The importance of 'a vibrant clash of democratic political positions'
why populism belongs in the political arena

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Abstract

Populism is often regarded detrimental to democracy. But populism also stresses the importance of the rule of the people, which is what democracy in its most basic form is all about. This positive relation between populism and democracy is often overlooked. In this thesis I therefore examine not only the negative effects, but also pay attention to the positive effects that populism can have. By using aspects of Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, I demonstrate that populism has a dualistic character: it has advantageous as well as detrimental features. Given this dualism, I state that populist parties do belong in the political arena, but that established parties should implement a strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation. On an *ad hoc* basis, established parties can either cooperate or non-cooperate with a populist party. I will show that this strategy upholds the positive effects of populism, while simultaneously thwarting its negative effects.

Keywords: populism, democracy, agonism, Mouffe, strategy, cooperation, *cordon sanitaire*

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Populism has become a regular phenomenon in parliaments in Europe. In the period 2000-2013, at least 51 political parties that can be denoted as "populist" gained parliamentary representation (Van Kessel, 2015, p.71-72). But what makes a political party populist? Roughly speaking a party is denoted populist when it appeals to the interests and demands of the ordinary people and rebels against the establishment and the political elite (Parlement en Politiek, no date). Examples of populist parties are the Dutch *Party for Freedom* (*PVV)*, the French *Front National* (*FN*) and the *Freedom Party of Austria* (*FPÖ*) (Mudde, 2004; Van Kessel, 2015).

The success of populist parties is met with suspicion and warnings, for example by (inter)national political leaders and high officials (Peeperkorn, 2014; AFP, 2014). In an interview with Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, President of the EU Jean-Claude Junker stated that when populist parties channel the dissatisfaction of citizens and when established parties start to imitate the populist parties, countries will become ungovernable (Peeperkorn, 2014). Junker clearly regards populism as a dangerous phenomenon. This resonates with what I think is often thought about populism and populist parties: that they pose a threat to democracy and that other political parties should not associate themselves with them.

However, when thinking about populism, I think we should not forget one of the reasons why populist parties are so successful, namely that people vote for them because they are discontent with the way in which established parties respond to their concerns (Van Kessel, 2015, p.180). If these discontented voters turn to populist parties, are those parties then not increasing the representativeness of parliaments, at least in principle? In addition, it could be argued that because populist parties emphasize that the concerns and demands of the ordinary people should be central to politics, that populist parties actually emphasize the essence of democracy. At least when one considers democracy to simply mean "rule by the people". Other views of democracy, such as "liberal democracy" and "representative democracy" might lead to different conclusions about the relationship between populism and democracy. To simply state that populism poses a threat to "democracy" thus seems short-sighted. The relationship between populism and democracy warrants a more thorough evaluation, I think.

This evaluation is especially required because the assessment of populism also has consequences for the way in which populist parties should be treated. If there is a positive side to populism, populist parties should not be simply ignored or treated as enemies. Simultaneously, if there is a negative side to populism, I do not think that we can let populist parties go their own way unimpededly. Populism thus presents us with a challenge. A challenge that especially the other,

established parties in parliament have to deal with. In their day-to-day business, those parties have to decide whether to cooperate with the populist parties or not.

It is precisely the possible ambiguous character of populism and the role of established parties in dealing with populist parties, that I will draw attention to in this thesis. This thesis will be guided by the following research questions:

Although populism is often considered detrimental to democracy, can it also be seen as beneficial to democracy? Furthermore, how should established parties deal with populist parties?

Even though populism is a highly debated topic among empirical researchers (see e.g. Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a; Van Kessel, 2015), it received far less attention from political theorists. Yet Canovan (2004, p.241) is right when she argues that it is worthwhile to devote more attention to it from a political philosophical perspective. After all, populism raises all sorts of philosophical questions, for example regarding the meaning it attributes to "the people" and how we should deal with populism.

One aspect that has already drawn some political theoretical attention actually is populism's relation to democracy (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Canovan, 1999; Urbinati, 1998). Thereby often the 'two strand theory of democracy' is used. This theory regards liberal democracy an unnatural and precarious combination of a liberal logic that 'is concerned with individual rights, universal principles and the rule of law' and a democratic logic that 'is concerned with the sovereign will of the people, understood as unqualified majority rule and typically expressed through referendums' (Canovan, 2004, p.244). From this view, populism threatens the precarious balance between the logics by overstating that democracy should be about the rule of the people. Because of its emphasis on the liberal aspects of modern democracy, less attention has been paid to other, perhaps more favourable aspects of populism, Canovan rightly argues (2004, p.244).

A theory that could shed a different light on populism, is Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism (2000; 2005a). Mouffe also set forth a two-strand model of liberal democracy, but thereby argues that the liberal logic has become dominant at the expense of the democratic logic and the idea of popular sovereignty. The hegemonic position of the liberal logic has become the *status quo* (Mouffe, 2000, p.5). Alternatives to this *status quo* have disappeared and thereby also 'the very possibility of a legitimate form of expression for the resistances against the dominant power relations' (Mouffe, 2000, p.5). Mouffe deems this problematic because it implies that there are no legitimate channels through which dissenting opinions, that are always present in pluralistic societies, can be expressed (2000, p.104). In the absence of such channels, conflict cannot be played out in a political and nonviolent manner. What democracy actually requires, Mouffe argues, is 'a vibrant clash of democratic political positions' in order to play out conflicts in a peaceful and political

manner (2000, p.104). This clash should take place in politics, that then not only forms a political outlet for people, but will also ensure that people feel represented in democracy.

Its focus on the need for a political outlet for the plurality of opinions and demands in society, and the discontent with the *status quo,* is precisely why Mouffe's theory is interesting for an evaluation of populism. With her theory, it could be argued that populist parties can function as a manifestation of such a political outlet; they speak for those people that have opinions that deviate from the opinions of the powerful elite. Populism and Mouffe's theory may thus have some ground in common. I therefore found it surprising that Mouffe herself did not seem to be aware of this common ground for a long time. In her analyses of the success of populist parties, Mouffe has been predominantly negative about the political phenomenon (2000, p.116; 2005a, p.66-72; 2005c, p.56). Only recently has she come to realise that there could also be a positive side to populism. Despite her renewed perspective of populism, her analysis of populism still remains inchoate. Using Mouffe's theory for the evaluation of populism will not only shed a new light on populism, but also point at certain aspects of Mouffe´s analysis of populism, as well as of her theory in general, that need further explanation, such as the importance of tolerance and freedom of expression.

The second topic of this thesis, regarding how established parties should deal with populist parties, has received even less attention from political theorists (Rummens and Abts, 2010; Müller, 2012). There are many empirical studies that discuss how established parties dealt with populist radical right parties in the past (see e.g. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012b), but less has been written about what a proper response of the established parties to populist parties is. By evaluating the options that established parties have, I aim not only at making a contribution to the scientific debate about dealing with populist parties, but also the wider discussion about populism in society and among politicians. If populist parties indeed have not only a negative, but also a positive side to them, this should not be overlooked or ignored by other politicians. Ignoring this positive side could be as harmful as the negative side of populism itself.

Outline

My evaluation of populism starts in chapter two with a discussion of the concept "populism". Although there is no definitional consensus on the concept, there can be distinguished three key characteristics that are shared by most definitions. These key characteristics are (1) "the people", (2) "the elite" and (3) the homogeneity of "the people" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.8; Rooduijn, 2013, p.47). Those elements constitute the specific populist ideology and vision on politics and society. In this chapter I will also make a distinction between populism on the one hand, and populist parties on the other. Whereas populism is a theoretical concept, populist parties are the empirical manifestation of populism. When discussing the effects of populism, I will primarily speak

of populism as a theoretical concept, because it allows me to evaluate populism free of contextual aspects and to compare it to other theoretical concepts, such as democracy.

In the third chapter, Chantal Mouffe's version of agonism will be discussed. The actual analysis of populism starts in chapter four, where I will examine its relation to democracy. Relating populism to different types of democracy - that is democracy in its most basic form, liberal democracy and representative democracy - will lead to the conclusion that the relationship between populism and democracy is ambiguous. In order to fully understand this ambiguity, I zoom in on the specific negative effects in chapter five and on the positive effects in chapter six.

My analysis of populism ends in chapter six with the conclusion that populism has a dualistic character: it has both beneficial and detrimental features. This has serious consequences for the way in which we should treat populist parties. I will argue in chapter seven that populist parties do belong in the political arena, but that they cannot go their way undisturbed. In dealing with populist parties, established parties should use a balanced strategy that takes notice of and deals with both the positive and negative effects of populism. *Ad-hoc* cooperation is such a balanced strategy, that allows established parties to reject populist parties' dangerous proposals, but to support the harmless proposals. In that way, established parties can protect democracy while simultaneously sustaining populism's positive effects.

Chapter 2 Populism

Populism is a much debated concept and a plurality of definitions has been offered. Many definitions refer to characteristics of populism such as charismatic leadership and style of communication, but I will argue that populism should be defined as a "thin-centred ideology". "Thin-centred ideology" refers to a type of ideology that is narrow in scope and consists of only a small numbers of elements (Freeden, 1998). With regard to populism, those elements are "the people", "the elite" and "homogeneity".

§2.1 Populism as a thin-centred ideology

One of the first extensive attempts to develop a useful and plausible definition of populism was made in 1969, when Ionescu and Gellner published an edited volume on populism. Since then, many categorizations and definitions have been suggested (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a). For example, populism has been characterized as a way of political mobilization to challenge the establishment, as charismatic leadership or as a particular style of communication (Abts and Rumens, 2007, p.407; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.5, 8). Populism could also be described as a discursive approach (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.6). According to the discursive approach, most famously set out by Ernesto Laclau (2005a),[1] populism is a political logic that confronts the existing hegemony through dividing the social into 'the people' and 'the power bloc'.

Although there is still no agreement on a general and universal definition of populism, lately there has been some convergence towards consensus on key features of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.8). The first central feature of populism is a reference to "the people" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a; Rooduijn, 2013). "The people" is seen as virtuous, as good and pure. "The people" and especially its "general will" (as the collective will of "the people" as a whole), should therefore be central in politics. It is not predetermined who "the people" is though. This depends on the circumstances in which populism operates and therefore "the people" can take on many different identities (Panizza, 2005, p.3).

Notwithstanding the lack of a predetermined identity, "the people" is regarded as homogeneous. This homogeneity of "the people" is the second fundamental characteristic of populism (Rooduijn, 2013, p.29). "The people" is indivisible and has a single voice and message (Houwen, 2013). This unity and homogeneity thus rules out perceiving "the people" as individuals with a plurality of values and opinions. The third key element in definitions of populism is "the elite" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a; Rooduijn, 2013). "The elite" or "the establishment" are 'powerful minorities [that] in one way or another are obstructing the will of the common people'

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[1] Laclau's view on populism will be discussed more thoroughly in §4.1.

(Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.8). They are corrupt and evil and betray "the people" by not carrying out its general will, populist argue (Mény and Surel, 2002, p.12). "The elite" is therefore opposed to the pure and good "people". "The people" and "the elite" are thus not distinguished from one another based on situational aspects, such as socio-economic class, but based on a moral distinction between good and evil (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012, p.8). For populists the relationship between "the people" and "the elite" is therefore antagonistic (Pasquino, 2007, p.20).

Building on the three key characteristics of populism ("the people", "the elite" and "homogeneity"), according to Mudde (2007, p.23) populism is

> a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.

The concept "thin-centred ideology" refers to a type of ideology consisting of only a small number of political concepts and which therefore has no comprehensive ideological ideas (Freeden, 1998, p.750). Other than the centrality of the general will of "the people", populism has no ideological ideas, for example on the welfare state or on foreign policy. Instead, as a thin-centred ideology, populism has a 'chameleonic' character (Taggart, 2004, p.275). It attaches itself to various other thick ideologies, such as socialism, conservatism and fascism. Because of its chameleonic character, what shape or form populism takes depends on the context. In Western Europe populism is often seen in conjunction with the far right, whereas in developing countries populism often leans to the left (Hawkins *et al*, 2012, p.4). The chameleonic character of populism also influences who is seen as "the people" and as the enemy. Populist radical right parties, for example, are often also called nativist, for stressing the importance and priority of the autochthonous people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Consequently, immigration is an important political issue for them. These parties argue that "the elite" ignores the will of "the people" and instead protects and pursues its own and the immigrants' interest. Immigrants are thus part of the enemy, because they pose a threat to "the people". This image of the enemy can be found for example in the Dutch populist political party *PVV*, that blames "the elite" for allowing mass-immigration and the Islamization of The Netherlands (Vossen, 2013).

The populist view that stems from the key elements can be characterized as 'Manichaean' (Hawkins *et al*, 2012, p.3). A Manichaean worldview refers to an ongoing battle between the Good and the Bad (Calder, 2014). It is a moralising and dualistic approach towards democracy, in which the Good is equated with the (will of) "the people", and the Bad with "the elite" (Hawkins *et al*, 2012). Because of this Manichaean outlook and emphasis on the homogeneous benevolent people, populism is contrasted to pluralism (Hawkins *et al*, 2012, p.3). Pluralism favours difference of

opinions and highlights heterogeneity, whereas populism 'sees a world that is naturally antagonistic' and dualistic with homogeneous groups (Hawkins *et al*, 2012, p.3).

Because of the thinness of the populist ideology, it is sometimes objected that populism is nothing more than a discourse or a political style (Canovan, 2002, p.31). Yet I think that the three key elements and the Manichaean worldview suggest otherwise. Populism may not provide a comprehensive and predetermined point of view on virtually all political issues as thicker ideologies do, but the three key characteristics do determine its general view and interpretation of politics and the world. The key elements of populism determine the stance on a subject. Therefore populism is more than a rhetorical style or trick that can be applied to any subject. I thus regard populism as a thin-centred ideology, consisting of a number of key concepts that together form a view on the world and democracy.

