# Democratic Agonism: Conflict and Contestation in Divided Societies

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**Applying the Theoretical Assumptions of Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly to the Case of Turkey**

## Introduction

The last twenty years have seen an unprecedented attempt to revitalise democracy. Populist anxieties, along with the dominance of corporate and media elites, the lack of real political alternatives, the limitations of most models of democratic representation and the political distortions produced by vast inequalities in wealth all point to an urgent need to rethink democracy (Newman, 2008: 228). Democratic theory is now rich in trends and models, offering different ways of reading what a democratic order should entail. The divergences within and between these theories tend to be based on a constitutive tension within democracy itself, and can be said to reflect the debate between the modernist and post-modernist political discourses. The antagonism is embodied in the articulation of democracy as a type of political regime with distinct institutions, and as a form of politics which embodies its own indeterminacy, which is contingent on and open to new and unpredictable articulations. The latter of these perspectives is articulated by the post-modernist thinkers Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly, and can be said to constitute what is variously referred to as "democratic agonism", "agonistic democracy" and "political agonism". These terms will be used interchangeably. The theory of political agonism analyses the structures of opposition that characterise various forms of political relations, particularly those that are conceived as definitive of democracy (Acampora, 2009: 3). Given the contemporary neoliberal hegemony and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies neoliberalism has displayed in its mature form, it is unsurprising that philosophy as a discipline has recently concerned itself with reformulating what true democracy might mean, attempting to redefine the acceptable boundaries of our day-to-day democratic discourse. Theories of democratic agonism offer a novel vision of democracy, one in which the rules of democracy are always 'open to question, disagreement, contestation, deliberation, negotiation and change over time'. It must not be forgotten that politics 'is the type of game in which the framework – the rules of the game – can come up for deliberation and amendment in the course of the game' (Tully, 1999: 170).

We must consider democratic agonism both in terms of an analytical framework for understanding the nature of modern democratic political relations, and as an actual form of political organisation that its adherents advocate. Whilst there has been a substantial amount of literature written about political agonism as a theory, there is surprisingly little which attempts to apply these theoretical assumptions to empirical case studies. This lack of research may have important consequences: 'while the attempt to reformulate democracy may, as is often the case with political philosophy, come across as conjectural, hypothetical or even utopian, it is only by situating theory within a solid study that affords the possibility for a radical shift of democratic ideas in real political circumstances' (Weeks, 2012). The questions under study in this paper are vividly illustrated in the quandary that constitutes Turkish politics. The politics of reconciliation in divided societies brings into relief the limits and possibilities of democracy, both as institution and ethos. The more diverse the social conditions, the more difficult it is to develop a sustainable framework for democracy. Divided societies provide a hard case in terms of which to consider the explanatory and normative power of contemporary theories of democracy (Schaap, 2006: 256). Yet at the same time, the unpredictability and radicalism that characterise politics in Turkey offer a unique opportunity to reformulate democracy in theory and in practice. Dogmatic political theory, as dominated by rationalism and individualism, is completely unable to help us understand what is happening. The diverse and uprooted nature of postmodern society

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means we must adapt democratic theory to reflect and encompass such diversity. It is in this context that democratic agonism proves most suitable.

As way of framing this debate, I will break this paper into two main sections. The first will establish a theoretical framework. To do this, we must firstly criticise both liberal rationalism and deliberative democracy. It is by examining the shortfalls of these ideologies that we will be able to find the rationale for advancing democratic agonism as the most apposite and necessary theory of democracy, not just within divided societies, but more broadly too. In order to define and characterise political agonism, we must first look to a Foucaultian analysis, followed by an exploration of the work of William Connolly and Chantal Mouffe, focusing particularly on Mouffe's theory of "agonistic pluralism". The second section of the paper will attempt to apply the theoretical assumptions to the case of Turkey, essentially asking whether this theory is a useful analytical framework for understanding modern, democratic political relations, opportunities and challenges in Turkish politics. Exploring a variety of political issues and tensions in Turkey will show the inadequacy of deliberative democracy whilst strengthening the case for agonistic pluralism.

## Theoretical Framework

*Against Liberal Rationalism*

Political liberals make the claim that in order to secure wide agreement on minimal political norms and institutions, citizens must bracket their particular social, moral and religious beliefs when deliberating upon 'constitutional essentials', or upon basic political principles and structures; as Rawls writes, 'faced with the fact of reasonable pluralism, a liberal view removed from the political agenda the most divisive issues, serious contention about which must undermine the bases of social cooperation' (quoted in Deveaux, 1999: 2). Liberals have been criticised for suggesting that citizens should bracket their views when discussing political norms, for their effort to keep morally and politically divisive topics off the political agenda, and for assuming that democratic politics should seek to minimise disagreements in the first place. A significant part of this criticism concerns the actual substance of politics itself; a common theme which unites more novel theories of democracy is the turn away from the routines, institutions, conditions, explanations and theories of politics (central concerns of liberal rationalism) to the activity or game of politics itself. In fact, this confrontation of the activity of politics itself seems to be a part of a general re-orientation in Western thinking in the 20th century (Tully, 2006: 162). Although their theories differ vastly, Jurgen Habermas and Chantal Mouffe both directly criticise liberal rationalism. As Ilan Kapoor explains, both contend that 'it is not enough to have the outward trimmings and institutions of liberal democracy (elections, parliaments, rule of law and so on); we also need to ensure the quality and inclusiveness of democratic processes in the multiple spheres of social life and within all public institutions' (2002: 459). Thus, although they do so from different ontological standpoints, both theorists view liberal democratic theory as inadequate, and wish to deepen or extend democracy. They claim that a critical conception of politics centred on pluralism offers a better framework for the expression and communication of citizens' differences than dominant liberal models of politics.

