1990; Derrida 1992). If this is true, it means that any possible system is basically undecidable, and in the final instance 'rests' upon an originary exclusion of other possibilities. As Laclau concludes:

”... the hiding of the ”ultimate” undecidability of any decision will never be complete and social coherence will only be achieved at the cost of repressing something that negates it. It is in this sense that any consensus, that any objective and differential system of rule implies, as its most essential possibility, a dimension of coercion” (Laclau 1990: 172).

It is this dimension of coercion, of the ever present facts of exclusions that needs to be taken explicitly into account in democratic theory, and which the deliberative model, constitutively blinds itself of.

The second problem is an effect of the first one, namely that this longing for rationality, easily makes deliberative democracy slip into elitism. In order to make this point I take issue with Danish theorist, Loftager, who in a particular interesting move on the one hand accepts the impossibility of reaching of the ideal of rationality, and on the other hand purifies the deliberative claim of democratic legitimacy being established through 'the better argument'. I completely agree with Loftager in the impossibility of reaching rational agreements, but because he anyway sticks to the idea of the better argument, the problems in the deliberative tradition of blinding itself towards exclusions, and of the potential elitism.

To participatory democrats reaching agreement on the common good was intimately linked to broad participation in democratic processes. To the deliberatists this link is contingent: an argument

cannot be considered right just because it has a majority of adherents. Equally it cannot be considered wrong because only few stick to it. According to Loftager, what the deliberative model makes explicit, but what constitutes democracy as such, is the victory of the better argument (Loftager 2004: 39f). He claims that the broadly accepted norm of equality between individuals actually is an ideal that has been imported from the aggregative model (and has, by several authors been proven impossible to realise). In stead Loftager suggests it is not essential to democracy that the largest number of individuals holding a certain interest or idea gets their way, but rather that ‘the better argument’ does. This immediately removes some of the pressure of full participation, since the advance of the better argument is not dependent on actual participation, only on general possibility of public participation in promoting better arguments (ibid: 41). Loftager refuses the ideal that all (affected) citizens should exert equal influence on political decisions. Since it is the arguments rather than individuals and their preferences that are the basic unit in democracy, it follows that there is no necessary relation between the better argument and the single citizen, who’s not always right. The citizen’s points of view must be put to the test in public reasoning (ibid: 42), and our equal (possible) access to the public sphere(s) is what guarantees a (new form of) political equality. Therefore, what the affected should be included into, is not a decision making body, but rather a general public sphere. To the quite obvious question of where decisions are then to be made, Loftager introduces the well known representative bodies. Elected politicians should after substantial deliberation in the public sphere, make the decisions that favour the ‘better argument’.

Loftager’s arguments are interesting, because it carries the ultimately undemocratic logic of rationality to its very end. To the extent that decisions must be made, what at a given point stands out as the better argument is going to be the topic of new disagreements. To argue that the decision makers act democratically to the extent they accept and decide in accordance with the better argument, provided through the general public, simply does not help very much, since the very determination of what is the better argument is likely to be the topic of other disputes. Loftager is well aware of this and points out that deeper deliberation about concrete practical problems might well produce more rather than less disagreement (Loftager 2004: 42). To argue that decisions should be made by elected representatives based on debates in a public sphere, might solve the practical problem of decision, but obviously undercuts any claim to rationality only established in agreements.

What Loftager effectively does, in a move inherent in the very logic deliberative democracy is to de-radicalise democracy and open up to the legitimation of elitism. If what count is not the number of citizens who have actually taken part in the democratic process, but rather that the better argument won, those best equipped to present their points of views as the better arguments will

favour (Young 2000). Secondly, if decisions still are to be taken by elected bodies, either any claim to rationality is lost, or one would end in the situation having to identify the better argument with the actual will of the majority. I believe both problems are quite unsettling for deliberative democracy, and sufficient for drawing the conclusion that the legitimacy of democracy must be separated from aspirations of rationality, and rethought in light of unavoidable decision making and exclusions. Since we never reach the point of universality, neither by an agent pre-disposed for the task, or through putting up situations like the ideal speech situation, will we always have to choose and decide between alternatives. No matter how well the debate has been formed, decisions making involves the exclusion of alternatives. Even in the probably very rare cases of unanimity a minimal amount of force – i.e. power – has been involved, namely the power it takes to 'suppress' alternatives that cannot be reduced to 'errors' in an algorithmic calculation. As Laclau puts it, this leads to the conclusion that democracy is not about making power disappear, but rather to shape power in accordance with the democratic principles of equality and liberty (Laclau 1993; Laclau 2001).

Radical democracy and conflict

We now know that a theory of radicalised democracy has to take the impossibility of universality (and rationality) as its points of departure. Neither can we stick to the belief that it should be possible to reach *a* common good. Politics, conflicts and disagreements are with us in all foreseeable future. This is the starting point for Laclau and Mouffe's theory of radical democracy. The main lines of this theory are quite convincing. However there are certain problems, especially in the way particular Mouffe has tried to meet the challenges from increased globalisation. In this section I present the outline and basic concepts of their vision of radical democracy, partly in order to present the theory, partly in order to show how Mouffe's recent reflections on a 'multi polar world order' in its eager of distancing it self from cosmopolitanism ends up running counter to some of the very basic principles of radical democracy.