A sense of crisis

To demonstrate that "the people", "the elite" and "the homogeneity" of the people are indeed the three key concepts of populism, Rooduijn (2013) has tested these and nine other characteristics against six familiar cases (differing in time and space) of populism. Rooduijn showed that these three characteristics can be witnessed in all cases (2013, p.47), but also identified a fourth characteristic common to all cases, namely 'the proclamation of a crisis' (2013, p.49). The sense of "crisis" has not come to the fore as a *central* element of populism thus far. Yet, this element can be found in the discussion of populism of several authors. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008, p.5) for example argue that populists bring about the idea of a crisis, by invoking the idea that communities are losing what they once had if "the people" does not stand up and makes it voice heard. Rooduijn himself (2013, p.47) suggests that populists proclaim the existence of a crisis, because "the people" is exploited by the selfish "elite". Populists use the proclamation of crisis to arouse a sense of importance and urgency in their message.

According to Rooduijn and Albertazzi and McDonnell the sense of crisis thus follows from populism's proclamation of it. But it could also be the other way around: populism emerges exactly in response to "a sense of extreme crisis" as Taggart argues (2004, p.75). Laclau (2005a, p.177) puts it even more strongly, by arguing that 'some degree of crisis [...] is a necessary precondition of populism' (Laclau, 2005a, p.177).[2] In what way populism and a sense of crisis are related to each other is thus still matter of debate (Rooduijn, 2013; Moffit, 2015). In either case, populists can use the concept of crisis 'for dividing "the people" against a dangerous other' (Moffit, 2015, p.210) and to sustain the Manichaean worldview (Rooduijn, 2013).

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[2] To be precise, Laclau (2005a, p. 177) argues that a sense of crisis is necessary in order for the "populist logic" to develop. The populist logic will be explained in §5.2.

§2.2 Conclusion

Although there is still no consensus on the definition of populism, there has been agreement on the key features of populism (Hawkins *et al*, 2012). Those features are "the people", "the elite" and "the homogeneity" of the people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a; Rooduijn, 2013). Together those concepts form a thin-centred ideology and a Manichaean view on the world (Hawkins *et al*, 2012). For populism, "the people" and its will should be central to politics. "The elite" is evil because they ignore or violate the general will of "the people". This idea of a thin-centred ideology is the definition of populism that I will use in this thesis. Because of the uncertainty about the direction of the relationship between populism and a sense of crisis, I do not regard the latter a key element of the former. Yet, the idea of "crisis" will occasionally come to the fore again later in this thesis.

Regarding populism as a thin-centred ideology that is composed of a limited number of key elements, is not only consistent with the way in which populism is most often understood in recent literature (Hawkins *et al*, 2012), it also allows for a "clean" analysis of populism and its relation to democracy. Contextual aspects or certain manifestations of populism, such as charismatic leadership or a specific political style, can be set aside. This definition of populism also allows for distinguishing between populism on the one hand and populist parties on the other hand. Populism can be seen as a theoretical concept, with populist parties as the empirical manifestation of it. In the evaluation of populism, I focus on populism as a theoretical concept. When answering the second research question, I focus on populist parties.

Chapter 3 Agonism

In this chapter I discuss Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonism. Agonism in general is interesting because it highlights the conflictual dimension within society and politics. What is specific about Mouffe's version is her emphasis on how this conflict can take the form of an agonistic, instead of an antagonistic struggle (Wenman, 2013; Wingenbach, 2011). After discussing Mouffe's theory, her insights can be used in the evaluation of populism and its relation to democracy.

§3.1 Pluralism, liberalism and deliberative democracy

In order to understand the contribution of agonism to political theory, I will start with a short discussion on pluralism, liberalism and deliberative democracy. Liberalism and deliberative democracy are important theories to discuss, because agonism can be seen as a critique on, and as an alternative to these theories. Liberalism and deliberative democracy on the one hand, and agonism on the other hand, have different understandings of pluralism.

Pluralism

The pluralist society we live in today, with all its different preferences, values and cultures, begs the question how to accommodate all these differences in politics and political institutions. On the one hand, the state should accommodate or at least respect those differences. On the other hand, the state needs room to function and it is difficult not to become biased towards some values while neglecting others. Various proposals have been developed in order to tackle this difficult problem of pluralism. According to Schlosberg (2009), roughly two types of responses to this problem can be discerned. The first category of authors sought the solution in state design and proposed solutions such as federalism and universally applicable liberal institutions. These authors tried to reconcile the differences and find some sort of consensus (Schlosberg, 2009). John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (1993) and theories of deliberative democracy are clear examples of this first approach for dealing with pluralism. The second category of authors argued that conflict that stems from pluralism should not be avoided but welcomed. Conflict is indispensable to politics and cannot be eradicated. Striving for consensus is in fact ignoring the inherently conflictual character of politics (Schlosberg, 2009). This has been argued by proponents of agonism, including Chantal Mouffe. To understand how agonism differs from theories such as deliberative democracy and political liberalism, let me first shortly explain the latter.

Liberalism and pluralism

From the perspective of liberalism, politics is about the question of how people with different values and conceptions of the good can live peacefully together 'under a supposedly neutral set of constitutional rules' (Dryzek *et al*, 2009, p.16). With regard to dealing with differences, two different

stands of liberalism can be discerned: perfectionist and political (or neutral) liberalism (Galeotti, 2009).

On the one hand, perfectionist liberalism values pluralism as a prerequisite to develop an autonomous personality (Galeotti, 2009). Through encountering different opinions and real choices, individuals will develop their own autonomous personalities. Perfectionist liberalism is not neutral to the different opinions. Values that are compatible with the liberal values are tolerated, incompatible values should be excluded. Perfectionist liberalism is thus not a neutral, but a comprehensive political ideal (Galeotti, 2009). For political liberalism on the other hand, pluralism is a problematic fact. According to political liberalism, the state and its political institutions should be neutral and independent of any moral outlook (Galeotti, 2009). In that way, the state can be recognized as legitimate by people with differing moral outlooks and values. Individuals are allowed to hold their own views in private, but they should not prefer their own views over those of others in the public sphere. There is thus no or little room for pluralism in the public sphere.

This last type of liberalism is what John Rawls advocates in his book *Political Liberalism* (1993). Rawls tries to find an answer to the main problem of political liberalism, that he formulates as follows (1993, p.XX): 'How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines?'. This question relates to the stability of a society, as well as to the legitimacy of that society. According to Rawls, only those principles and that political power that citizens reasonably can be expected to agree on, is legitimate. He expects citizens to agree on these principles since Rawls asserts it possible to reach an 'overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines' (1993, p.134). This overlapping consensus supposes that citizens, despite their own reasonable comprehensive views or doctrines, can agree on the same basic laws and principles. Such an overlapping consensus will be possible because citizens are reasonable and have reasonable comprehensive views that do 'not reject the essentials of a democratic regime', Rawls argues (1993, p.XVIII). Because of this shared support for the essentials of democratic regimes, consensus is possible. Reasonable citizens will not impose their own comprehensive doctrine on others or forge them to live according to that doctrine. A society that is based on this overlapping consensus will be stable, because this doctrine is agreed on for moral reasons that are internal to their comprehensive doctrine. The overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines is thus more than a strategic compromise of the different comprehensive doctrines or a "modus vivendi", just to overcome a problem.

Deliberative democracy and pluralism

Another set of theories that argues that consensus is possible, although in a somewhat different way,

is deliberative democracy. Bohman (1998, p.401) broadly defines deliberative democracy as 'any one of a family of views according to which the public deliberation of free and equal citizens is the core of legitimate political decision making and self-government'. Proponents of deliberative democracy argue that it is possible to reach consensus through a process of deliberation. During this process of rational deliberation, preferences are altered and consensus becomes possible. Theories of deliberative democracy have emerged in response to aggregative models of democracy. In the aggregative models, people's preferences are simply registered and aggregated through voting in order to reach a decision on what policies to pursue. People's preferences are fixed and not altered in the process of reaching a decision in the aggregative model of democracy (Cunningham, 2002). Deliberative democrats criticize this model of democracy, because it does not encourage citizens to *reason* about one's own and others' preferences and 'to seek consensus over common goods' (Cunningham, 2002, p.165). The decisions that follow from the process of deliberation can be considered legitimate, because all participants can reasonably agree on it (Bohman and Rehg, 2014).

But how is reaching consensus possible in the light of pluralistic societies? Deliberative democrats acknowledge that consensus might not always be reached (Schaap, 2006). Nonetheless, it is worth striving for because taking into consideration the perspectives of all that are affected, will make a decision more legitimate. And, as Schaap (2006, p.259, original emphasis) argues, 'it is only by presupposing the *possibility* of arriving at a consensus that conflict and disagreement can be brought within a shared horizon of meaning between conflicting parties'.

§3.2 General aspects of agonism

After this brief sketch of political liberalism and deliberative democracy, I will now discuss a branch of political theory that takes a different stance on pluralism and consensus, namely agonism. According to agonistic theorists, pluralism is an inevitable fact that follows from 'the human impulse to make meaning of a world that does not provide it' (Wingenbach, 2011, p.22). Every human makes meaning to the world in another way. Pluralism is constitutive of all social orders, but can also always lead to conflict. Agonistic theorist then see politics, and democracy in particular, as the place where those conflicts should take place (Wingenbach, 2011, p.23). This school of political theory thus highlights and focuses on conflict. Hence the term "agonism", which is derived from the Greek word *agon*, which means conflict or strife (Wenman, 2013).

Its understanding of pluralism and concomitant conflict is precisely what sets agonism apart from theories of liberalism and deliberative democracy. According to Wenman (2013, p.29), agonism differs from the former theories in the sense that agonists

1. 'reject the idea that pluralism can be, or ought to be, mediated by a determinant set of rational principles';

2. 'insist that plurality does not only refer to differences between groups and individuals, but also to the circumstances that constitute and condition the identity of those groups and individuals';

3. 'have a keen sense of the ways in which plurality can be distorted and manipulated by dominant interests and values'.

Because pluralism and conflict are inevitable aspects of life that should not be covered up or ignored, disagreement, not consensus, is the natural starting-point and essence of political life. The idealized conceptions of procedural deliberative democracy and other norms that hamper the expression of diverse beliefs are based on flawed premises. Rather than a politics based on consensus, agonists propose 'a form of politics [...] that is essentially contestatory' (Fossen, 2008, p.377). Agonism thus has a post-foundational character: ideas, values and identities are not fixed but contingent constructions that can always be contested (Wenman, 2013; Wingenbach, 2011). This post-foundational character, which is associated with continental political thought, is another way in which agonism differs from analytical political theories such as political liberalism.

Because ideas can always be contested, there should be room in society to cultivate and elaborate on differences and disagreements. Citizens should actively take part in the direct expression of their differing opinions and beliefs, which is 'an indispensable feature of democratic life' according to agonistic democrats (Deveaux, 1999, p.2). Since an agonistic approach to politics does not hide or want to overcome differences, proponents argue that this approach is better able in dealing with pluralism than liberalism and deliberative democracy. Agonistic theorists state that their approach would lead to greater inclusion and respect of different opinions and belief than liberal or deliberative models of democracy (Deveaux, 1999).

Various authors have put forwards agonistic theories, such as Bonnie Honig, William Connoly and Chantal Mouffe. Although these authors all share the core features of agonism as listed by Wenman (2013, p.29, see above), Mouffe differs from Honig and Connoly in her conception of 'the political' (Mouffe, 2005a, p.9). Whereas Honig and Connoly see 'the political' as 'a space of freedom and deliberation', Mouffe sees it as a space of conflict and antagonism (Mouffe, 2005a, p.131). This emphasis on antagonism is what Mouffe's work sets apart from other brands of agonism (Wenman, 2013; Wingenbach, 2011). Because Mouffe already conducted an analysis of the success of populist parties (2005a; 2005c), her work provides an interesting starting point for investigating the (dis)advantages of populism. In the remaining of this chapter I will therefore discuss her version of agonism.

§3.3 Theoretical background of Mouffe's agonism

For a proper understanding of Mouffe's version of agonism, it is necessary to take a closer look at some crucial concepts of her work: "the political", "antagonism", "constitutive outside" and "hegemony". She derived insights in these concepts from the work of Carl Schmitt (1932/2007), Henry Staten's (1985) work on Jacques Derrida, and a book co-written with Ernesto Laclau (1985/2000). Each of these crucial concepts will be discussed in turn.

Schmitt's antagonism and "the political"

Carl Schmitt, a German legal and political theorist, was a fierce critic of liberalism, based on his notion of "the political" and antagonism. According to Schmitt, 'the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy' (1932/2007, p.26). The distinction between friend and enemy represents 'the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or disassociation (Schmitt, 1932/2007, p.26). The intensity of this antagonistic relationship between friend and enemy also denotes 'the ever present possibility of conflict' (Schmitt, 1932/2007, p.32). Conflict must be taken very literally here. It implies violent conflict, aimed at the eradication of the enemy. Because the possibility of combat is ineradicable, it determines how people act and think. Consequently, this 'creates a specifically political behaviour' (Schmitt, 1932/2007, p.34). This extreme and antagonistic relationship between friend and enemy and the behaviour that follows from it, is what Schmitt calls "the political".

The distinction between friends and enemies, or in other words between "us" and "them", exists only when 'one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity' (Schmitt, 1932/2007, p.28). The distinction of an "us" cannot exist without the recognition of a "them", an enemy. The formation of collective identities is thus relational. The state can then only be a political entity when it decides who the enemy is. There are thus other states, which makes Schmitt's theory pluralistic on the *international* level. Yet, on the *domestic* level pluralism is not possible since the friend-enemy distinction is the defining feature of the state. According to Schmitt, other ways of constituting collectivities within the state are not possible 'without destroying the entity [of the state] and the political itself' (1932/2007, p.45). The state itself is thus homogeneous.

Derrida's "constitutive outside"

Another concept that is important for understanding Mouffe's theory, is the notion of "constitutive outside". This notion has been put forward by Henry Staten (1985) to summarize Jacques Derrida's work on the constitution of identities and exclusions. "Constitutive outside" refers to the fact that every identity, every "inside", is constituted in confrontation with an "outside", an "other". And 'to be a true outside, the outside has to be incommensurable with the inside, and at the same time, the condition of emergence of the latter' (Mouffe, 2000, p.12). The "other" is significantly different from

"us", but there only is a "we" because it can be demarcated from the "other". One's own identity is thus established through a process of 'contra-identification': people know that they belong to a certain group by distinguishing other groups to which they do not belong (Van Leeuwen, 2015, p.794). This affirmation of differences between groups, or the recognition of an "outside", is needed to form any identity. In what way the frontiers between "us" and "them" is drawn, is the result of relations of powers (as will be discussed in the next section).