*'Deliberative Democracy'?*

The debate between Mouffe and Habermas can be seen as an "allegory of the modern/postmodern condition", with Habermas defending reason, legitimacy, justice and universality, and Mouffe defending antagonism, pluralism and contingency (Kapoor, 2002: 460). Whilst Habermas' 'deliberative democracy' is not a central concern of this paper, the intensity of the debate between Mouffe and Habermas often produces a symbiotic relationship between the modern and postmodern visions. It is therefore well worth examining Habermas' alternative model. Deliberative democracy has been particularly attractive for those attempting to analyse democracy in divided societies, and thus we must confront and challenge its major assumptions, rejecting some aspects of the theory whilst accepting others. Habermas' vision relies on 'reasoned and inclusive public deliberation that is geared to reaching consensual decisions. His arguments foreground concerns about legitimacy and (universal) justice, concerns that he believes are ignored by poststructuralists at their peril' (Kapoor, 2002: 460). Thus, the central claim of deliberative democracy is that collective decisions are more legitimate to the extent that they are the outcome of public reasoning among free and equal persons. Opinions and preferences are formed through political interaction and are transformed through the course of public deliberation. Deliberative democracy is therefore consensus orientated; consensual decisions

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are reached only by the "force of the better argument", so that, at the end of the deliberative process, all concerned are convinced by the decisions reached and accept them as reasonable (Kapoor, 2002: 462).

There is much in deliberative democracy that we would want to hold on to, especially its emphasis on the transformative potential of democratic politics on citizens' preferences, as well as on the importance of reconciliation in divided societies. The theoretical assumptions of deliberative democracy are not necessarily wrong, but rather incomplete. What democratic agonists most often take issue with is the extent to which deliberative democrats tend to take for granted the commonality required for democracy. As Andrew Schaap explains, 'what is common in metaphors such as "settling accounts", "healing nations" and "restoring community" that are often invoked in reconciliation talk is a presumption of unity as a social good' (2006: 258). In their attempt to justify the collectively binding decisions under which we are expected to live, deliberative democrats overlook a fundamental aspect of modern life; namely, the deep disagreement on a multidimensional range of issues that characterises modern societies (Glover, 2012: 87). The post-political vision of deliberative democrats is profoundly mistaken, and their attempt to go 'beyond hegemony', 'beyond sovereignty' and 'beyond antagonism' is in fact at the origin of many of the problems that democratic institutions are currently facing. This blindness to antagonism and idealised view of human sociability is not new. Underlying modern democratic political thinking is the idea that violence and hostility are archaic phenomena, 'to be eliminated thanks to the progress of exchange and the establishment of a transparent communication among rational participations' (Mouffe, 2005: 3). Yet viewing consensus and reconciliation as fundamental aims of democracy is both conceptually mistaken and fraught with political danger; it is based on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics.

Moreover, because deliberative democracy *presupposes* commonality in terms of an anticipated moral consensus rather than recognising commonality as a 'contingent outcome of political interaction', it tends to neglect the 'political nature of its own exclusions' (Schaap, 2006; 263). As Chantal Mouffe critically questions, 'there is much talk today of "dialogue" and "deliberation" but what is the meaning of such words in the political field, if no real choice is at hand and if the participants in the discussion are not able to decide between clearly differentiated alternatives' (Mouffe, 2005; 3)? Consensualists fail to appreciate that liberal democracy is itself a political regime, and will thus reflect a certain epistemological discourse. It is a political mistake to model democracy on the ideal of an unconstrained deliberation between free and equal citizens because the anticipated moral consensus in terms of which conflict is made meaningful is always *politically* constituted and bound in relations of power (Schaap, 2006; 262). Deciding who and what values are excluded and included in politics is itself a political decision. These criticisms will be expanded upon when detailing the characteristics of democratic agonism.

Ultimately, deliberative democracy falls short because it is unable to fully distance itself from the liberal discourse. Especially in divided societies, where power struggles are definitive of daily politics, we have good reason to be sceptical of consensus and dialogue-orientated models of democracy. Processes of reconciliation will never be democratically neutral, and it is for this reason that we must go beyond the deliberative model to a deeper and more critical understanding of democracy.

*Epistemological Framework: Post-modernist, Post-structuralist & Anti-foundationalist*

Democratic agonism, as articulated by Mouffe and Connolly, must be understood through the metanarrative of postmodernism. Following from Habermas, many believe that for democracy to be resurrected, it has to be based on the firmly modern grounds of reason, rationality and universalism, grounds which postmodern theory, in its 'nihilism', jeopardises. However, in line with Mouffe and Connolly, I will argue that whilst postmodernism unsettles the epistemological foundations upon which it is usually conceived, it allows, in doing so, for a radical rethinking of democracy (Newman, 2008: 230).

Modern democracies are essentially organised around the ideals of equality and liberty. A commitment to the upholding of these values is what distinguishes democracy both in theory and in practice. Yet, in the footsteps of Nietzsche and Foucault, what postmodern thinkers challenge us to ask is why these values in particular should be held in such great esteem; what is the origin and meaning of our values? We must acknowledge that the activity of politics involves, and to some extent just is, about these very foundations (Acampora, 2009: 4). In this vein, Richard

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Rorty encouraged us to 'dispense with the great metaphysical and post-metaphysical theories associated with different forms of human organisation and value spheres' and to 'abandon the attempts to discover large-scale underlying processes or conditions of possibility that determine our thought and action behind our back' (Tully, 1999: 163). Agonistic democrats thus adopt an anti-foundationalism in their evaluation of the ideals of equality and liberty. Whilst not denying that democracy needs to be based on such ideals, they push us to question who defines what is meant by 'equality' and 'liberty', and for what purpose. By accepting that such terms are bound by power relations, and will therefore be social constructs that reflect hegemonic articulations, we are forced to reconsider the modernist project of grounding human values. As James Tully aptly summarises, 'At any one time, some constituents are held firm and provide the ground for questioning others, but which elements constitute the shared "background" sufficient for politics to emerge and which constitute the disputed "foreground" vary. There is not a distinction between the two that stands outside the game, beyond question for all time' (1999: 170). The boundary drawn around the values constitutive of democracy can and should be contested.