Radical democracy is an attempt to re-articulate the emancipatory project of the left firmly within the frames of 'democratic revolution'. The basic reason for this move (from democracy qua socialism to socialism as a part of democracy) is the epistemological critique of universalism. To Marx it was the universal characteristics of the proletariat which made it the privileged agent for the liberation not only of itself as a class, but for humanity. As we've seen deliberative democracy does not count on a privileged agent in terms of a specific group, but rather in terms of rationality in the form of the better argument. Against this Laclau and Mouffe claim the impossibility of ever

reaching the universal. This very impossibility is precisely what they claim to find an institutionalisation in democracy. Democracy institutionalises at the logic of universal values – equality and freedom for all – but at the very same time the impossibility of these values to become actualised as such. Democracy makes it impossible for any (particular) social force to be equated with these values: we know that whatever is done, it can only be done as a particular interpretation of the democratic ideals. This is why, in democracy, as Claude Lefort puts it, the place of power remains empty, and specific social forces are only allowed to occupy the place of the power temporarily (Lefort 1988). In this sense democracy is paradoxical: to the extent its basic values – equality and liberty for all – could be actualised, to the extent we'd reached the universals, it would make itself unnecessary: we would no longer need to keep the place of power empty. But the universal cannot be reached, there will always be disagreements and therefore decisions and politics. Democracy should be seen not as the way of securing rationality and overcoming power, but as a regime which organises power in a way that best fits our ideals of equality and liberty as well as keeping society 'open' making any idea of finalisation impossible.

Within this general adherence to (liberal) democracy, Laclau and Mouffe seeks to spell out a left wing alternative of radicalising democracy, deepening it in light of ever present conflicts and power. The aim is to spread democracy to a range of social spheres, which means that the principles of equality and liberty should govern still more social relations, which will of course be of very different kinds. The forms of democracy will also be highly different, and should be thought of in many different forms. Even though Laclau and Mouffe obviously shares the ideas from participatory democracy of the broadening and deepening of democracy, they are critical of the idea of imagining participatory forms as the dominant. Not only because they do not fit the complexities of differentiated social forms of today's world, but also because they are critical towards the theoretical foundations behind most pleas for participation. As we have seen, participation was thought to make the citizens *recognise* the common good. Laclau and Mouffe argue instead that the formation of political identities is a hegemonic game, and that the arrow goes as much from the representative to the represented as the other way round (Laclau 1993; Laclau 1996). But since politics is exactly about making decisions in an undecidable terrain, i.e. the formation of identities rather than their simple presentation as interests, this is not something to be looked upon as a second best, but rather as the main logic of democracy (Laclau 2002).

Agonism, passions and 'the people'

In her later writings Mouffe (2000a; 2005; 2007) has termed her ideal *agonistic* democracy² With this she wants to underline that democracy – *pace* deliberative and liberalist interpretations – holds political oppositions and disagreements as a positive feature to be cherished rather than something to be overcome. As I've already shown, we can no longer dream of a 'sutured' or finalised society, from which all major disagreements have disappeared. The impossibility of reaching universality necessitates that we come to terms with pluralism as something that forever produces oppositions and disagreements – in short politics. But disagreements are not only something to be accepted but rather endorsed. Why? Because disagreements dealt with under a democratic respect of the opponent – the adversary as Mouffe terms it – guarantees the openness of the exclusions following all decisions. Rather than blinding oneself from exclusions, which is the effect of viewing political processes as instances of rationality, democratic negotiations and decision making bring these exclusions to the fore, making the contingency of their – always temporary – solution visible. The radical democratic ambition should therefore be to make sure that problems and conflicts can be dealt with democratically in still more areas of social life. Agonistic democracy legitimises political conflict and disagreement, as long as these are 'processed' democratically that is in respect for other democratic positions – adversaries – and in the principle of different interpretations of the democratic principles of equality and liberty of all. Therefore agonistic or adversary democracy places a central weight on disagreements.

Democracy is also based on agreement, or consensus. The agreement on the universal democratic principles of equality and liberty for all. However, such an agreement on principles will never be absolute, since these will always appear interpreted (articulated as discourse theory puts it). We will never be in a position where the principles can be agreed upon 'rationally' in a 'pure' form. Rather such a basic agreement, without which democracy obviously could not work, must be understood as *identifications* with (tendentially) empty signifiers, which can be given a whole range of different interpretations. As Laclau has shown, such a set of identifications is – in the absence of any possible final (rational) ground – based upon a moment of affect (Laclau 2002; Laclau 2005b; Laclau 2005a). This leads us to the questions of passions in politics and democracy.