Because identities are relational, one's own identity changes when the perception of the "other" alters. The fact that the constitution of an identity always implies an exclusion, could lead to tensions and frictions in society. Since the contra-identification always implies one group that discriminates itself from another group. Mouffe uses this non-essentialist approach to show that any identity, but also any objectivity, always implies an exclusion.

Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony

Another important concept in Mouffe's work on agonism is "hegemony". Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe further developed this concept in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985/2000). Central to the plural and radical democracy that Laclau and Mouffe envision, is the concept of "hegemony". Hegemony refers to the phenomenon that every social objectivity is actually the result of a political struggle, that it is constructed through performances of power. Social objectivity, or what is regarded as "common sense" is thus of a political nature, because it implies the exclusion of other "objectivities". It is this 'point of convergence [...] between objectivity and power' what Laclau and Mouffe mean with hegemony (Mouffe, 2000, p.99). The processes through which a certain order comes about, are called "hegemonic practices" (Mouffe, 2005a, p.18). Important to note further is that there are also always counter-hegemonic practices, that pursue a different hegemonic order (Mouffe, 2005a). Because of these counter-hegemonic practices, any hegemonic articulation can never be fully realized and can always be contested. The social order, which is "politically" established, is therefore contingent. Because any social objectivity is the result of performances of power, this also means 'that any form of consensus is the result of a hegemonic articulation' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985/2000, p.XVIII).

In order for Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy to come about, 'the creation of a chain of equivalence among democratic struggles' is required (Mouffe, 1993, p.60). A chain of equivalence entails different demands, all directed against the same enemy, that aggregate themselves.[3] In that way, a new collective identity is formed that recognizes, and is opposed to, a common enemy. This new collective then tries to establish a new kind of order. In a pluralist society, the contest about what specific aims to pursue thus also forms and changes the identities according to Laclau and

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[3] I will further elaborate on 'chain of equivalances' in §4.1

Mouffe (1985/2000). The hegemonic logic thus also applies to identities. Just as every order, identities are constituted through acts of power. In fact, identities are also linked to hegemonic power, because it constitutes pro- or counter-hegemonic identities. The essentialist's view that identities (and social orders) are fixed is thus rejected by Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2000). On the contrary, they have adopted a post-foundational view that regards identities as contingent (Bevir, 2010).

What this discussion of "the political", "antagonism", "constitutive outside" and "hegemony" has showed, is that Mouffe has a post-foundational approach. She argues that relations, identities and the world as we know it, are shaped through hegemonic power relations and can always be contested. From the notion "constitutive outside" it follows that the constitution of any identity (or order) always implies an "other" and therefore an exclusion. What form this demarcation between "us" and "them" takes depends on the relations of power, but Schmitt (1932/2007) has showed that it can always take an antagonistic form. Combined with the fact that Mouffe takes it as a fact that people will always want to belong to a certain collective identity (2005a, p.23-24), this implies that there will always be tensions in a pluralist society. Since the constitution of any identity and order always implies a contra-identification, a demarcation from an "other", and thus an exclusion that can always be contested.

§3.4 Chantal Mouffe's version of agonistic pluralism

The previous discussed concepts form the foundation of Mouffe's theory of "agonistic pluralism" (2000, p.101). In line with Schmitt (1932/2007), Mouffe (2000, p.102) argues that "the political" as 'the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations' is ineradicable. However, contrary to Schmitt, she argues that the we/they distinction can take other forms than friend versus enemy. It could also take the form of friend versus adversary. In contrast to enemies, adversaries do not aim at the eradication of each other. Rather, adversaries are legitimate enemies 'whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question' (Mouffe, 2000, p.101). What sets enemies, adversaries and friends apart from each other is their (non-)adherence to 'the institutions constitutive of democracy' and 'the ethico-political values' of 'liberty and equality for all' (Mouffe, 2005a, p.31). Friends and adversaries both adhere to those ethico-political values, whereas enemies do not. The common ground shared by friends and adversaries is not entirely peaceful though. Adversaries and friends may have a shared adhesion to those principles, they do not have a shared interpretation of them. There thus exists a 'conflictual consensus' on those values when it comes to the exact meaning and implementation (Mouffe, 2000, p.103). The ethico-political values play an important role in the constitution and demarcation of collective identities, but those values also

place a limit on the opinions that are allowed in democratic politics. Only those demands that are in line with the ethico-political values can be allowed in the agonistic debate (Mouffe, 2005a, p.120).

The struggle between adversaries is what Mouffe calls "agonism" (2000, p.102). The goal of democracy is then to transform antagonism into agonism. This is the domain of "politics". Mouffe defines "politics" as 'the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political' (2005a, p.9). The aim of politics is to transform antagonism into agonism, but this can only be realized when there is room for dissent and conflict. Or, in Mouffe's (2000, p.104) own words: 'A well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions'. Politics must form an outlet for the various viewpoints and subsequent tensions that are present in a pluralist society. Otherwise people will express their opinions and discontent in an antagonistic way, outside the democratic institutions.

But politics can only be an outlet for conflicting viewpoints if people feel represented and if they can identify with the political camps in democracy. Here "passions" play a role. Mouffe defines passions as 'the various affective forces which are at the origin of collective forms of identifications' (2005a, p.24). Those affective forces can make people identify with a certain group or political party. Ignoring those passions is harmful because it can lead to apathy and disaffection with politics. Rather than ignoring or eliminating those passions because they are not rational (as the aggregative and deliberative model of democracy do), those passions should be mobilized and steered towards democratic institutions. Only if people identify themselves with, and feel represented by the democratic institutions, the tensions and conflicts that are inherent in a pluralistic society can be played out in an agonistic manner.

By now it must have become clear why Mouffe is opposed to political liberalism (2005b) and deliberative democracy (1999). These theories differ significantly from Mouffe's theory, especially regarding pluralism on the ontological level. Pluralism is not a problematic fact that needs to be overcome as is argued by political liberalism, but 'the defining feature of modern democracy' which leads to the ineradicable possibility of conflict (Mouffe, 2000, p.19). Because pluralism and consequently conflict are defining features of society, arguing that rational consensus is possible is like believing in an illusion. What is regarded as consensus is in reality 'the expression of a hegemony and the crystallization of power relations' (Mouffe, 2000, p.49). Opinions that deviate from the hegemonic order are excluded, which implies the dismissal of pluralism in the public sphere (Mouffe, 2000). Emphasising consensus and denying the ever possibility of conflict is even harmful for democracy, Mouffe (2000) argues, because it will lead to apathy and disaffection with politics. Or, even worse, because the antagonistic nature of politics is ignored, the likelihood that conflicts will be played out in a violent manner increases. Passions should therefore not be suppressed but mobilized.

If we truly want to take pluralism seriously, Mouffe (2000) argues, we should acknowledge that rational consensus is conceptually impossible and undesirable.

Shortcomings of Mouffe's theory

Although Mouffe offers an interesting alternative perspective on pluralism and politics, her theory has been widely criticized. Fritsch (2008) for example, has criticized her for a wrong interpretation of the work of Schmitt and Derrida. Westphal (2014) and Wingenbach (2013) highlight the fact that Mouffe has paid little attention to how her model of agonistic politics can be institutionalized. Another criticism comes from Knops, who argues that Mouffe actually has to rely on a notion of deliberative democracy that she rejects, namely rational consensus, in order for her theory to work (2007, p.118). Knops reasons that the conflictual consensus about the ethico-values will represent the existing power relations, since the consensus will be determined by the most powerful (2007, p.117). Mouffe will want to prevent this from happening, since she also uses her theory to show how hegemonic power relations can be challenged. Therefore Knops (2007, p.117) argues that Mouffe either has to admit that this consensus must be reached through a rational discussion, in which deliberative values such as the fair exchange of reasons and mutual respect plays a role, or renounce her theory as a distinct alternative to deliberative democracy.

There are three points of criticism that I want to discuss more thoroughly. The first problem relates to the fact that agonistic theorists argue that their theory is better in dealing with pluralism than liberal democracy or deliberative democracy, because it does not cover up the differences and conflict, but brings it to the fore. Deveaux (1999) and Schaap (2006) think that agonists are wrong and argue that the theory of agonism works counter-effectively. Highlighting differences and the conflictual dimension will not lead to a better way of dealing with differences, but rather works polarizing, Deveaux suggests (1999, p.15). When the disagreements between groups are emphasized, it will be more difficult for those groups to see that they may also have certain interests or opinions in common. As Dryzek (2005, p.222) argues, the clash of opinions and focus on differences could lead to disintegration.

Deveaux (1999), Dryzek (2005) and Schaap (2006) express a justified concern, I think. Focusing too much on the differences instead of on the resemblances between groups, could lead to a further alienation between groups. But I wonder whether the alternative, hiding differences or trying to overcome them through reaching consensus on rational terms, is a better solution. The strength of Mouffe's theory is exactly that she stresses that those differences and oppositions cannot be ignored because otherwise they will be expressed in antagonistic, violent ways. The recent riot in the Dutch municipality Geldermalsen whereby anti-refugee protestors violently disrupted a council meeting about plans to build a refugee centre because they felt that their concerns were not taken into

account (Voorn, 2016), is exemplary of the possibility that conflicts will be played out in a violent manner. Although highlighting differences and disagreements always carries the risk of further polarization, I think that hiding those differences is even more harmful.

The second problem relates to the discrimination between enemies and adversaries, based on whether or not political opponents endorse the ethico-political values. As Knops (2007, p.116) argues, Mouffe remains rather vague on what those values are. She does specify them as liberty and equality but argues that adversaries, although endorsing those values, can differ on the exact interpretation of them (Mouffe, 2000, p.102). This leaves us with the question of how broadly "equality" and "liberty" can be understood. Because of her anti-essentialist approach, Mouffe does not answer those questions. But if Mouffe herself does not set boundaries to those values, who does? Who decides what counts as "liberty" or as "equality"? Mouffe would probably argue that this is a political decision. But if so, the decision would probably be made by those in power, as Knops also argues (2007, p.117). Those in power will then probably equate the boundaries of the ethico-political values with their own interpretation of those values, or set the boundaries in such a narrow way that political opponents that could threaten their hegemonic position would be determined as antagonistic enemies. As a consequence, the hegemony of those in power and the *status quo* will not be challenged, but rather enhanced. Moreover, a narrow interpretation of the ethico-political values also detracts from the pluralism in society. Only a small number of opponents will be recognized as adversaries and allowed to express their dissenting opinions in the agonistic debate.

Another scenario is that the ethico-political values will not be defined in a very narrow way, determined by those in power, but in a very broad way. There can be established a conflictual consensus, in which the definitions of the values are stretched very far. As a consequence, political opponents that under a narrow interpretation of the ethico-political values would have been denoted enemies because they reject democratic institutions, could now be regarded adversaries and allowed in the agonistic debate. Democracy is then undermined from within. In either case, when it comes to the ethico-political values, Mouffe's own post-foundational approach is highly problematic and could lead to the undermining of democracy and a diminished possibility to express dissenting views. As will become clear in chapter seven, this definitional undecidedness is also problematic when one needs to decide whether populist parties endorse the ethico-political values.

Leaving the difficulties with distinguishing between enemies and adversaries aside, the aim of democratic politics itself, namely 'to transform *antagonism* into *agonism*' (Mouffe, 2000, p.103, original emphasis) is puzzling as well. Mouffe remains unclear on how this transformation can come about, but primarily explains how it can be prevented that agonism (re)transforms into antagonism, I would argue. According to Mouffe (2005a, p.20), adversaries 'see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes

place'. Enemies, who do not endorse the ethico-political values, do not share this common symbolic space with adversaries and the demands that they put forward are therefore to be excluded (Mouffe, 2005a, p.120-121). Schematically, this situation looks like this:
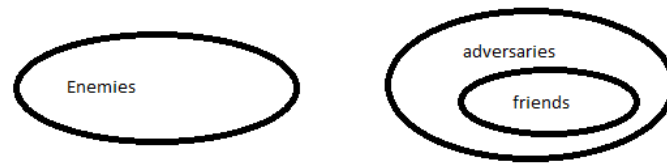

Figure 1: Sketch of Mouffe's theory: enemies and adversaries do not share a symbolic space.

Mouffe argues that adversaries can share their deviating interpretations of the ethico-political values in the same symbolic space and political association. Therefore the conflict between adversaries can be agonistic. Here Mouffe explains how a conflict can remain agonistic and not turn into antagonism.

Regarding the transformation of antagonism into agonism, Mouffe states that 'antagonistic conflicts are less likely to emerge as long as agonistic legitimate political channels for dissenting voices exist' (2005a, p.21). This requires 'the establishment of institutions and practices through which the potential antagonism can be played out in an agonistic way' (2005a, p.20-21). As an example Mouffe describes how a democratic institution such as the parliament can play an important role (2005a, p.22). Through a process of voting, a conflict can be ended while political opponents can still have their own convictions. With this example of the role that a parliament can play, Mouffe herself actually points at a weakness in her line of reasoning. Because if a parliament can play a role in the transformation of antagonism into agonism, this seems to presuppose that enemies are already present and allowed in the parliament. But that would be at odds with what Mouffe earlier stated about enemies not belonging to the same political association or symbolic space as adversaries. Demands that conflict with the ethico-political values are to be excluded from the agonistic debate. How then, can a process of voting, or a parliamentary system in general, transform antagonism into agonism? As Erman (2009, p.1048) rightfully stated about the transformation of antagonism into agonism

> we would not know when, let alone how, we had succeeded in transforming from one (where we do not share any symbolic space) to the other (where we do share a symbolic space), without some common understanding, i.e. a shared symbolic space.