To illuminate some of these points, it is fitting to analyse the work of the great postmodern thinker Michel Foucault. For Foucault, politics is the theatre of war and battle, tactics and strategies. Politics, he stated, simply is 'war carried out by other means' (2003: 15). Foucault prompts a recognition of the benefits of agonistic interaction, stimulating politics such that our struggles (rather than their imposed absence) become our defining characteristic. For him, the human condition is to exist within a system of power, and thus it must be 'the human potential to incessantly resist its reach, relocate its boundaries, and challenge its authority' (Thiele, 1990: 918-921). He argues that the 'games' or practices in which we are participants are 'not closed by a frontier'; the rules of the game will always be open for questioning. Yet, the prevailing modern theories of politics (modern 'humanism') disregard this feature, universalise a certain state of play, and so obscure rather than illuminate how we constitute and are constituted by the games and practices in which we think and act. Foucault explains, 'What I am afraid about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom' (1988, quoted in Tully 1999: 166). Thus, Foucault advances his postmodern project through an explicitly anti-humanist agenda. Human nature, and thus our discourses and practices, is an expression of contingent histories and practices. In other words, if we are all products of modern power, as Foucault believes, then our institutions and discourses will be expressive of that power, and therefore the modernist search for epistemological 'foundations' is unhelpful, as such foundations will themselves be culturally and socially contingent. It is upon this anti-foundationalist and postmodernist discourse that agonistic democracy is based.

*Characterising Democratic Agonism: William Connolly's 'Ethos of Pluralisation'*

Variants of agonistic democracy range from conservative republican doctrines to left-leaning accounts of republican citizenship sensitive to the realities of pluralism and postmodern accounts of the relevance of identity and difference to politics (Deveaux, 1999: 3). William Connolly can be said to fit into the latter of these categories; his agonistic model of democracy gestures towards a more inclusive, pluralistic politics. He insists that 'one significant way to support human dignity is to cultivate agonistic respect between interlocking and contending constituencies' (quoted in Deveaux, 1999: 13). A key characteristic of Connolly's 'Ethos of Pluralisation' is the idea that we must "pluralise pluralism". The task of democracy becomes to embrace and welcome difference, and to expand the register by which claims on behalf of difference can be voiced. Agonism, is an attempt to '"pluralise" modern pluralism, and bring such difference to the forefront of a radically engaged and contentious democratic discourse' (Glover, 2012: 88). When this has occurred, the tension between identity and difference will be continually worked through and negotiated, yet final reconciliation is never guaranteed or even desired (Newman, 2008: 230).

We find in Connolly's work a similar branch of postmodernism and anti-foundationalism as advanced by Foucault and Nietzsche. He writes; 'Deconstructionists show how every social construction of the self, truth, reason or morality, endowed by philosophy with a coherent unity and invested with a privileged epistemic status, is actually composed of an arbitrary constellation of elements held together by powers and metaphors which are not inherently rational' (1993: 231). He thus agrees that the modernist search for rational foundations which make up human nature is inherently flawed, as these unities have a constructed character and an epistemic privilege. Applying this strain of thought to radical democracy, Connolly impels a more thorough democratic politics. He argues that 'When democratic politics is robust, when it operates to disturb the naturalisation of settled conventions, when it exposes

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settled identities to some of the contestable contingencies that constitute them, then one is in a more favourable position to reconsider some of the demands built into those conventions and identities' (quoted in Deveaux, 1999: 13-14). Thus, for Connolly, the very indeterminacy of democracy's foundations must be uncovered and incorporated into its institutions and practices; 'Spaces for difference are to be established through the play of political contestation' (Connolly, quoted in Deveaux, 1999: 13). The 'building stones' that are part of democracy but which are buried under notions of identity, consensus, legitimacy and the common good, must be unearthed through a post-structuralist approach. As Saul Newman summarises, Connolly's account is illuminating as it uncovers the need to eschew the essential foundations of democracy, and 'open itself to contingency, indeterminacy and, above all, difference' (2008: 231).

*Characterising Democratic Agonism: Chantal Mouffe's 'Agonistic Pluralism'*

Whilst a variety of different thinkers have advanced diverse articulations of agonistic democracy, Chantal Mouffe's 'agonistic pluralism' is perhaps the most influential postmodern attempt to explicitly name a radical political project. She also has urged democratic theorists not to deny the role of antagonism and passion in politics, stressing 'the importance of fostering "agonistic pluralism" within a "shared symbolic space", where the latter constitutes the boundaries of a community, but must also make room for the passionate expression of differences and disagreements between citizens, thus furnishing the conditions for a deep and meaningful pluralism' (Howarth, 2008: 177). For Mouffe, radical democracy demands that we acknowledge difference, and the challenge is instituting a democratic regime that allows for the expression of social plurality. As she summarises; 'the task for democratic theorists and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant "agonistic" public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted' (2005: 3). We find Foucaultian aspects to her analysis, in that she acknowledges 'the contingent character of the hegemonic politico-economic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment. They are precarious and pragmatic constructions which can be disarticulated and transformed' (Mouffe, 2005: 33). Thus she too is suspicious of attempts to determine in advance what is to count as legitimate political action because this too often becomes a way of 'co-opting radical challenges to the dominant interests within a society'. For her, public reasoning is always reasoning within a particular tradition or discourse, and therefore in any existing democracy, 'the terms in which an anticipated moral consensus among free and equal persons is represented will always be based on a contingent and provisional hegemony of the prevailing tradition within which these terms are conceived' (Schaap, 2006: 257-262). Expanding on this, there are a number of elements to Mouffe's vision that require our attention.

Underlying Mouffe's theory of agonistic democracy is a Schmittian account of 'the political', which she contrasts to ordinary 'politics'. Here, the political refers to 'the dimension of antagonism' taken to be constitutive of human societies and that is inherent in human relations' (Mouffe, 2005: 9). As such, the political refers to an extraordinary moment – the potential resort to violence against an enemy – that conditions ordinary politics (Schaap, 2006: 268). In contrast, Mouffe takes ordinary 'politics' to mean 'the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organising human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political' (Mouffe, 2005: 9). These practices, discourses and institutions will always be potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'. Moreover, the political can never be eradicated because it can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavours: every moral, religious, economy, ethical or other antithesis can transform itself into a political one. Politics, then, should be about 'acknowledging the dimension of the political'. The question is not how to arrive at a consensus without exclusion – as deliberative theorists believe – since this would imply the eradication of the political. Rather, politics aims at the 'creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an "us" by the determination of a "them"' (Mouffe, 2000: 15).