• Democracy and passions

- On forming strong democratic identities

² Partly inspired by William Connolly, (1995)

- Strong identities are not formed by 'proving' the rational superiority of democracy
- What is needed is concrete experiences with democracy, and clear political differences for identifications.
- A radical democratic project is to create a democratic popular identity (Laclau 2006)
- Not one democratic agent carrying human emancipation within.
- Numerous and very different social areas – often with conflictual relations between them
- A radical democratic popular identity is one which is articulated with other democratic demands

Radical democracy as a promise

- Radical democracy is also radical in its acceptance of the democratic paradox: the 'true', ultimate realisation of democracy would mean its abolition.
 - To reach the true 'common good' would make democracy superfluous
 - The many identities and interests never reach a 'rational' or perfect coupling
- Radical democracy is a promise, a horizon which must be reached for, without being able to be realised as such. (Derrida's Notion of Democracy *to come* (Derrida 1994))

The global challenge

The huge challenge is globalisation

- How to conceive of democracy beyond the nation state?
- Cosmopolitanism
 - Much caught in a consensual, human rights centred vision
 - Obvious danger for an excluding Western movement
- Hardt og Negri: Multitude/ Absolute democracy? (Hardt and Negri 2000; 2002)
 - Point at the necessity of a globalisation of politics
 - But lack of politics (of hegemony): no creation of (popular) unity
- The crucial task is the articulation of a popular position, which articulates a whole set of democratic demands
 - fx Social Forum

- A global popular identity around demands for democracy, social justice/ distribution and the protection of the environment
- Could perhaps be the contours of a new radical leftwing project

Critique of Mouffe's Global vision

As with most of their former theorising, these considerations has primarily been directed towards 'domestic' politics, but in her more recent work, the international scene has gained increasing attention (Mouffe 2002; 2004; 2005). In her analysis of the international realm she primarily criticises the cosmopolitan perspective, against which she has the same kind of objections as against liberal theories. She claims, whatever the form of cosmopolitanism, "they all postulate albeit in different guises, the availability of a form of consensual governance transcending the political, conflict and negativity" (Mouffe 2005: 106). Since a truly universal project in which a cosmopolitan democracy coincides with humanity is impossible, the very attempt of reaching it would be a dangerous illusion: "If such a project was ever realized, it could only signify the world hegemony of a dominant power that would have been able to impose its conception of the world on the entire planet, and which, identifying its interests with those of humanity, would treat any disagreement as an illegitimate challenge to its 'rational' leadership" (ibid: 107).

In stead she argues in favour of a leftist strategy of a 'real pluralism' which can only come to existence within a multi-polar world order, based on the existence of several regional blocks, providing "an equilibrium of forces among various large areas, instituting among them a new system of international law" (ibid: 116).

This new normative anti-cosmopolitan project of a multi-polar world order is informed by scepticism towards two central figures in the cosmopolitan ideal, i.e. the idea of universal (and unpolitical) human rights, and the moral superiority of the West. She seems so eager to avoid these pitfalls, that the former constituents of a radical democracy – freedom and equality for all – no

longer appears to be principles 'universally' attractive (with the qualification of course, that universality is always an articulated universality, modified by each instance of its incarnation).

Let me just end this discussion by pointing out that I believe that the quest for (radical) democracy must off necessity be of a global character, just as the spreading of the principles of freedom and equality for all, most likely will take on the form of a spreading of (human) rights.³ To me it does not make much sense to oppose a claim for the spreading of democracy to the entire world, out of fear of it being hegemonised by the West, and used for promoting undemocratic aims. What is at stake is not limiting of the vision of global democracy – even of a liberal kind, with freedom and equality for all – but rather the dissociation of this visions from the actual actions of the West. As Gandhi said, western civilisation would be a good idea, and the fact that the West does not live up to its own proclaimed standards, should not make us renounce on the (general applicability of the) standards in favour of a 'multi-polar' world order, with potentially large areas remaining outside of democracy.

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3 In her critique of the dangerous ways quests for 'humanity' might be realised, Mouffe often quotes Schmitt's argument from *The concept of the Political*, that wars fought in the name of humanity is particularly inhumane (Mouffe, 2005: 78). However, Schmitt's way of posing the problem shows the inadequacy of simply denying the idea of 'humanity' and human rights any relevance. If such wars are particular *inhumane* obviously the problem is not the notion of humanity it self, but rather the fact that the actions apparently taken to defend it, are shams, failing to live up to those very standards it claims to defend. Now, does that not resemble very much Mouffe's strategy toward liberal democratic regimes, trying to make them live up to their proclaimed values (freedom and equality)? And is it not an example of hegemonic struggle (and critique) *par excellence*? Fighting to be the force interpreting the common values is the definition of hegemonic struggles. Therefore, to me the problem lies not so much in the very vision of a democratic – cosmopolitan – world order, as in the fact that at present, the very undemocratic sharing of power, turns the struggle of hegemony into a very un-democratic one.

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