Erman (2009, p.1048) subsequently asks 'since the subjects involved do not share any symbolic space until they have accepted the ethico-political principles and become adversaries, how can they accept some common principles before this moment?'. It is probably therefore that Mouffe argued elsewhere that the transformation of enemy into adversary implies 'a radical change in political identity', which is 'more a sort of *conversion* than a process of rational persuasion' (2000, p.102,

original emphasis). Because adversaries and enemies do not share a symbolic space, the transformation cannot be set in motion through rational persuasion (or persuasion guided by passions, as Mouffe would probably prefer). Rather, enemies would turn into adversaries through some kind of *Gestalt-switch*. But relying on the notion of conversion for the transformation of antagonism into agonism, which is one of the most crucial aspects in Mouffe's theory, detracts from the strength of this political theory. Moreover, even if it is the case that the transformation of antagonism into agonism is a kind of *Gestalt-switch*, enemies need to be aware of the existence of adversaries and those ethico-political values. It is therefore more likely, as Erman (2009, p.1048) argues, that adversaries and enemies do share a symbolic space. But within this space, only adversaries actually support the ethico-political values. A situation that would look like this:
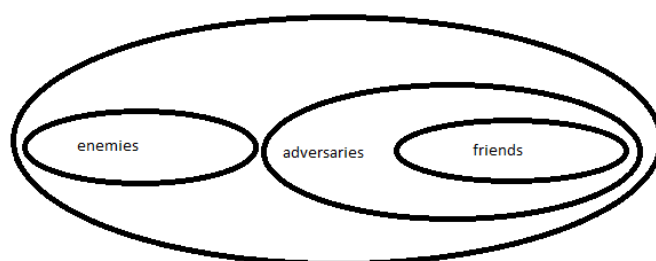

Figure 2: Sketch of the situation in which enemies and adversaries do share a common symbolic space.

Mouffe thus needs to rely on the rather vague notion of conversion or acknowledge that adversaries and enemies do share a symbolic space after all. In either case, I think that her explanation of how the transformation from enemies into adversaries takes place, is one of the most crucial yet weakest parts of Mouffe's theory. Mouffe cannot argue that through channels for dissenting voices antagonism can be transformed into agonism. She can only use this explanation to convincingly show how it can be prevented that agonism (re)transforms into antagonism. I regard the explanation of this transformation one of the most valuable aspect of Mouffe's political theory.

§3.5 Causes of populism: the adversarial model and the democratic paradox

Another strength of Mouffe's work is that she applies her theory to empirical problems and phenomena. Mouffe is especially concerned with two developments in democracy: (1) the blurring of the left/right division in politics, also called the end of the adversarial model (2005a) and (2) the excessive emphasis on the liberal logic in liberal democracy, at the expense of the democratic element of popular sovereignty (2000). Both these developments will be discussed because, according to Mouffe, they can explain the success of (right-wing) populism.

The blurring of the left/right division

Since the early 1960s, various authors have discussed and predicted the overcoming of the adversarial model of politics and ideological differences, such as Fukuyama (1989) and Beck and Giddens (1994). Fukuyama (1989) argued that after the fall of communism and fascism, there were no ideological competitors to liberalism left. There might be conflict along the way, but in the end economic and political liberalism would triumph. In the end, a world with no real ideological struggles would emerge (Fukuyama, 1989). Beck and Giddens (1994) argue that collective identities would become obsolete due to the process of individualisation. Consequently, politics is no longer structured around collective identities and conflicts between different groups. In the new post-political model the focus is on individuals instead of collectivities. There are still disagreements, but in the new consensual model they are not played out and framed 'in the register of morality' (Mouffe, 2005c, p.58).

An empirical manifestation of this consensual model is "Third Way" politics, in which left-wing parties are moving closer to a "radical centre" (Mouffe, 2000; 2005a). This radical centre is not simply the middle between left and right parties, but exceeds the left/right division 'by articulating themes and values from both sides in a new synthesis' (Mouffe, 2000, p.108). According to Mouffe, left-wing parties have increasingly come to terms with pluralism and liberal democratic institutions, thereby giving up their efforts to come up with an alternative to the hegemonic neo-liberal order. This development has blurred the differences between political parties and the left/right division in general, paving the way for an increased emphasis on consensus. The British "New Labour" under the leadership of Tony Blair is a clear example of "third way" politics (Mouffe, 2005a, p.60). A Dutch example is the labour party *PvdA* under the leadership of Wim Kok in the period 1994-2002, I would argue. Kok explicitly argued to shake off the party's ideological feathers and move closer to the middle of the political spectrum (De Volkskrant, 1995).

According to Mouffe (2000), the blurring of the left/right division has stalled the debate about how the "ethico-political values" should be interpreted and implemented in the institutions. The lack of debate has various consequences that put the transformation of enemies into adversaries, and thus democracy, at risk. First, the blurring of the division hampers 'the dynamics of the political [...] and the constitution of distinctive political identities' (Mouffe, 2000, p.115). Because parties become more alike ideologically, there are no real political alternatives or alternative democratic political identities anymore with which citizens can identify. Consequently citizens become alienated from politics and will be less inclined to participate in the political process (Mouffe, 2005c, p.63). Second, because there are no alternatives or political parties that people can identify with, disagreements will reveal themselves not in agonistic but in antagonistic forms (Mouffe, 2005a, p.50). When conflict manifests itself in antagonistic forms, this will 'undermine the very basis of the democratic public

sphere' since enemies do not accept the ethico-political values of equality and liberty (Mouffe, 2000, p.115). Third, Mouffe signals the development of a juridical discourse (2000, p.115). Instead of in the political domain, disagreements are played out in the juridical domain. Social relations are not ordered through politics, but by judges. Mouffe regards this problematic because organizing social orders and human coexistence is the task of politics (2005a, p.9). Fourth, the weakening of the left/right division has led to 'the "moralization" of politics' (Mouffe, 2005a, p.75). Instead of politically drawing the we/they distinction, 'the "we"/"they" opposition constitutive of politics is now constructed according to moral categories of "good" versus "evil"' (Mouffe, 2005a, p.75). This is problematic because evil indicates an enemy that needs to be eradicated. There is no room for adversaries or agonism in this form of politics.

The fifth consequence that Mouffe identifies is the success of right-wing populist parties (2000, p.116; 2005a, p.66-72; 2005c). Because of the blurring of the left/right division and the absence of an agonistic debate, voters do not have any notable alternatives to choose from. Consequently, they could not identify themselves with different political identities. Populist parties seized the moment and provided an alternative, both in terms of political plans and of identity. They constructed new identities around the highly affective notion of "the people", pitched against "the establishment" (Mouffe, 2005a, p.70). The populists were able to mobilize passions again and expressed real democratic demands that were thus far not articulated in the political spectrum. The rise of these parties, Mouffe (2000) thinks, would not have occurred if there had been more real political alternatives within the democratic spectrum.

The democratic paradox

Another cause of the success of populist parties lies in the fact that "liberal democracy" as we know it is mistakenly taken for granted, Mouffe argues (2000, p.4). Mouffe regards liberal democracy as the result of the unnatural cooperation between two different logics and therefore speaks of a 'democratic paradox' (2000, p.1). Liberal democracy is not a natural phenomenon but the result of a long battle and 'a contingent historical articulation' (Mouffe, 2000, p.3).

The liberal tradition emphasises humanity, universalism and liberty (Mouffe, 2000). Every human being is automatically, as a human being, equal to other human beings. Within the liberal tradition, this is what the concept of equality refers to. Respect for human rights is therefore also stressed within the liberal logic. When this form of equality is at stake due to democratic decisions, 'it is legitimate to establish limits to popular sovereignty in the name of liberty' (Mouffe, 2000, p.4). The democratic logic is about equality (Mouffe, 2000). But in contrast to the liberal concept of equality, in the democratic tradition the concept is a political one. If it are "the people" who rule, one needs to know who constitutes "the people" and to whom democratic rights are and are not applicable. In the

democratic tradition equality relates therefore to inclusion/exclusion and inequality. It draws a line between "us" and "them". The democratic logic is thus also a logic of identity (Mouffe, 1993). Liberalism is incapable of conceptualizing such boundaries between people. There thus cannot be full democracy and full liberalism at the same time. The sovereign people in the democratic logic might make decisions that jeopardize liberal rights, and the liberal logic will want to limit the decisions of the will of the people. Because the two logics are not entirely reconcilable, liberal democracy is only a temporary stabilization of a hegemonic order, Mouffe argues (2000, p.5).

Carl Schmitt asserts that the discrepancy in emphasis of the two logics will lead to the self-destruction of liberal democracy (Mouffe, 2000, p.44). Mouffe (2000) thinks otherwise and argues that the conflict between the two logics is rather a tension that makes possible a pluralist society in which equality and freedom can coexist. Although there will never be a perfect equilibrium between the two logics, the tension has some beneficial consequences. The liberal logic of liberty and humanity enables us to challenge the inclusions/exclusions that follow from the democratic logic. The other way around, the democratic logic tempers the liberal logic's drift towards abstract universalism (Mouffe, 2000). In addition, the constant interplay between the two logics helps to see how liberal democracy and pluralism are reconcilable. The democratic paradox shows that "the people" does not have a fixed substantive identity (Mouffe, 2000). On the contrary, it is precisely because "the people" is not fixed but constituted over and over again, that pluralism has a place within liberal democracy. Without pluralism, there would not be a political decision about who defines "the people". Simultaneously, precisely because of the ongoing interplay between the two logics, there is the possibility of pluralism in liberal democracy. Because who "the people" is can always be contested and is contingent, liberal democracy offers the opportunity for a plurality of identities. The tension is thus 'a very important dynamic, which is constitutive of the specificity of liberal democracy as a new political form of society' (Mouffe, 2000, p.44).

Mouffe uses this theoretical discussion to analyse the current political situation. According to her, there exists a "democratic deficit" in the sense that the democratic logic in current liberal democracy is undervalued (Mouffe, 2000, p.4). In modern liberal democracies the emphasis lies on the liberal logic and its defence of human rights, whereas popular sovereignty is hardly accentuated. In fact, popular sovereignty is seen as an outdated concept that can hinder the enforcement of human rights. Mouffe (2005c, p.52) states that '[w]hat we are witnessing, actually, is the triumph of a purely liberal interpretation of the nature of modern democracy'.

The current hegemony of the liberal logic and the neglect of popular sovereignty within modern democracies has dangerous effects, Mouffe argues (2000; 2005a). For one, the hegemony of the liberal logic hides the fact that liberal democracy is actually an unnatural phenomenon. Liberal democracy could then mistakenly be taken for granted. In addition the coalition between the two

logics itself obscures the vision on alternatives. Moreover, it has given momentum to right-wing populist parties (2005c). Those parties do what other parties do not, namely emphasizing popular sovereignty. Populist parties say to represent the will of the people and thus fill in the void of the democratic deficit. In this way, they prove an alternative to the traditional parties and give people hope that things can be changed.

Although right-wing populist parties draw attention to popular sovereignty and the importance of "the people" within democracy, Mouffe (2005a; 2005c) does not approve of them because of the way in which they construct "the people". "The people" is constructed through 'unacceptable mechanisms of exclusion, where xenophobia usually plays a central role' (Mouffe, 2005c, p.56). Established parties also do not approve of the populist parties, yet Mouffe is not pleased with the way in which the former reacts on the latter. Instead of fighting the populist parties in a political way, traditional political parties morally condemned them (Mouffe, 2005c). Established parties portrayed the populist parties as evil enemies and themselves as the 'good democrats', thus drawing the we/they distinction in a moral way (Mouffe, 2005a, p.72). But fighting populist parties 'in the moral register' is dangerous because it prohibits an antagonistic struggle from taking an agonistic form (Mouffe, 2005a, p.76). If "they", the populist parties, are portrayed as evil enemies, the only possibility is to eradicate them. This attempt to eradicate populist parties can be seen in the implementation of a "cordon sanitaire" by traditional political parties around the populist *Vlaams Blok* in Belgium and *FPÖ* in Austria (Mouffe, 2005a; 2005c).[4] Overall then, Mouffe regards populist parties an understandably attractive, but dangerous and illusory alternative to the traditional parties. It are however the traditional parties that have made their emergence possible.

§3.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism (2000; 2005a). Mouffe argues that rather than striving for consensus in order to deal with the pluralism in society, there should be room in society to play out the conflicts in a civil and non-violent manner. In that way, an antagonistic struggle between enemies can be tamed and transformed into an agonistic conflict between adversaries. Mouffe signals that in contemporary democracy there is only limited room for dissent and an agonistic debate. According to Mouffe (2000; 2005a) this is the result of the blurring of the left/right division and the hegemonic position of the liberal logic within liberal democracy. The absence of an agonistic debate and other alternatives to the established parties, has driven voters in

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[4] A "cordon sanitaire" is a political strategy of principled non-cooperation that political parties can implement against a specific political party. Other parties decide not to cooperate with that specific party, in order to prevent it from influencing the decision-making process. The "cordon sanitaire" will be further discussed in §7.4.

the arms of (right-wing) populist parties, Mouffe argues (2000; 2005a; 2005c). Although she understands why voters turn to right-wing populist parties, she argues that those parties are dangerous for the xenophobic way in which they interpret "the people" (Mouffe, 2005a, p.71).

Although her analysis of the success of right-wing populist parties is interesting, I think that Mouffe (2000; 2005a; 2005c) painted a partial and one-sided picture of populism. She discussed a particular manifestation of populism, namely right-wing populist parties instead of populism as a thin-centred ideology. The xenophobic way in which those parties construct "the people" is not necessarily populist, but stems from the right-wing ideology it attached itself to. Moreover, she mainly focussed on why right-wing populist parties have become successful and less on the effects of populism on democracy. This one-sided picture of populism explains why Mouffe, until recently, regarded populism as a dangerous alternative to established parties. From 2013 on though, Mouffe has come to realize the potential of populism for her agonistic project, as has become clear from several interviews and speeches she has given since (Mouffe, 2013; Mouffe, 2014; Winter and Wank, 2013a; 2013b; Korbik, 2014). She thereby not only argued that populism is compatible with democracy (Mouffe, 2013), but also that populism is a necessity in politics. In an interview Mouffe stated (Korbik, 2014):

> populism itself is not a bad thing! My point is that populism is a necessary dimension of democratic politics. There is a necessity to take into account the demands of the people and to create a collective will. The crucial issue is how the "people" is constructed. This also requires us to acknowledge another dimension that I think is very important: the role of passion in politics.

Mouffe offers a couple of reasons for the necessity of populism. First, Mouffe argues that '[t]here is a necessity to take into account the demands of the people and to create a collective will' (Korbik, 2014). Populism can materialize this necessity and the democratic logic. Secondly, the role that passions play in politics need to be recognized. By employing passions in their rhetoric, populism recognizes and uses this affective dimension to mobilize people (Winter and Wank, 2013a). Lastly, populism can overcome the blurring of the left/right division and the consensual model of politics. Mouffe thereby specifically envisages a role for left-wing populism, that can serve as an alternative to right-wing populism to the hegemonic neo-liberalism that she denounces (Korbik, 2014).