For Mouffe then, politics is always about the constitution of a 'we' and this 'we' is always articulated in contrast to a 'them'. The criteria of the political is the friend/enemy distinction, and the novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but the different ways in which it is established (Mouffe, 2000: 15). Thus the question is not how to reach a 'rational', fully inclusive, consensus, without any exclusion. Rather, we must allow for the we/they distinction to be articulated in a variety of ways. As Mouffe writes:

'Every order is political and based on some form of exclusion. There are always other possibilities that have been

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repressed and that can be reactivated. The articulatory practices through which a certain order is established and the meaning of social institutions is fixed are "hegemonic practices". Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony' (2005: 18).

What is thought to be the 'natural order' of a society is in fact the result of 'sedimented practices'; in line with Foucault, it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity exterior to the practices that bring it into being (Mouffe, 2005: 18). The we/they distinction can always become the locus of an antagonism, and thus to take account of the political as the ever-present possibility of antagonism means we must come to terms with the lack of a final ground and acknowledge the dimension of undecidability which pervades every order. It requires 'recognising the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order and the fact that every society is the product of a series of practices attempting to establish order in a context of contingency' (Mouffe, 2005: 17). Therefore, a crucial element of Mouffe's theory is that we must accept the ever-present possibility of antagonism in social relations. The political, defined as this we/they distinction, is an intrinsic part of our ontological condition.

From the point of view of 'agonistic pluralism', the aim of democratic politics is to construct the 'them' in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but an 'adversary', i.e. somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question (Mouffe, 2000: 15). When democratic politics transform "antagonistic" relations between "enemies" into "agonistic" relations between "adversaries", we have "agonistic pluralism" (Kapoor, 2002: 465). It must therefore be the aim of democratic politics to transform antagonism into agonism; far from jeopardising democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence. Alternative passions must not be eliminated from the public sphere in order to achieve a rational consensus, but rather we must mobilise those passions towards democratic confrontation (Mouffe, 2000: 16). By transforming conflict into agonism, this antagonistic dimension can be given a form of expression that will not destroy the political association. Rather, agonism will establish a common bond so that parties in conflict will not treat their opponents as enemies to be eradicated, whose demands are illegitimate. What is fundamental here is that those in conflict have a common symbolic ground and recognise the legitimacy of their opponents, even though there is no rational solution to their conflict.

Actors in this context may conflict with one another but they must also view themselves as 'belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place' (Mouffe, quoted in Howarth, 2008: 178). Citizens are imbued with an agonistic ethos; they abide by the democratic rules and procedures that underpin this common symbolic space, and hold a consensus on the institutions constitutive of democracy and on the ethico-political values informing the political association. However, this consensus must be accompanied by conflict and dissent concerning the *interpretation* of this shared set of ethico-political principles. Citizens must struggle to impose different interpretations of equality and freedom within an overall allegiance to the principles and institutions of liberal democracy (Howarth, 2008: 178). As Mouffe herself explains, 'what is at stake in the agonistic struggle is the very configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured: it is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally' (2000: 21)

It is for these reasons that Mouffe believes Habermas' vision of deliberative democracy falls short. As she explains, 'the ideal of a pluralist democracy cannot be to reach a rational consensus in the public sphere. Such a consensus cannot exist. We have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilisation of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion' (2000: 17). Theorists who wish to eliminate passions from politics are showing their lack of understanding of the dynamics of the political. Rather than suggesting that power could be dissolved through rational debate, and trying to disguise power relations under the veil of rationality or morality, an agonistic approach 'acknowledges the real nature of its frontiers and the forms of exclusion that they entail' (Mouffe, 2000: 17). Mouffe's vision of agonistic pluralism calls, in short, for a plurality of passionate subjects to exercise voice, make demands and be heard, within a shared symbolic order. However, this shared symbolic order is not fixed; it can be interpreted in a number of different ways. It is by bringing the political back into politics that Mouffe envisages this happening, through which "antagonism" will be transformed into "agonism", "enemies" into "adversaries".

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Mouffe warns of the dangers that accompany the refusal to acknowledge and embrace a vibrant clash of democratic political positions. She believes that if agonism is not accepted, and democracy continues to be envisaged in terms of consensus and reconciliation, there is the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation among other forms of collective identitification. The result can be the 'crystallisation 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' (Mouffe, 2000: 16). In particular, Mouffe believes that too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation will lead to the rise of identity politics and far-right extremism. In sum, refusing to accept the inherent antagonism in politics, and attempting to overlook these conflicts in favour of rational consensus is dangerous both in theory and in practice. Such a refusal can in fact exacerbate antagonisms and destroy the 'common symbolic space' necessary for healthy democratic engagement.

*Some Criticisms*

As way of both balancing and enriching the debate, it is useful to look at some of ways Connolly and Mouffe have been criticised. Connolly's theory has been criticised for lacking the necessary mechanisms to formalise ideas of inclusion and recognition. Many have questioned *how* existing social orders can be challenged and transformed. More attention must be paid to the economic, material and institutional obstacles that block radical structural change, as well as the precise composition and configuration of such impediments (Howarth, 2008: 189). The claim that an agonistic model of democracy could foster greater inclusion of diverse citizens as well as mutual respect between communities will remain ineffective and simply rhetorical in the absence of such ideas. Moreover, Connolly has been accused of optimistically overlooking the ways in which power relations may undercut the abilities and opportunities of citizens to participate in democratic institutions. As Monique Deveaux explains, 'Who has meaningful access to different political institutions; who possesses the leisure time, education and skills to form judgements and participate in public debate; and whether the mass media compromise citizens' independence in matters of opinion and decision-making: these are all questions that need to be addressed if an agonistic conception of democracy is to be credible' (1999: 13).

A further issue, often directed at Mouffe, is that the kind of vibrant clashes that are advocated may be more likely to harden or reify existing identities than to transform them (Schaap, 2006: 270). It cannot be guaranteed that the we/they distinction as put forward by Mouffe will automatically be transformed into a democratic relationship among adversaries. Indeed, it seems equally as likely that a model of politics that emphasises public conflict, contestation and disagreement could lead to the entrenchment of social and cultural identities, and thus the continuation of antagonism in the public sphere, rather than the transformation of antagonism into agonism. As Deveaux suggests, 'Quite possibly, political institutions with an oppositional or "agonistic" character might make it more difficult for diverse cultural communities to see that they do share at least some social and moral views, norms and interests in common with others – even leading instead to the reification and polarisation of their identities' (1999: 15). This point is particularly relevant when analysing divided societies. In some extreme cases, it is the case that democracy is only possible by taking certain divisive issues off the political agenda. In this sense, Mouffe's assertion that a well-functioning democracy is one that is highly politicised might be criticised as being naively optimistic.

There are also some theoretical concerns that appear to undermine Mouffe's vision of agonistic pluralism. First, it is not entirely clear how or why citizens will come to have the 'agonistic respect' for each other that would ensure that their conflict remains non-violent. As Schaap explains, in divided societies, 'reasonableness' is precisely what is lacking. At least deliberative democrats have legitimating procedures, which provide a critical standard in terms of which to regulate political contest; agonistic democrats provide no alternative (2006: 269). However, agonists must challenge this normative claim and counter deliberative democrats by arguing that reasonableness is precisely what a reconciliatory politics hopes to bring about. The central point is that what counts as reasonable cannot be determined in advance but must itself be worked out politically. As Schaap goes on to suggest, 'The risk of antagonism cannot be avoided but can only be elided by representing political community in terms of an overlapping moral consensus among reasonable persons' (2006: 269). However, although this might solve one issue, we are then confronted by another: who decides, and by what criteria, which persons are to count as "reasonable"? This is one of the biggest challenges facing agonists, with most theorists unable to determine the boundaries by which to identify an "adversary" as opposed to an "enemy". It is crucial, in order for democracy to maintain itself as a political

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regime, that democrats are able to distinguish between legitimate democratic adversaries who share a commitment to the values of equality and liberty, and antagonistic enemies of democracy who do not. We are faced with a 'paradox of democracy', within which the task must be to expand pluralism without thereby sanctioning undemocratic practices.

A final, related, point concerns the normative nature of agonistic pluralism itself. As Stefan Rummens expresses,

'Mouffe's agonistic model of politics is marred by some crucial but persistent ambiguities… When Mouffe emphasises the agonistic dimension present in all human societies, she is not merely making an ontological point about the ineliminability of political struggle. Instead, she is also making the normative claim that agonism *should be* valued because of its ability to uphold the pluralistic nature of society' (2009: 385).

Thus, because agonistic pluralism is itself a political project, it falls into the same trap of making normative assumptions about the ways in which society is best structured. The commitment by agonists to the universal inclusionary logic of liberalism and to the ethico-political values of liberty and equality in particular is not a neutral option. To be consistent, 'the agonistic inclusion attempted by agonistic pluralism cannot be unconditional since, as a normative theory, it needs to reject as inimical those political projects that are incompatible with the idea of pluralism' (Rummens, 2009: 385). These theories may therefore be viewed as contradictory, even hypocritical, in their non-essentialism. In dismissing universalism as a ploy for hegemony, agonism runs the risk of becoming too relative.

## Empirical Analysis: Radical Politics in Turkey

Whilst there is an abundance of literature on the theory of democratic agonism, there is surprisingly little which attempts to apply these theoretical assumptions to tangible case studies. It was this gap in the literature which became the impetus for this project, with the belief that reconciling theoretical and empirical analyses could help to enrich and deepen the case for agonistic democracy. As previously mentioned, agonistic pluralism is not only an analytical framework, but also an actual form of political organisation that its adherents advocate. The latter part of this paper will therefore apply the theories of agonism developed thus far to Turkish politics. It will ask, essentially, whether the theories of democracy articulated by Mouffe and Connolly are useful ways of understanding the radicalism that currently constitutes daily politics in Turkey. Through this empirical analysis, we will see how a critical reorientation in democratic theory bears on the actual meaning, value and radical impulses of democracy itself.

Turkey is a particularly fitting case study to illustrate why agonistic pluralism is necessary for the democratic project. A number of related issues are highlighted. Firstly, it illustrates how the hegemonic democratic system, dominated as it is by liberal-rationalist universalism, is undermining the democratic project. Traditional political theory is completely unable to help us understand what is happening in Turkey. Furthermore, we will see how this wrong 'type' of democracy may be politically harmful, leading to the growth of collective identities around religious, nationalist or ethnic forms of identification. The two 'dangers' Mouffe identifies – the rise of the extreme right and the rise of identity politics – can both be found in the Turkish case. The case of Turkish politics will therefore prove that it is essential we expand or deepen democracy either through a modern or postmodern project. Ultimately, it will allow us to critique the deliberative model of democracy and put forward a convincing case for a democratic project founded upon the principles of agonistic pluralism.

*Background*

Turkey, a country of diverse social fabric, is defined by its radicalism; daily antagonisms exist between secularists, Islamists, nationalists and leftists. Islam sits in the background of the secular regime established by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923. Kemal's dramatic steps towards secularisation transformed the circumstances in which religion and politics interact in Turkey, this interaction now changing continuously according to the social and political circumstances of the time (Kanra, 2009: 2). Identities in Turkish politics are often diverse and overlapping; ethical, religious and cultural divisions cut deep, and there is a relentless contest between secular and Islamic ideas. The dynamics of these interactions make Turkey an interesting case study of the different ways in which agonistic democracy can and should function.