What Mouffe seems to imply here by arguing that populism is a necessity is, I think, that populist parties can play a role in the institutionalization of agonism. Within agonistic theories, institutionalization is a neglected subject, Westphal therefore speaks of an 'institutional deficit' (2014, p.1). Although this institutional deficit may be due to the fact that agonists argue that institutional design could always be contested since institutions represent the hegemonic order (Schaap, 2006; Westphal, 2014), I think that developing a new approach to democracy also demands

thinking about the implementation of it. Perhaps that populist parties can play a role in the implementation of an agonistic debate, by highlighting the conflictual dimension of politics and using "passions". Concluding then, although Mouffe pointed at some interesting features of populism, many opportunities and challenges of populism are still left uncovered and unexplained. An evaluation of populism that uses insights of agonistic theory could therefore not only shed a new light on populism, but also on Mouffe's version of agonism itself.

Chapter 4 Populism versus democracy

Now that it is clear what I mean with populism and Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, it is time to conduct the evaluation of populism. My evaluation starts with a general discussion about populism's relation to democracy. Three classifications of democracy will be discussed here, namely democracy in its most basic form, representative democracy and liberal democracy. I will show that different understandings of democracy lead to different evaluations of populism.

§4.1 Democracy and populism

In its most basic form, democracy can be defined as popular sovereignty. After all, "democracy" is the merger of two Greek words: '*demokratia* = *demos* (people) + *kraiten* (rule)' (Przeworski, 2010, p.8, original emphasis). Although over time other values such as equality and liberty have been added to the idea of democracy, in its most literal and simplest meaning, democracy is rule by the people (Przeworski, 2010, p.8). Democracy shares with populism this core of popular sovereignty. As explained in chapter two, populists want "the people" to rule, not "the elite", preferably in a direct way (Abts and Rummens, 2007, p.408). Because of this shared emphasis on the sovereignty of the people, it can be argued that populism in and on itself is democratic. Tännsjö for example argues that populism is defensible because both democracy and populism can be equated with 'a majoritarian or unanimous decision-making with a rule by the people' (2002, p.3). Other proponents of the view that populism is not hostile to democracy, are Canovan (1999) and Laclau (2005a), whose arguments will be discussed in turn.

Canovan on democracy

According to Canovan, 'populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society' (1999, p.3). She subsequently argues that there is always some degree of populism present in democracy. This has to do with her conception of democracy. Canovan (1999, p.9) argues that democracy has two faces, a redemptive face and a pragmatic face. From the pragmatic point of view, democracy is a system, or a form of government, for peacefully coping with conflict through rules and institutions. The redemptive form of democracy is more idealistic and sees democracy as Abraham Lincoln (1863) described it, namely 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (Canovan, 1999, p.10). The redemptive face of democracy is opposed to institutions and favours directness and spontaneity. When the people govern, salvation through politics is possible (Canovan, 1999, p.8). The two faces are interdependent, although there also exists a tension between the two. The idealistic character of the redemptive face and the practical character of the pragmatic face do not fit together nicely and in this tension populism can flourish. Moreover, it is

especially the redemptive face of democracy that is hospitable to populism and relates to populism's emphasis on the sovereignty of the people (Canovan, 1999). Therefore Canovan argues that there is always some degree of populism present within democracy. As she phrases it, the tension between the two faces 'always leaves room for the populism that accompanies democracy like a shadow' (Canovan, 1999, p.16).

In later work, Canovan seems to equate populism with democracy when she discusses a 'populist-democratic ideology' (2002, p.25). She argues that democratic ideology is thoroughly populist and she uses the terms populist and democratic ideology interchangeably. "The people", "democracy", "sovereignty" and "majority rule" are the key concepts of populist ideology and '[t]hus, democracy is understood as government by the sovereign people, *not* as government by politicians, bureaucrats or judges' (Canovan, 2002, p.33, original emphasis). "The people" here seems *not* to be constructed in ethnical terms, but rather in terms of profession or culture. It is "the ordinary people" against "the elite" and their elitist values. In this book chapter Canovan speaks, rather confusingly, interchangeably about populist and democratic ideology. A clear description of both types of ideology is lacking, but overall she seems to imply that the traditional ideology of democracy is considerably populist. In that case, populism cannot be hostile to democracy.

Canovan's conception of democracy strongly resembles Mouffe's discussion of the democratic paradox (2000), as discussed in the former chapter. Abts and Rummens (2007) therefore argued that the two faces and the tension between them that Canovan describes, are equivalent to the tension between democracy and liberalism. Canovan (1999, p.10) herself disagrees however and states that 'liberalism itself has both a redemptive and a pragmatic face' and that therefore the comparison does not hold. I am more inclined to follow Abts and Rummens (2007) and think indeed that Canovan used different terms to describe the same tension between two logics as Mouffe did. But I do agree with Canovan that there are considerable similarities between democracy and populism. Both democracy and populism stress the importance of the sovereignty of the people and therefore they are not at odds with each other. As I will argue in paragraph 4.3 however, I think that populism can be dangerous to the liberal logic (or in Canovan's words pragmatic face) of democracy.

Laclau on populism

In *On Populist Reason* (2005a) and a chapter in an edited volume (2005b), Ernesto Laclau also argues that populism is not hostile to democracy. Rather, populism is intrinsic to democracy and "the political". An explanation of Laclau's definition of populism is warranted, because his understanding of populism differs severely from the type definition of populism that I proposed in chapter two. I argued that populism is a thin-centred ideology with the key elements "the people", as a "homogeneous whole" and "the elite". Laclau explicitly rejects such definitions of populism that

ascribe a specific content to it or that emphasize the vagueness or ideological emptiness of the concept (2005a, p.5-19). Laclau argues that 'what is specific about populism – its defining dimension – has been *systematically* avoided' (2005a, p.10, original emphasis).

So what is this defining dimension? Rather than seeing populism as an ontological category, with a specific political or ideological content, Laclau regards populism an ontic category (2005b, p.34). This means that Laclau sees populism as a 'particular *mode of articulation* of whatever social, political or ideological contents' (2005b, p.34, original emphasis). Populism is not a substantive concept but a way of constituting ideas and identities, such as "the people". The populist mode of articulation is based on the *logic of equivalence* (2005a). The logic of equivalence refers to constructing a content 'through a partial surrender of particularity, stressing what all particularities have, equivalentially, in common' (Laclau, 2005a, p.78). Let me explain this logic with Laclau's own schematic representation:
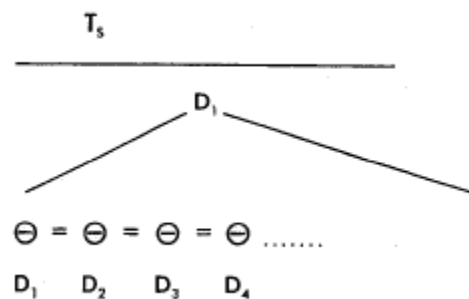

Figure 3: logic of equivalence with D_1 as an empty signifier (Laclau, 2005a, p. 130)

In this picture, D_1 to D_4 represent demands. All these demands are particular and differ from each other. But they also have something in common: they are all directed against a power bloc, a common enemy, in this scheme represented as T_s. Additionally, the demands are unfulfilled by the power bloc. Together $D_{1 to} D_4$ represent an equivalential chain of unfulfilled demands. The circles that represent the demands are internally split, to represent that the demands are partially overlapping and partially different. The feature that all demands have in common can, due to frustration about not being satisfied, become represented by one of the particular demands. In the schema above, D_1 starts to function as a 'signifier representing the chain as a totality' (Laclau, 2005, p.39). D_1 is thus at the same time a particular demand, but also representing the whole chain of equivalence. This taking up of the totality by a particularity, is what Laclau calls hegemony (Laclau, 2005a, p.70). Because D_1 can never totally embody the whole chain of equivalence and will always remain particular as well, Laclau calls D_1 'an *empty* signifier, its own particularity embodying an unachievable fullness' (Laclau, 2005a, p.71, original emphasis). The horizontal line in the schema represents the dichotomous frontier between the unsatisfied demands (or the signifier) and the power bloc. Or how the logic of

equivalence and the dichotomous frontier constructs "the people", with as its negative referent, an antagonistic power.

However, the figure above is a simplified illustration of the populist logic of articulation (Laclau, 2005a, p.130). The antagonistic power could namely try to disturb the equivalential chain, by advancing an alternative equivalential chain with which the demands D_1 to D_4 could link. Schematically it looks like this:
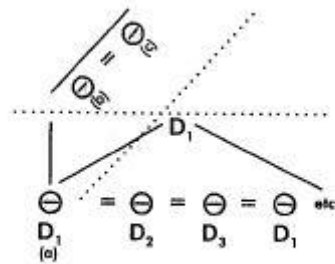

Figure 4: logic of equivalence with $D_{1(a)}$ as a floating signifier (Laclau, 2005a, p. 131)

(b) and (c) here represent the demands that belong to the side of the power bloc. In this situation, $D_{1/a}$ could either be the signifier of the "original" horizontal chain of equivalence (D_1 to D_4), or of the "new" chain of equivalences ((a) to (c)). Thus, in this situation $D_{1/a}$ is a "floating" signifier. $D_{1/a}$ can shift from the one equivalential link to the other, so its identity is not fixed. What identity $D_{1/a}$ takes on, will be the result of a hegemonic struggle (Laclau, 2005a, p.131). It is important to highlight here the two different ways in which "the people" is constructed through empty and floating signifiers. In case of empty signifiers, the construction of "the people" takes place 'once the presence of a stable frontier is taken for granted' (Laclau, 2005a, p.133). The floating signifier represents a situation in which this frontier is volatile. Since situations in which either of them is solely relevant is unthinkable, the 'floating and empty signifiers should be conceived as partial dimensions – and so as analytically distinguishable – in any process of hegemonic construction of the "people"' (Laclau, 2005a, p.133).

Laclau adds one further aspect to his model. So far, it was presupposed that any demand directed against a power bloc can be incorporated in the equivalential chain. However, there are demands which clash with the demands in the present chain and therefore cannot be incorporated. Consequently, it also does not shape the identity of the two camps (as the two camps in the two former situation do), because it does not share the same space of representation with the two other camps. This type of outside, Laclau calls "social heterogeneity" (2005a, p.140). In his scheme these demands are represented by *m* and *n*:
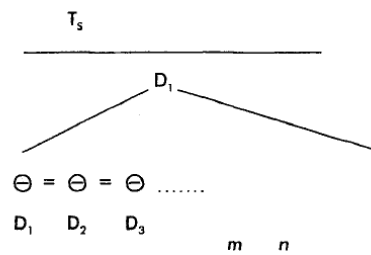
Figure 5: logic of equivalence and social heterogeneity (Laclau, 2005a, p. 148)

Heterogeneity does not only play a role *outside* the earlier discussed chains of equivalence, but also plays a role *inside* them. Laclau (2005a) argues that the first two schemas and the different identities could not have been established without a sense of heterogeneity. "The people" is more than solely the opposite of the power bloc, it also has its own specific identity stemming from the particular and heterogeneous demands. Those particular demands are heterogeneous and have their own particularity. Without this particularity the demands would have been all the same and the chain of equivalence would not be possible. There is thus always heterogeneity present in the construction of "the people".

Now that the logic of equivalence is explained, Laclau's notion of populism can be presented (2005a, p.156):

> The emergence of the 'people' depends on the three variables I have isolated: equivalential relations hegemonically represented through empty signifiers; displacements of the internal frontiers through the production of floating signifiers; and a constitutive heterogeneity which makes dialectical retrievals impossible and gives its true centrality to political articulation.

Laclau thus regards populism as a particular mode of political articulation, through which "the people" is constituted. It is based on the logic of equivalence and revolves around the constant replacing and redefining of the frontier between "the people" and the antagonistic power.

I will use this mode of constituting "the people" in chapter six to explain one of populism's effects. For now the question remains why Laclau argues that populism is not hostile to democracy. This has to do with the fact that Laclau regards the mobility of the frontier and the ongoing battle between the floating and empty signifiers as 'the *political* game' (2005a, p.153, original emphasis). Laclau (2005, p.154, original emphasis) goes on to argue that

> since the construction of the 'people' is the political act *par excellence* – as opposed to pure administration within a stable institutional framework – the *sine qua non* requirements of the political are the constitution of antagonistic frontiers within the social and the appeal to new subjects of social change – which involves, as we know, the production of empty signifiers in order to unify a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands in equivalential chains. But these are also the defining features of populism.

Thus, for Laclau the political is equivalent to populism. But not just that, he emphasizes the relation between populism and democracy. Laclau (2005a, p.171, emphasis added) argues that

> democracy is grounded only on the existence of a democratic subject, whose emergence depends on the horizontal articulation between equivalential demands. An ensemble of equivalential demands articulated by an empty signifier is what constitutes a 'people'. So the very possibility of democracy *depends* on the constitution of a democratic 'people'.

According to Laclau, for democracy even to exist, a democratic "people" needs to be constructed. And, as discussed before, the construction of "the people" proceeds through the populist logic of articulation. So both, the political and democracy are for Laclau concerned with populism.

Laclau's conception of populism and its relation to democracy and the political offers an interesting perspective on populism and its relation to democracy. However, it could be questioned whether he has not gone too far in equating populism with the political and democracy. Regarding populism as a mode of articulation and equating it with politics, seems to ignore the fact that populism is only assigned to certain political parties or movements (Houwen, 2015, p.25; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.6). By equating populism with politics, Laclau stretches the argument too far and subsequently detracts the particularity from populism. In my opinion, populism is a distinct ideology not shared by all political movements, parties or political leaders. I would therefore argue that Laclau (2005a) primarily has provided a valuable explanation of how "the people" can be constructed, either by populist parties or by non-populist parties.