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The issues surrounding the democratic debate in Turkey today have their origins in the Ottoman period and the subsequent formation of the Turkish Republic in the early twentieth century. We can trace the dominance of the liberal-rationalist view of democracy in Turkish politics to the Ottoman period and the modernisation reforms that followed. The Ottoman conceptualisation of politics assumed that only the guardians were able to know what the common good is, and thus saw no place for a political legitimacy based on citizen activity. Following from this, when the modernisation process started in the late 18$^{th}$ century and took on its new form in the republican period, democratisation was considered to be a technical issue, and the role of citizens as democratic subjects was disregarded. The model of democracy which was established therefore does not assume any connection between citizens and politics beyond the existing institutional relationships. Democratic activity is limited to the act of voting and excludes citizens from the decisions that affect their lives (Doğanay, 2004: 731). Modern Turkey was established out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. It was premised upon a vision of modernity and self-determination which can be traced back to the Enlightenment; founded upon principles of universalism, progress, reason, individualism, emancipation and the perfectibility of human society. Atatürk's nationalism was inspired by the conviction that there is only one universal civilisation, and thus identity politics in Turkey is based on the universalist idea of 'Turkishness' (Rumford, 2002: 260). Although today Turkey is often seen as a model of democracy for the Middle East, historically Turkey's experience with democracy has been extremely limited. This has been the result of universalist conceptions of identity and liberal-rationalist conceptualisations of democracy. In considering Turkey's current democratic situation, and looking at how democracy might be expanded or deepened, we cannot underestimate the effect that these experiences have had on Turkey's democratic development.

Politics in Turkey cannot be studied without considering the role of religion. With the proclamation of the Kemalist Turkish Republic in 1923, Islam lost its privileged status, and the country took dramatic steps towards secularisation. These steps transformed the circumstances in which religion and politics interact in Turkey (Kanra, 2005: 526). The divisions between secular and Islamic lines in Turkey have become increasingly antagonistic following the rise of the Islamic Refah Partisi (RP), or Welfare Party, into the ranks of government during the 1990s. Islamic politics continued to grow during the 2002 general elections, following the formation of a new party, Adalet ve Kalinma Partisis (AKP), or Justice and Development Party (Kanra, 2009: 2). Today, it appears that Turkey has become one of the rare examples in the Islamic world where Islam successfully coexists with a secular system. Yet, as we shall see, reconsidering the democratic framework casts doubt on the viability of the "Turkish model" of democracy.

*Conceptualising Democracy in Turkey Today*

The dominant, liberal-rationalist understanding of democracy in Turkey reduces democratisation to modifications on the constitutional structure, and thus disregards how the process itself should function. Democratisation is viewed as institutional and legal revisions, and the existence of structures and institutions associated with democracy are taken as the measure of democratic values. Most of the literature on democratic consolidation in Turkey focuses uniquely on the formal structural arrangements concerning party systems, electoral procedures and public administration, and emphasises the role of the bureaucratic and military elite in Turkish politics (Doğanay, 2004: 731). However, this liberal-rationalist, or universalist approach to democracy is fundamentally flawed, and 'the conflation of democracy with state discourses, institutions and structures results in a superficial assessment of the quality of Turkish democracy' (Czajka & İsyar, 2011). It is not enough to simply have the outward trimmings and institutions of democracy. The situation of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey confirms this. Whilst the situation of minorities has improved in the last two decades, and there have been institutional and legal advances in the recognition of the individual rights of religious and ethnic minorities, collective cultural and social rights remain either legally unrecognised or inadequately enforced (Czajka & İsyar, 2011). Specifically, the Kurdish issue is illuminating: the 2009 announcement by the Erdoğan government to provide the Kurdish minority more freedom was welcomed, yet this has not been followed through substantively. As Human Rights Watch describes it: 'Following the Justice and Development Party government's encouraging talk of pursuing democratisation in Turkey and of trying the solve the Kurdish problem, prosecutors have turned right around and taken new menacing steps against legal Kurdish political organisations' (quoted in LeVine, 2011). A liberal-rationalist approach places too much emphasis on institutions and formal structures, and is thus ill-equipped to deal with the real 'crisis of democracy' in Turkey. In conflating democracy simply with institutions and structures, this approach has only advanced the situation of minorities on the surface; deeper democratic concerns are ignored or buried.

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In the last few years there have been new theoretical and political developments in Turkey that have stressed a more extensive model of democracy. These models are based on deliberative or dialogue-based forms of democracy, as previously outlined. Bora Kanra for example argues for a deliberative model of democracy that appreciates the social learning capacity of deliberation. She finds potential moments of reconciliation between secular and Islamic discourses in Turkey, and discovers that divisions between these discourses 'are not necessarily insurmountable' (2009: 3-4). Specifically, she points out the acknowledgement by the AKP of the most fundamental secular principle: the separation of religious and political affairs. Erdoğan himself made a commitment to secularism: 'secularism, [he] described, provides an essential tool to regulate the balance between religion and politics by keeping the state neutral and at an equal distance to all faiths and religions' (Kanra, 2005: 528). For Kanra, this is of primary importance to the enhancement of democratic aspirations in Turkey. This paradigm shift by the AKP has created a "climate for dialogue" between once extremely alienated sections of Turkish society. Consequently, 'A healthy dialogue orientated to social learning and mutual understanding between Islamic and secular forces within the Turkish public sphere could enhance the possibility that an adequate framework for reconciling differences can be established' (2005: 530). Additionally, Kanra detects some similarities between liberal left and some Islamic groups; 'These two groups show signs of converging in conceptualisation of a democratic order based on the protection of individual rights'. For her, the fact that two different sections of Turkish society, traditionally hostile to one another, are now able to develop a similar view of democratic politics is of 'fundamental importance to the future forms of democracy in Turkey' (2009; 4). It is not my aim to completely dispute Kanra's argument, as there is much in the deliberative model of democracy that I believe is worth keeping. In divided societies, it is important that rare moments of reconciliation are acknowledged and expanded. In Turkey, the AKP's acceptance of secularist principles and its entering into dialogue with other political factions is certainly a productive step, and deliberation is clearly an important part of vigorous democratic dialogue.

However, from an agonistic standpoint, what I take issue with is the normative view that consensus and reconciliation are to be upheld as ultimate goals of democracy. The blindness to antagonism that accompanies deliberative models of 'healing nations' and 'restoring community' is not only based on flawed premises, but can dangerously overlook the real issues at stake here. We must remember that the moral consensus on which deliberation is based will always be political constituted. What a perspective based on agonistic pluralism reminds us is that Kanra forgets that the 'playing field' within which political decisions are made is the result of certain hegemonic practices and discourses. Thus, rational consensus cannot be the end-game of a pluralist democracy, as every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilisation of power, and always entails some form of exclusion (Mouffe, 2000: 17). Kanra's attempt to find similarities between diverse movements in Turkey has theoretical flaws and could be politically dangerous. The terms of reconciliation will always be politically constituted and bound in power relations. Thus, although the AKP's acceptance of secularist principles may appear to be an advance for democracy, this move is caught up in the struggle to define what constitutes 'the political', and any final consensus will reflect the hegemonic values of those in power. The political, as articulated by Mouffe, is clearly misunderstood here, with Kanra believing that the 'shared symbolic order' is fixed, and that the best we can achieve democratically is consensus. In misunderstanding the political in this way, the role of power and antagonism in politics is substantially overlooked.

Deliberative democracy is not so much wrong, as incomplete; Kanra's work is not critical enough, and excludes what is considered "unreasonable" from the public sphere. A more critical perspective must focus on the issues of exclusion, concerned with 'who' is involved, 'whose' agenda is being served, 'whose' voice predominates in public discussion and 'how' people are kept outside the process of discussion and decision-making (Doğanay, 2004: 732). Although, of course, there must be some sort of boundaries that exclude anti-democratic claims from the public sphere, these boundaries themselves must be up for deliberation. This is what Mouffe means when she asserts that we must reconstitute 'the political'; what makes up politics itself must be contested and conflicted. Thus, central to the criticism of deliberative democracy is the question of 'how the decisions made as the outcome of persuasive processes of argumentation will be to the benefit of all, rather than to that of the people who dominate by having the institutional and social priorities necessary to advocate their own interest'. Because of inequalities of power and resources, 'some participants are privileged to set the agenda of deliberation'; as a result, 'the participants deprived from the attributes of power… are effectively silenced because of their inability to dominate the deliberative processes controlled by the style of leadership and expertise' (Doğanay, 2004: 732-733). Thus, another problem with a

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deliberative form of democracy in Turkey is that it excludes 'unreasonable claims' from the decision-making process, without the self-criticism required to question these boundaries.

The position of the political left in Turkey seems to best showcase this issue. The radical left tends to see the Republican reforms, the legacy of Atatürk, military dictatorships, state elites and extreme nationalism as 'different facets of the same ideology and political power structure' (Ayata & Ayata, 2007: 216). They argue that 'these constitute the basis of a repressive and despotic state apparatus and ideology that they generally identify as Kemalism' (ibid). For them, the 'engine of democratisation' has been first the centre-right parties and then the Islamist movement (ibid). It is not surprising, then, that these radicals are strongly rejected, not only by the centre-right and Islamist parties, but also by the social democrats and the centre-left. Their claims – that democratisation requires the negation and ultimate elimination of the Kemalist political outlook and ideology – are seen as unreasonable, and are thus rejected from the democratic arena. This alludes to the hegemony of the neoliberal discourse within the political landscape of Turkey. In this regard, although consensus is being established between Islamists and nationalists, this consensus only prevails within a certain hegemonic discourse. With the claims of the radical left completely excluded from the democratic debate, and their attempt to create a new political platform which could challenge neoliberalism quashed, what is established through deliberation cannot claim to be truly democratic.

This brings us to a further, related issue concerning the centre-left and the dominance of the neoliberal discourse in Turkey today. Although the centre-left has traditionally had less dominance in Turkish politics, in the movements that do exist, it is possible to see liberal economic values and ideas having a growing influence over the political outlook and ideology of the centre-left. As Sencer Ayata argues, 'Political liberalism… constituted the very core of the centre-left discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. The Social Democratic People's Party of Erdal İnönü argued for individual, civil, social and political rights emphasising the rule of law, comprehensive democratisation and changing the state-centric 1982 Constitution to empower the individual against the state' (2007: 217).

It could be argued, in this way, that the ideology of the centre-left is being co-opted by the neoliberal rationale. The centre-left poses no real challenge to the dominant discourse because the hegemony of neoliberalism works in such ways that it makes all other claims appear unreasonable or undemocratic. Centre-left ideologies are therefore subsumed under neoliberalism, made to think that this 'third way' is the only option to further democracy. As Mouffe points out, 'One of the main problems nowadays is that the left's coming to terms with the importance of pluralism, and of liberal democratic institutions, has been accompanied by the mistaken belief that this means abandoning any attempt to offer an alternative to the present hegemonic order. Hence the sacralisation of consensus, the blurring of the left/right distinction and the present urge of many left parties to locate themselves at the centre' (1998: 13).

Thus instead of trying to build a new hegemony, the left has capitulated to the neoliberal one. This is a political dangerous manoeuvre. From the standpoint of agonistic pluralism, the left/right opposition is the means through which legitimate conflict is given form and institutionalised. If this framework does not exist or is weakened, the process of transformation of antagonism into agonism is hindered and this can have dire consequences for democracy. This is why, as Mouffe insists, 'discourses about the "end of politics" and the irrelevance of the left/right distinction should not be cause for celebration, but for concern' (1998: 17). This concern is particularly valid in the Turkish case, where the centre-left's adoption of neoliberal values means there is very little debate about possible alternatives; democracy becomes a 'struggle among elites, taking place in a neutral terrain, thereby making adversary forces invisible and reducing politics to an exchange of arguments and the negotiation of compromises' (Mouffe, 1998: 13).

Aside from this, there are two major dangers of refusing to acknowledge the inherent antagonism and the primary reality of strife in social life: firstly, the growth of other types of collective identities around religious, nationalist or ethnic forms of identification; and secondly, the increasing role played by extreme-right parties. Both these dangers are evidenced in the Turkish case. There is a clear connection in Turkish politics between the failure of the universalist Kemalist project and the appeal of identity politics, specifically the popularity of the Kurdish guerrilla movement, the PKK. With Turkish nationhood racialised, religious and ethnic minorities appear in dominant discourses as "inauthentic Turks" who threaten the unity and existence of the Turkish nation (Czajka & İsyar, 2011).