§4.2 Representative democracy and populism

Contemporary democracy has come to mean more than just "rule by the people". Modern democracy is representative democracy: a type of government in which the people elect representatives to express their will. In representative democracy, the people are not directly involved in the law-making process, but only through a system of representation (Urbinati, 2011). Representative democracy therefore seems at odds with populism, since populists argue that democracy should be about the direct expression of "the will of the people", without mediation or compromising by representatives (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Canovan, 2002; Meny and Surèl, 2002; Von Beyme, 2011). Populists are not the only ones who criticize the representative character of democracy (Alonso *et al*, 2011; Urbinati, 2011). One of the first (and most famous) authors who argued against the idea of representative democracy is Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau (in Urbinati, 2011, p.34) stated that:

> Sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated. It consists essentially in the general will, and the will cannot be represented. The will is either itself or

something else; no middle ground is possible. The deputies of the people, therefore, neither are nor can be its representatives; they are nothing else but its commissaries. They cannot conclude anything definitively.

If the people are to remain sovereign, they cannot transfer their power to representatives since this would imply losing 'their political liberty along with the power to vote directly on legislation' (Urbinati, 2011, p.33). Rousseau therefore regards this transfer of power and sovereignty illegitimate. Representative democracy then is said to be a *contradictio in terminis*: 'democracy, the direct form of decision making among equals par excellence, is combined with indirect decision making that supposes a hierarchy of competence, that is, representation' (Alonso *et al*, 2011, p.3).

Populism is not only opposed to representation because it hinders the direct expression of the will of "the people", but also because representatives often "betray" or "ignore" the people and are out of touch with the interests of the ordinary people (Urbinati, 2011; Alonso *et al*, 2011). But it can be questioned whether populism is opposed to representation in general, or only to the *wrong* kind of representation (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.17). That is, representation by "the elite" who do not represent "the people" and their demands in a right and sincere way. Mudde (2004, p.546) thinks that true representation, that is the *direct* representation, of "the people" is probably supported by populism. If that is the case, populism does not want to overthrow the whole political system, as extremist and/or revolutionary movements want, but only the way in which parliaments function at the moment, Von Beyme argues (2011, p.62). He thinks that populists only want to change certain elements *within* representative democracy, not the entire democratic system. Examples of those elements are immigration and electoral laws.

Laclau (2005a) even argues that populism needs representation in order to exist at all. According to Laclau (2005a, p.158) 'representation is a two-way process: a movement from represented to representative, and a correlative one from representative to represented'. On the one hand, representatives represent the represented and their will. This is the movement from represented to representative. On the other hand, by representing the represented, the representative constitutes the represented. It is through the process of representation, that the represented, as a collective identity, is constituted. This is the movement from representative to represented (Laclau, 2005a, p.158-159). This same logic of representation applies to the construction of "the people" and thus the logic of equivalence, as discussed in §4.1. The unsatisfied demands in the chain of equivalence become represented by an empty signifier. This is the movement from represented to representative. But at the same time, through this empty signifier, as a symbol for the chain of equivalences, "the people" becomes constituted (Laclau, 2005a, p.161-164). Thus, 'the construction of a "people" would be impossible without the operation of mechanisms of representation', Laclau argues (2005a, p.161).

Moreover, Canovan (1999, p.13) rightly argued that even though populism prefers the unmediated expression of the will of the people, they need 'institutions that make that power [of the people] effective and lasting'. For every political ideology or movement it goes that they need some form of representation and institutions if they want to get support for or implement their ideas. Despite its grudge against any institution that hinders the proper expression of the will of "the people", populism cannot do without any form of representation, I would say.

Additionally, I tend to agree with Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a) and Von Beyme (2011) that populism is not necessarily opposed to representative democracy in general, but primarily to the *wrong* kind of representation, namely by "the elite". Populism does not want to overthrow the democratic system entirely, which would make it dangerous to democracy. Rather, populism will only want to change certain elements within representative democracy, as Von Beyme (2011) argues. Yet Von Beyme seems to overlook the fact that changing certain elements within representative democracy can be problematic, such as changing welfare entitlements or immigration laws. For example, right-wing populist parties in Europe often propose a 'welfare chauvinism', 'which refers to the view that access to the welfare state should be restricted to a nation's "own people"' (Wolkenstein, 2015, p.113). In this way, the benefits of the welfare state are reserved for the "own people", conserving the social benefits that have existed for years. This type of law changing has exclusionary effects on certain groups in society and undermines the equality between groups. Although I agree with Von Beyme (2011) that populism is not opposed to representative democracy, this conclusion must be made with some precautions.

§4.3 Liberal democracy and populism

In §3.5 I already discussed Mouffe's view on the relationship between populism and liberal democracy (2000). Let me shortly recap her argument. According to Mouffe (2000), liberal democracy is an unnatural cooperation between the liberal logic and the democratic logic. The liberal logic emphasises liberty and the rule of law, whereas the democratic logic focuses on popular sovereignty, because it is only the people, not the law, who has supreme authority and can legitimise the political system. The problem with modern liberal democracy is, Mouffe (2000) argues, that the liberal logic is predominating at the cost of the democratic logic. One of the consequences of this democratic deficit is the rise of right-wing populist parties (Mouffe, 2000, p.116).

Mouffe regards the rise of those right-wing populist parties as dangerous, because those parties construct "the people" in a xenophobic way, which is at odds with the ethico-political values of liberty and equality. Yet Mouffe's vision of populism sometimes seems to be clouded by the right-wing character of the populist parties she focuses on. This does not mean that her analysis is entirely wrong though. Because what populism does is signalling an unbalance in the precarious relation

between the democratic and liberal pillar. Populism brings to the fore that modern liberal democracy is 'under-responsive' in the sense that the will and interests of the people are underrepresented (Alonso *et al*, 2011, p.12). I do not regard this signalling role itself as dangerous. The problem lies in the way in which populism wants to remedy this under-responsiveness and tries to reinforce the democratic logic. Populism goes too far in emphasizing the importance of the democratic logic, at the expense of the liberal logic. Populism is 'over-responsive' (Alonso *et al*, 2011, p.12) and puts 'the *demos* above the laws' (Urbinati, 1998, p.119, original emphasis). Those laws, stemming from the liberal logic, are there to protect minorities, equality and liberty. Considering the exclusionary way in which populism constructs "the people" those laws are very important. I therefore regard the relationship between liberal democracy and populism problematic not because of populism's signalling role, but for the way in which populism tries to cure the problems of democracy.

§4.4 Conclusion

Comparing populism to various forms of democracy provided a mixed picture of the relation between populism and democracy. Populism is not at odds with democracy in its most basic form, because both are in essence about the sovereignty of the people. Regarding representative democracy, I think that populism is not necessarily opposed to the representative character as such, but only to the *wrong* kind of representation, namely by "the elite". Populism does not want to overthrow democracy entirely, but only change certain elements of it. The changes that populism envisions can be dangerous for minority groups though. The conclusion that populism is not necessarily hostile to representative democracy must therefore be made with some precautions. The discussion of liberal democracy brought to the fore the signalling role of populism. Populism highlights the under-responsiveness of modern democracy, but tries to remedy this at the expense of liberal protections and equality for all. This first evaluation of the relationship between populism and democracy thus showed that this relationship is ambiguous. For a proper understanding of this ambiguity, it is necessary to zoom in on the specific effects that populism can have.

Chapter 5 The negative effects of populism

In this chapter, I zoom in on the negative effects that populism can have on democracy. As a starting point, I will use the six negative effects that Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a) identified. Supported by the work of e.g. Abts and Rummens (2012), Canovan (1999), Mény and Surel (2002) and Urbinati (2014), I will explain and discuss those effects. The focus is thereby on the effect that populism can have on consolidated democracies. A consolidated democracy is 'a political regime in which free and fair elections are institutionalized as the mechanism whereby access to political power is determined', which is regarded stable and expected to exist for many years (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.22). The effect of populism may be different in states that are still in the process of becoming a democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a).

§5.1 Six negative effects

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a, p.21-22) listed six negative effects of populism on democracy:

(1) Populism can use the notion and praxis of popular sovereignty to contravene the 'checks and balances' and separation of powers of liberal democracy.

(2) Populism can use the notion and praxis of majority rule to circumvent and ignore minority rights.

(3) Populism can promote the establishment of a new political cleavage (populists vs. non-populists), which impedes the formation of stable political coalitions.

(4) Populism can lead to a moralization of politics, making compromise and consensus extremely difficult (if not impossible).

(5) Populism can foster a plebiscitary transformation of politics, which undermines the legitimacy and power of political institutions (e.g. parties and parliaments) and unelected bodies (e.g. organizations such as central banks or inspections offices) that are indispensable to 'good governance'.

(6) Ironically, by advocating an opening up of political life to non-elites, populism's majoritarian, anti-elite thrust can easily promote a shrinkage of 'the political' and cause a contraction of the effective democratic space.

While Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a) listed those effects, they did not really elaborate on them. In the remaining of their edited volume, other authors empirically investigated the relationship between populism and democracy, but the effects still require a more theoretical and detailed explanation. Using additional work of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser themselves and the work of several other authors, I will explain and discuss the six effects. Where possible I will sustain my theoretical discussion of possible effects with insights of empirical research.

Effect (1): jeopardizing liberal democracy

The first negative effect stems from the fact that for populism it is only the will of the people that is

important and which gives legitimacy to the political system. The 'horizontal *division* of power' and the 'vertical *limitation* of powers' that were incorporated in liberal democracies to avoid the tyranny of the majority (Pasquino, 2008, p.19, original emphasis), are precisely now what populists try to circumvent, since those constraints hinder the execution of the will of "the people" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.17). For liberals that adhere to the rule of law and constitutionalism, such a standpoint is of course problematic (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). Summarizing then, ***populism endangers the liberal constraints on the will of the people in liberal democracy.***

Effect (2): exclusion

Populism poses a threat to minorities for several reasons. To begin with, the construction of "the people" always implies the exclusion of others (Mouffe, 2000; 2005a). In general populism distinguishes "the people" from "the elite", that obstruct the will of the former. In Europe this distinction is often based on ethnicity (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a; 2012b). In addition, because populism presupposes "the people" to be a homogeneous unity, there is little room for diversity (Abts and Rummens, 2007, p.414). Those people that are not included in "the people" are considered a threat. Moreover, when populists are in power, minorities can further be threatened because the majority could decide to abolish or neglect certain individual or minority rights (Canovan, 1999, p.7). In addition, when populism creates a 'climate of fear', members of the groups that are (verbally) attacked by the populists may no longer dare to politically participate in society (Rosenblum, 2007, p.53). In short, the liberal principles that place constraints on the democratic principles are ignored by populists.

The question is, however, whether these liberal principles and checks and balances can so easily be ignored or circumvented. Abts and Rummens (2007, p.421) argue that if populists are capable of gaining enough power, they will be able to outmanoeuvre the checks and balances. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012b, p.210) place more faith in the constitutional protections and argue that populism cannot easily transform democracy in a negative way. Leaving any empirical remarks aside, populism 'prefigures a politics not of inclusion but of exclusion' and replaces equality for sameness and unity (Urbinati, 2014, p.7). In short then, ***populism has an exclusionary effect on democracy.***

Effect (3): destabilizing democracy

Urbinati (2014) argues that by contesting and simplifying pluralist ideas and interests, populism creates a distinction between the masses and the elites. Populism portrays the elite as a hostile enemy and unifies the ordinary people against it. This hostility, that stems from populism's Manichaean worldview in which the world is divided into "the good" and "the bad", resembles the antagonistic relationship between "us" and "them" that Mouffe describes, I would argue.

Consequently, the hostility impedes collaboration and coalition forming, upholds the conflictual situation and makes reaching a democratic outcome difficult (Pasquino, 2008).

Moreover, by creating a distinction between the masses and the elites, populism 'create[s] a polarized scenario that makes the people immediately know how to judge and with whom to side' (Urbinati, 2014, p.13). In that sense, populism measures up to the three elements that a cleavage entails, namely '(a) self-conscious demographic groups; (b) sharing a common mindset; and (c) a distinct political organization' (Deegan-Krause, 2009, p.540). Bornschier (2010a, 2010b) empirically investigated the establishment of new political cleavages and argued that the conflict between the New Left parties (that hold libertarian-universalistic values) and the populist right parties (that hold traditionalist-communitarian values) 'has evolved into a full-fledged cleavage' and changed the social structure and political identities (Bornschier, 2010b, p.207; 2010a). Although Bornschier only talks about right-wing populist parties, this new political cleavage has a polarizing effect that can threaten the stability of the political system. Because the two camps are so opposed and polarized, it will become difficult to form government coalitions. Concluding then, ***populism has a polarizing and destabilizing effect on democracy***.

Effect (4): moralizing politics

That populism can lead to the moralization of politics has already come to the fore in the discussion of Mouffe's analysis of populism (2005a; see §3.5). It is important to stress though, that this moralization of politics and the subsequent difficulties with finding a compromise, is set in motion from two sides. Populists themselves draw a moral distinction by referring to "us" as the good people that are threatened by the evil "them". Populists will not want to work together with the "undemocratic" traditional parties, that in their eyes hinder the direct translation of the "will of the people" into politics. The other way around, the mainstream parties will not want to work together with the "evil" populist parties (Mouffe, 2005a, p.72). Thus both populist and mainstream parties contribute to the moralization of politics and make it difficult to cooperate or to reach compromises and consensus. Hence, ***populism has a moralizing effect on politics and consequently impedes the formation of agreement***.

Effect (5): populism undermines the legitimacy and power of institutions

Instead of a mediated representation of the will of the people, populists prefer a more plebiscitary way of expressing the will of the people (Barr, 2009, p.38). That is to say, instead of mediated representation through political institutions and unelected bodies that are ruled by the elite and that are likely to "betray" or "ignore" "the people", the popular will should be expressed by a populist leader that embodies the will of "the people" (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Canovan, 1999; Pasquino, 2008). Yet it could be questioned whether this plebiscitary style of politics really serves the

empowerment of "the people" and enhances the legitimacy government decisions. On the contrary, it could also primarily empower a specific populist leader, making "the people" not a political actor but rather a mere audience (Weyland in Roberts, 2014; Urbinati, 2014). In either case, the power of the institutions and unelected bodies will be repeatedly questioned by populists. Summarizing, *populism undermines the legitimacy and power of institutions that are crucial for an effective democracy.*

Effect (6): **diminishing the democratic space**

In first instance, populism can highlight "the political" because it brings to the fore that there are non-elite groups in society that hold opinions that conflict with the opinions of those in power. However "the people", that populism says to represent is a homogeneous group. Because of this homogeneity, many other people are excluded, who cannot express their opinions. Paradoxically then, trying to include non-elites through a strategy directed against the elite works exclusionary as well. However, I would not call this a shrinkage of "the political", as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser do (2012a, p.22), because for me "the political" refers to 'the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations' (Mouffe, 2000, p.102). "The political" itself does not shrink, only the manifestation of this antagonistic nature in politics. It is the democratic space in which a diversity of beliefs and preferences can be expressed that shrinks. The democratic space, that should be based on openness and the inclusion of differences, becomes effectively smaller and less pluralistic then. Ergo, *populism has a diminishing effect on the democratic space*.