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Paradoxically, the outcome of this universalist project is the increasing appeal of identity based politics, with minorities turning to political movements founded upon collective identities. The emergence of these new social identities means that Turkey can no longer sustain a universal identity to the exclusion of the particular (Rumford, 2002: 263). Doing so will only worsen antagonisms and undermine the democratic project, leading to the 'crystallisation 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' (Mouffe, 2000: 16). What is required in this instance follows along the lines of Connolly's ethos of pluralisation. We must open up the space for difference through political contestation, thereby "pluralising pluralism". Rather than aiming for a final reconciliation, which would inevitably be based on exclusion, the tension between identity and difference in this model of democracy is continually negotiated and altered. Although understanding the Kurdish issue in Turkey is far beyond the scope of this paper, what is clear is that an approach to democracy that is thoroughly based on agonism is less likely to lead to the growth of collective identities based on religion, nationalism or ethnicity.

Turning now to the second "danger" identified by Mouffe as being conclusive of the refusal to approach democracy from an agonistic standpoint: the rise in popularity of far-right parties and movements within the Turkish political landscape. Mouffe has argued that in blurring political frontiers and refusing to acknowledge the antagonism inherent in politics, the extreme-right wing has come to play a more prominent role. As she explains, this increasing popularity should be understood in the context of the "consensus at the centre" type of politics that has resulted from the growing ideological convergence between the main governing parties (1998: 15). During the 1990s there was a considerable realignment of voters in Turkey, as they gradually shifted their allegiances toward the parties to the far right of the ideological spectrum. In the 1991 and 1995 elections, for example, the Islamic revivalist and ultra-nationalist Turkish parties experienced stellar increased in their performances and electoral support (Kalaycıoğlu, 2007: 249). These parties – the only ones who could to challenge the dominant consensus – appeared as anti-Establishment forces representing the will of the people. Even more worryingly, the AKP has consistently been a party of the far right. The end of the Cold War and the decline in support for left-wing ideologies and parties in Turkey rendered the far-right as legitimate and attractive political choices. As the left shrunk, the right gained momentum, and 'the centre of political gravity on the Turkish ideological spectrum swiftly shifted further right' (Kalaycıoğlu, 2007: 239-249). In this way, extreme right wing politics became normalised in Turkey. The rise of the AKP represented a new form of populist nationalism, cloaked in religion, tradition, even chauvinism and xenophobia. For Mouffe, such a situation would not have been possible 'had more real political choices been available within the traditional democratic spectrum' (1998: 15). Allowing for the formation of tangible political challenges to the neo-liberal discourse and encouraging the development of alternative democratic frameworks would reduce the appeal of far-right extremism in its most dangerous, all-encompassing forms.

## Conclusions

Turkey has proved to be an interesting case through which to assess political agonism both in theory and in practice. It is vital that political theory moves away from liberal, deliberative or consensus based models to an "agonistic" approach that 'acknowledges the real nature of its frontiers and the forms of exclusion that they entail, instead of trying to disguise them under the veil of rationality or morality' (Mouffe, 2000: 17). Mouffe encourages us to come to terms with the fact that power is constitutive of social relations. Any political order is the expression of hegemony, of a specific pattern of power relations, and will therefore show traces of exclusion. Thus, the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable claims must itself have a political dimension; it must be contestable and open to discussion. Deliberative models fall short because they refuse to acknowledge that liberal conceptions of equality and liberty are not fixed symbolic orders. Citizens should be free to contest the terms of public life and the conditions of their political association, rather than acting within a pre-determined conception of what is to count as legitimate political action (Schaap, 2006: 257). As Mouffe herself insists, 'A perspective like agonistic pluralism, which reveals the impossibility of establishing a consensus without exclusion, is of fundamental importance for democratic politics. By warning us again of the illusion that a fully achieved democracy could ever be instantiated, it forces us to keep the democratic contestation alive' (2000: 17). Rather than giving up on 'left' and 'right' as outdated terms, this requires us to redefine them. Contestation is not obsolete: the left should reignite the democratic struggle by redefining and re-engaging with the political nature of social life (Mouffe, 1998: 17).

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However, although theoretically it is possible to take important steps towards a more radical political theory which acknowledges the centrality and inevitability of conflict and power relations in social life, the findings of this paper have proven that in practice it is far more difficult to implement such an approach. It is not until the 'apparent excess of consensus' embodied by the centre-right dominance of politics, and the marginalisation of a political 'underclass' in the form of parties towards the extremities of the political spectrum, are profoundly disturbed that we can consider democracy to have really changed (Weeks, 2012). The inherent radicalism of Turkish politics would appear to give us hope for implementing an agonistic model of democracy. Moreover, the issues touched upon in this paper – the rise of the far right and identity politics, the dominance of the neoliberal discourse, the rejection of the far left from the democratic arena – all point to the pressing need to deepen or expand democracy. However, it seems that there is little evidence that Turkey is choosing this path, and Turkish democracy largely remains caught up in the antagonistic politics which Mouffe's philosophy seeks to eliminate. Although there has been some structural change within the Turkish political system, the persistence of antagonism in the political process proves that, whilst steps may be taken to change structures and institutions, it is far more difficult to amend the consciousness of an entire population. By choosing to ignore an agonistic approach, democratic politics in Turkey has in fact exacerbated the antagonistic potential existing in society. Furthermore, at the heart of the problem lies a difficult paradox: 'is it ever possible for agonistic pluralism to be anything more than hypothetical when it is, in reality, an inevitability that there will always be parties whose mentalities are geared towards a perpetual characterisation of the other as enemy', as is arguably the case with the AKP (Weeks, 2012). However, whilst the situation in Turkey may not be cause for optimism as such, the issues raised here have certainly confirmed the pressing need for an agonistic democracy, within which the democratic framework or 'rules of the game' can and should come up for deliberation at any time.

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*Written by: Kathryn Harvey*
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