The six negative effects of populism on democracy thus are:

1. populism endangers the liberal constraints on the will of the people in liberal democracy;
2. populism has an exclusionary effect on democracy;
3. populism has a polarizing and destabilizing effect on democracy;
4. populism has a moralizing effect on politics and consequently impedes the formation of agreement;
5. populism undermines the legitimacy and power of institutions that are crucial for an effective democracy;
6. populism has a diminishing effect on the democratic space.

§5.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that populism can have negative effects on democracy. In theory, populism can threaten democracy because it is exclusionary, circumvents minority rights in the name of majority rule and undermine the effectiveness and stability of democracy. However, populism can also signal that democracy in its current form does not pay enough attention to the will of the people

(Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Mény and Surel, 2002; Taggart, 2002). The question is now whether populism is anything more than just an indicator of democracy's ill-health (Taggart, 2002, p.78-79).

Chapter 6 The positive effects of populism

The former chapter showed that populism can have some serious negatives effects. Populism can exclude minorities, polarize groups, destabilize and undermine institutions and shrink the democratic space. Despite these negative effects, which we have to take very seriously, populism might also have some positive effects on democracy. This chapter investigates those potentially positive effects.

§6.1 Four positive effects

There are a number of positive effects that can be discerned in the literature, according to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a). Again, those authors only gave a brief explanation of those effects in their edited volume. The effects will therefore be discussed by means of additional literature. The positive effects are (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.21):

(1) Populism can give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the elites, by putting forward topics relevant for a 'silent majority' (e.g. issues such as immigration in Europe or economic integration in Latin America).

(2) Populism can mobilize excluded sections of society (e.g. 'the underclass'), improving their political integration.

(3) Populism can represent excluded sections of society by implementing policies that they prefer.

(4) Populism can provide an ideological bridge that supports the building of important social and political coalitions, often across class lines, thus providing a key dynamic element in the evolution of party systems and related modes of political representation.

(5) Populism can increase democratic accountability by making issues and policies part of the political realm (rather than the economic or judicial realms).

(6) Populism can bring back the conflictive dimension of politics and thus help revitalize both public opinion and social movements in order to foster the 'democratization of democracy'.

As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a) noted, many of those effects are difficult to distinguish from each other. The first three effects all refer to excluded groups in society that are being included again by populism, I would say. Therefore I will discuss those three effects in one go. The last three effects, that are more distinct from each other, will be discussed separately.

Effects (1-3): inclusion

The first three effects that Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a, p.21) listed, all refer to the inclusion of groups that are somehow excluded from politics. Those groups are, or feel, excluded because their views and interests are not (properly) represented by "the elite" in the eyes of populism. It differs

per context who the excluded sections of society or "silent majority" are, and what the topics are that should be put forward by populists.

It is important to pay attention to the fact that people may not *feel* represented by the elites (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a, p.21). One can objectively be represented, for example by a representative of one's electoral district, or a representative with the same cultural background. But whether one *feels* represented, whether one's preferences and ideas are represented, can differ from the observed empirical situation. The same line of reasoning applies to feelings of exclusion. Objectively measuring, some groups in society may be excluded, for example because they have no voting rights. Yet, "being" excluded also has a subjective component. It is about experiencing and feeling excluded as well. Thus, exclusion and not being represented are not solely neutral facts, but subjective experiences as well. It can be questioned though in which direction the relationship between populism and feelings of exclusion/non-representation goes.[5] Do people feel excluded, which is subsequently picked up by a populist party? Or does a populist party state that people feel excluded, after which certain people in society state that they indeed feel excluded? Since it is difficult to say whether feelings of exclusion or non-representation are real and/or justified (and it is not for me to say either), I will assume now that such feelings are present in society.

The positive effect that populism can have with regard to these excluded and/or non-represented people in society, is '*bringing the people into politics*', as well as '*bringing politics to the people*' (Canovan, 2002, p.26, original emphasis). Populism can include groups that feel excluded or ignored by the established parties and make representative politics interesting for them again. It does so through mobilizing people, influencing the political agenda and/or implementing favourable policies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b). By putting the demands/interests of the excluded groups on the political agenda, populist parties force mainstream parties to react on those issues. In that way, populism can remedy what Alonso and colleagues (2011, p.12) called 'the under-responsiveness of representative democracy'. As explained in §4.3, with under-responsiveness the authors mean that the will of the people, and especially the interests of the less powerful people, are underrepresented in contemporary democracy. By bringing to the fore the interests and preferences of those ordinary and under-represented citizens, populism can remedy this under-responsiveness.

In theory, populism could thus lead to the implementation of policies that excluded sections of society prefer and remedy the under-responsiveness of representative democracy. However, whether this will actually be the case depends on the power of the populist parties (e.g. number of seats in parliament), but also on how other parties in parliament react on the populist parties. It will

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[5] This question resembles the uncertainty about the direction of the correlation between populism and crisis, see §2.1.

be more difficult for populist parties to implement policies, when other parties in parliaments decide not to support any proposal of populist parties.

An aspect of populism that Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a) do not explicitly mention as a positive effect, but that can contribute to the inclusion of excluded groups, is that populism can serve as an alternative to the mainstream established parties. Mouffe (2005a, p.66-72) already mooted this aspect, when she argued that populist parties are successful because established parties have become ideologically alike. People can relate to this political alternative and triggered by the highly affective dimension of "the people" that populist parties use, become politically interested and active again. The alternative political character of populism is reflected in the way in which populist parties do not abide to the mainstream political discourse and break political taboos (Von Beyme, 2011). A clear example of a taboo-breaking political party that took advantage of the convergence of the established parties, is the Dutch right-wing populist party *List Pim Fortuyn* (*LPF*) (Van Kessel, 2011). Stressing the negative consequences of an increasing multicultural society, the *LPF* vocalized some citizens' concerns about immigration. At that time, the three largest established parties, the *Christian-Democratic Appeal* (*CDA*), the liberal *People's Party for Freedom and Democracy* (*VVD*) and labour party *PvdA* were predominantly positive about immigration and multiculturalism. They paid only little attention to those issues in their 2002 election programmes. As Van Kessel (2011, p.80) states, the success of the *LPF* in the 2002 elections can 'be seen as the result of the perception among a considerable share of the electorate that the mainstream political parties did not sufficiently take into account salient social issues'.

Summarizing, by appealing to excluded sections of society, and advocating for their interests, populism can mobilize groups in society that were previously (feeling) unheard or ignored. Those groups might become politically interested and active again, because an alternative to the established parties is offered that shares the same concerns and interests. In this way, populism can remedy the under-responsiveness of representative democracy. This benefits the representativeness and inclusiveness of democracy. Thus, ***populism can lead to the inclusion of groups that were formerly alienated from politics and put their issues and demands on the political agenda***.

Effect (4): Ideological Bridging

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a) state that populism can lead to the ideological bridging of differences. In turn, this bridging is an important element in the modes of political representation and in the evolution of party systems. That populism can lead to changes in social and political coalitions and modes of representation has already become clear in §5.1, where I discussed how populism can lead to a new political cleavage (Bornschier 2010a; 2010b). In that paragraph, I portrayed the emergence of a new cleavage as a negative consequence of populism, because it forms

a new line of political conflict and polarization. However, the development of new modes of political representation can also be explained in a more positive way.

Developments as globalization and increased educational levels, changed the identities and values of various groups in society (Bornschier, 2010a). Populist parties can be the political representation of changed opinions in societies, as the example of the populist party *LPF* shows. The *LPF* represented citizens that were critical about immigration and multiculturalism, whereas the established parties remained predominantly positive about these issues. The *LPF* can be seen as the political representation of the changed views in society. In that sense then, populism is not only a polarizing force, but also a re-aligning force and serves as a bridge between politics and society.

Ideological bridging and the building of political and social coalitions by populism, can best be explained with reference to Laclau's notion of the logic of equivalence (2005a). As explained in §4.1, Laclau argues that when many demands of citizens are not satisfied by those in power, these demands can aggregate in a new demand, a "signifier", that represents the initial demands (Laclau, 2005a). What unites these demands, that content-wise differ from each other, is a common enemy against which the demands are directed. Because of this shared enemy, solidarity between the groups can arise, differences can be bridged and new political and social coalitions can be formed. This logic of equivalence is what Laclau (2005a) identifies as populism.

An example of such populism and ideological bridging, is the Greek left-wing populist party *Syriza*. During the economic crisis in Greece, this party has gradually become more successful. Using Laclau's insights on populism, Stavrakakis and Katsambekis identify *Syriza* as a left-wing populist party (2014, p.130):

> SYRIZA's discourse is clearly organized on the basis of an antagonistic schema, with the pattern 'us/the people against them/the establishment' being the dominant one. It constructs thus two chains of equivalences opposing one another: 'us,' the people that are hit by austerity policies, and 'them,' the political establishment that implements the policies dictated by the so-called 'troika'.

In the populism of *Syriza*, on the national level "them" are the established parties (that cooperated with the EU and the IMF in implementing the austerity measures), the corrupt elite, big business and tax avoiders. On the international level, "them" are neoliberalism and the political institutions that are advocating it, such as the IMF and the EU (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). "The people" are those people that suffer from the austerity measures and that are opposed to neoliberalism and its advocates. It is thus the negativity, the common enemy, that unites "the people".

Syriza is thus a left-wing populist party, but how has it enabled ideological bridging and the building of social and political coalitions? During the ongoing economic crisis, anti-austerity popular movements gained more and more followers. *Syriza* was one of the first parties to join the

movements on the streets and engage with the protester's demands.[6] According to Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014, p.129),

> [i]t is there that a chain of equivalences started to be formed between different groups and demands through a shared opposition towards European and Greek political structures, later to be interpellated by SYRIZA as representing "the people" against "them".

By joining the popular movement, *Syriza* became the political manifestation, or perhaps I should say signifier, of the indignation about the austerity measurements and started building social coalitions.

Another example of how *Syriza* build political coalitions and brought about ideological bridging, can be seen in the aftermath of the 2015 Greek election, I would argue. In that election, *Syriza* became the largest party and formed a government with the *Independent Greeks (ANEL)* (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, 2015). This was a surprising coalition, because *ANEL* is a radical, nationalist and conservative right-wing party that is opposed to immigration, whereas *Syriza* is left-wing, pro-immigration and opts for the separation of Church and State (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, 2015). The common denominator in these parties, however, is the anti-austerity and anti-European stance. A coalition of such ideologically different parties was a first for Greece (Manoli, 2015). Thus, although Syriza has not been entirely successful in withstanding the EU and the IMF, it was able to bridge ideological differences and to build a new political coalition.

Because of this bridging effect, populism can mobilize citizens or minority groups that on their own have limited influence on politics and that therefore could be ignored or overruled by those in power. What is distinct about this type of political representation is the more collective form it takes, I would argue. Instead of individual attempts by minorities to counter the hegemonic order, minorities can collectively try to make a difference. Concluding, ***populism can establish ideological bridging between parties and in that way strengthen the representation of certain groups in society.***

Effect (5): politicizing issues

According to Mouffe (2000, p.115), the blurring of the left/right division leads to the development of a juridical discourse. Disagreements are no longer played out in the political domain, but in the judicial realm. Mouffe regards this as a harmful development, since organizing society and playing out conflicts should be done in the political realm. Moreover, judicial decisions can give the impression of being impartial or objective. This impartiality hides the antagonistic dimension of

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[6] Since its foundation in 2004, *Syriza* has always been one of the largest of the smaller parties in the Greek parliament (Election Resources, 2015). It was with the ongoing economic crisis and increasing frustration about the crisis and austerity measurements that *Syriza* became more successful (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). The relation between populism and crisis, as discussed in chapter 2, becomes apparent here again.

decision-making and diminishes the room for political contestation about decisions. This is problematic, because '[t]here are no impartial solutions in politics', as Mouffe rightly argues (2005c, p.55). Moreover, the increased juridification of politics can also be understood 'as a form of hegemonic preservation by threatened elites' (Hirschl, 2004, p.9). By transferring the political decision-making upon the judicial realm, elites hope to preserve their interests while giving it a veneer of impartiality. The assumption here is that courts will judge in line with the preferences of the elite. From the point of view of agonistic pluralism this is lamentable, because it preserves the status quo and hides the actual political decision.

Another reason why the juridification of politics is undesirable, is that (at least in The Netherlands) judges are not democratically elected by citizens but appointed for life by the government (Nederlandse Grondwet, 2015). At hand is thus a "democratic deficit". At the same time, increased interference by judges in politics can undermine the separation of powers (*trias politica*), one of the key elements of modern democracy. An example of the undermining of the separation of powers is the ruling by a Dutch court that the government has to increase its efforts to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions (De Rechtspraak, 2015). The Dutch government aimed at reducing the emissions by 17% in 2020 compared to 1990, but The Hague District Court argued that this should be at least 25%, in compliance with the minimal international norm for developed countries. With a goal of 17%, the Dutch government would not fulfil its duty to protect and improve the living environment of its citizens, the court argued. The court was aware of the potentially political character of the ruling and argued that (De Rechtspraak, 2015):

> With this order, the court has not entered the domain of politics. The court must provide legal protection, also in cases against the government, while respecting the government's scope for policymaking. For these reasons, the court should exercise restraint and has limited therefore the reduction order to 25%, the lower limit of the 25%-40% norm.

With this ruling, the court seems to overstep its mandate and undermine the separation of powers by interfering quite directly in policymaking.

Yet this same court-case also demonstrates how the juridification of politics can help those who want to challenge the hegemonic order. The important thing here is that the lawsuit was started by the citizens' organisation *Urgenda. Urgenda* reasoned that because the increasing climate change is so urgent and harmful and because the government only took limited action to reduce the emissions, that it was justified to go to court. The director of *Urgenda* stated that sometimes a judge can call a halt to a major wrongdoing that exists, but on which politics agrees on at that moment (NOS, 2015). This statement clearly shows how a small minority of citizens, that did not succeed in influencing policymaking through ordinary political channels, can challenge the hegemonic order and

the powerful government by going to court. Playing out conflicts in the judicial realm is thus not only a harmful phenomenon, as Mouffe (2000) argued, it can also contribute in countering the hegemonic order I would argue.

Playing out disagreements and making decisions in the economic realm is harmful, because it is not democratic. Mouffe discusses how, in the light of globalization and cosmopolitanism, some authors envisage a (neo-liberal) politics, which is based on the values of free trade, liberal democracy and capitalism (2005a, p.91). Additionally, international financial organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF determine the conditions under which national parliaments can make economic policies (Hirschman and Berman, 2014). Dutch political parties send their election programmes to the Central Planning Agency (CPB), that calculates what the separate programmes would mean for the Dutch economy and the purchasing power of different groups in society (such as the elderly, single earners or families with children). Economic arguments thus play an important role in political decision-making and organizing social relations.

If issues need to be settled in the political realm, instead of in the juridical or economic realm or not at all, they need to be put on the political agenda. Populism would do so, because they are against the powerful elite that supports big-business at the expense of ordinary people. Populism can shift decisions that are of an economic nature, towards the political realm. *Syriza* that issued a referendum on the proposed bailout plan of the EU and the IMF (BBC, 2015) is a clear example of such a move. As former Greek Minister of Finance Varoufakis of *Syriza* tweeted after announcing the referendum: 'Democracy deserved a boost in euro-related matters. We just delivered it. Let the people decide. (Funny how radical this concept sounds!)' (in BBC, 2015). Of course the Greek crisis is/was also a political issue, the future of Greece within the Euro-zone and within the EU were at stake. But the bailout plan was also a highly economic and technical issue, which included several new austerity measurements that would affect the Greek citizens. By proposing a referendum, *Syriza* reinforced and highlighted the political dimension of the plan, much to the annoyance of President of the Eurogroup Dijsselbloem, who had hoped to make the negotiations less political (De Vries, 2015). In summary then, populism is able to attenuate the increasing influence of the judicial and economic realm on politics. Hence, ***populism can politicize issues that were previously played out in the juridical or economic realm.***

Effect (6): Highlighting conflict

If there is one thing that populism does, it is highlighting the conflictive nature of politics. Populist parties openly combat "the elite", the established parties and their political views. Populist parties embody an alternative in a political system in which political parties have ever become more alike. The responses of the established parties towards those populist parties, such as morally condemning

them or issuing a *cordon sanitaire*, could even further highlight this conflictive dimension and underscore the differences between the parties, I would argue.

From an agonistic perspective, highlighting this conflictive dimension is desirable since it breaks through the blurring of the left/right division. Populist parties form an alternative to the established parties and bring to the fore the opinions and interests of groups in society that otherwise do not feel represented in parliament. By openly combating the established parties on their viewpoints, populism does justice to the differences and oppositions between various groups in society. What populism then in fact does is highlighting "the political", it points at 'the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations' (Mouffe, 2000, p.101) that has been covered up by the established parties. By actively combating the established parties, populism shows that there is no consensus. In doing so, populism makes democracy more receptive to the various views and interests that are present in the pluralistic society.

In my opinion, highlighting the conflictual dimension is more desirable than pretending that differences can be overcome through a rational consensus, even though it could lead to polarization (see §3.4). If one regards populism a desirable way to highlight "the political" in politics, it can be argued that populism helps to revitalize or democratize democracy. Populist parties can form a non-violent outlet for dissatisfaction and frustration. Instead of becoming violent and overthrowing the democratic system, dissatisfied citizens can identify with populist parties because they offer an alternative to the hegemonic powers. Moreover, the simplistic style and language that populist parties often use, make identification with populist standpoints even easier. While loathing the intellectual and technical style of the mainstream elitist parties, populism appeals to the common sense and emotions of ordinary people (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Taggart, 2002). Therefore, populism breaks with the rational style of contemporary politics and helps people to identify with political parties again. This affective dimension of populism, corresponds to what Mouffe calls "passions", 'the various affective forces which are at the origin of collective forms of identifications' (2005a, p.24), I would argue. Populism is precisely doing this: establishing new collective forms of identification through its affective dimension and making politics more comprehensible.

Because people can relate to politics again and are presented with an alternative political party, people may become politically active again. By giving more voice to the people and re-interesting the formerly apathetic part of the electorate for politics, populism can revitalize democracy and increase its representativeness and inclusiveness. Given 'the decreasing public trust in political leaders, low electoral turnouts, dwindling citizen participation, [and] the growing gap between the rulers and the ruled' (Howarth, 2008, 173), there certainly needs to be a need for revitalizing democracy. Ergo, ***populism can highlight the conflictual dimension of politics and in doing so revitalize democracy.***

To recap, the four positive effects of populism on democracy are:

1. populism can lead to the inclusion of groups that were formerly alienated from politics and put their issues and demands on the political agenda;

2. populism can establish ideological bridging between parties and in that way strengthen the representation of certain groups in society;

3. populism can politicize issues that were previously played out in the juridical or economic realm;

4. populism can highlight the conflictual dimension of politics and in doing so revitalize democracy.

§6.2 Populism versus agonistic pluralism

In discussing the potential effects of populism on democracy above, I repeatedly used insights of Chantal Mouffe's work on agonistic pluralism. Those insights did not only contribute to the evaluation of populism, I think that the evaluation also showed that populism could play a role in an institutionalized form of Mouffe's agonistic project. For example, populism makes countering the hegemonic order possible. It can also shift issues from the economic/juridical realm to the political realm and, by serving as a real alternative to the established parties, bring back to the fore the conflictual dimension of politics. Furthermore, populism makes use of "passions". By relating to emotions through a rather simplistic style, rather than a rational mode, populism can mobilize people, help them identify with political parties and make them participate in politics again. In this sense, populism is supportive of the agonistic project.

The evaluation of populism also brought to the fore some disadvantageous aspects. Populism can be exclusionary and is opposed to pluralism. In general, it could be argued that by excluding and morally condemning "them", populism seems to regard "them" as an antagonistic enemy. This is a consequence of populism's Manichaean outlook on the world: "the people" are good, "the elite" are evil. Moreover, by depicting "the people" as homogeneous, populism seems to rule out pluralism. Populism thus does not seem to attach much importance to equality between "us" and "them". By proposing alterations of laws, such as immigration laws or welfare entitlements, populism also restricts the liberty of those who not belong to "the people".

This is problematic for Mouffe's project of agonistic *pluralism*. After all, Mouffe envisions a type of democracy in which adversaries share a "conflictual consensus" on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality (2000, p.103). It could be questioned then whether populism shares with "us" these ethico-political values of liberty and equality. Answering this question is even more difficult because Mouffe has not indicated to what extent adversaries may differ in their interpretation of those values (see §3.4). By refraining from providing definitional boundaries of the values equality

and liberty, the definitions of those values could be stretched very far. Probably too far for Mouffe's liking, or for staying democratic principles.

Concluding then, I think that the relationship between populism and Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is ambivalent. With regard to the agonistic part of Mouffe's project, populism seems to bring to the fore the conflictive dimension of politics. At the same time however, populism diminishes this conflictive dimension because it allows only for its own interpretation of "the people", preferences and worldview. Other views should in the end be eradicated. The relationship between populism and the pluralistic part of Mouffe's project is perhaps even more ambiguous. Although populism tries to include those groups in society that feel unheard by the established parties, it does so at the expense of other groups. The fact that populism excludes certain groups from "the people" is not problematic *per se*, since constituting collective identities always implies a constitutive outside and thus exclusion, according to Mouffe. But it is the antagonistic manner, stemming from the Manichaean outlook, in which populism distinguishes "us" from "them" that is problematic. By regarding "them" as an evil enemy populism rules out pluralism and the possibility of transforming an enemy into adversaries. In that sense, populism is highly problematic for Mouffe's agonistic pluralism.

§6.3 Intermediate conclusion

In this and the former chapters, I explored the relationship between populism and democracy. Using insights of Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism, I theoretically examined the positive and negative effects that populism can have on democracy. Where possible, I sustained my arguments with examples and empirical evidence. Now it is time to make up an end evaluation of these effects.

In the previous chapters, I discussed the relationship between populism and democracy in its most basic form, between populism and *representative* democracy and between populism and *liberal* democracy. I argued that the relationship between populism and democracy is not necessarily negative. That is, when one takes democracy in its most literal sense, namely rule of the people. This sovereignty of the people is exactly what populism stresses as well. I agree therefore with Canovan (1999) and Laclau (2005a) that populism in and on itself is not at odds with this understanding of democracy.

Populism is more opposed to the representative character of modern democracy. Populism desires the direct rule of the people and representation stands in its way. At the same time however, populism needs representation in order to exist or be successful. I agree with Laclau (2005a) that representation is a two-way process. Populism represents the will of "the people", but by the act of representation populism comes into existence. In the end therefore, populism can only be opposed to the *wrong* kind of representation, namely representation by "the elite". I therefore argued that

populism does not want to change the entire democratic system, but only certain elements of it. Thus, populism is only opposed to representative democracy in its current form.

Regarding liberal democracy, many authors consider it an unnatural combination between a democratic and a liberal logic (Mouffe, 2000; Abts and Rummens, 2007; Canovan, 1999; Mény and Surel, 2002; Urbinati, 2014; Pasquino, 2008). According to Mouffe, in modern democracy the liberal logic has come to dominate at the expense of the democratic logic (2000). Populism signals the weakening of the democratic logic and tries to re-strengthen it. I applaud this signalling role of populism, but I am worried about the problematic way in which populism tries to strengthen the democratic logic. It tries to solve under-responsiveness with over-responsiveness. The solutions that populism proposes may undermine the liberal logic. This is problematic because the liberal logic, among other things, protects minorities against the tyranny of the majority. The liberal and the democratic are both important and therefore a precarious balance needs to be established.

Let me now recall the negative effects that populism can have:

Negative effects

1. populism endangers the liberal constraints on the will of the people in liberal democracy;
2. populism has an exclusionary effect on democracy;
3. populism has a polarizing and destabilizing effect on democracy;
4. populism has a moralizing effect on politics and consequently impedes the formation of agreement;
5. populism undermines the legitimacy and power of institutions that are crucial for an effective democracy;
6. populism has a diminishing effect on the democratic space.

Alongside these detrimental effects, populism can have the following positive effects on democracy:

Positive effects:
5. populism can lead to the inclusion of groups that were formerly alienated from politics and put their issues and demands on the political agenda;
6. populism can establish ideological bridging between parties and in that way strengthen the representation of certain groups in society;
7. populism can politicize issues that were previously played out in the juridical or economic realm;
8. populism can highlight the conflictual dimension of politics and in doing so revitalize democracy.

This overview of the potential positive and negative effects clearly shows that populism's relationship with democracy is mixed and ambiguous. It can be exclusionary for some groups in society, while simultaneously inclusionary for other groups. Populism can diminish the democratic space because it is opposed to pluralism and regards "the people" homogeneous, but at the same time bring to the fore the conflictual dimension of politics. It strengthens the democratic logic of liberal democracy by giving more prominence to the voice of "the people", but it undermines the liberal protections of minorities. The rise of populism itself can signal that the democratic feature of democracy has weakened. The way in which populism tries to strengthen the voice of "the people" can be problematic however, for all the reasons mentioned above. The effects of populism on democracy are, summarizing then, ambiguous.

As has become clear throughout this and the former chapter, what the effects of populism *in general* are is difficult to say, because it primarily depends on the way in which "the people" and "the elite" are defined. Because of populism's chameleonic character, the way in which "the people" and "the elite" are defined depends on the host ideology that populism attaches itself to. "The people" of right-wing populism differs from "the people" of left-wing populism. Yet regardless of the specific host ideology, populism will always be exclusionary *and* inclusionary. And because of populism's Manichaean worldview, the "other", in this case "the elite", is morally condemned as an antagonistic enemy (Hawkins *et al*, 2012). The moral condemnation of "the elite" makes transforming antagonism into agonism, enemies into adversaries, very difficult. This Manichaean outlook undermines the principles of equality and liberty, and thus liberal democracy, as well.

All in all then, populism has a *dualistic character*. It carries both agonistic as well as antagonistic aspects with it. Populism is agonistic for highlighting the conflictual dimension in politics and representing people that feel unrepresented by traditional parties, but antagonistic for the Manichaean and homogeneous way of constituting "the people". As a result of this dualistic character, populism should be praised and condemned at the same time.

Chapter 7 Dealing with populism in practice

Notwithstanding the need for a theoretical discussion of the relationship between populism and democracy, populism ultimately is an empirical phenomenon in the form of populist political parties. *PVV* in the Netherlands, *Front National* in France, *Syriza* in Greece and *FPÖ* in Austria are only a few examples of such parties. The question is how we should deal with populist parties, especially given the dualistic character of populism. In this last chapter I investigate whether it is possible to develop an approach for dealing with populist parties that tackles their negative effects but simultaneously embraces their positive effects.

§7.1 The tolerance dilemma and views of democracy

Tolerance of the intolerant

The question of how to deal with a populist party that threatens democracy, resembles a classical problem: the dilemma of tolerance for the intolerant, or the paradox of tolerance. Popper (1945/2002, p.668) formulated the paradox as follows:

> Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. […] We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We should claim that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside the law.

Too much tolerance will lead to the decease of the tolerant society, because it cannot protect itself against intolerant groups. A tolerant society therefore has the right, Popper argues, to be intolerant against any intolerant movement. But this leads to a second problem (Cunningham, 2011). If a political organisation that wants to stand for election is antidemocratic, pro-democrats can try to prohibit that party from participating in the elections. However, in doing so the pro-democrats subvert their own democratic procedures and principles. In that case, democracy is not only threatened by the intolerant group, but also by the reaction of those that want to protect democracy. When it comes to dealing with a populist party then, one must find a difficult balance between two perils: either tolerate the populist party at the risk that that party will damage democracy, or repress the populist party with strategies that violate democratic principles. So it seems that democracy will either be harmed from the outside by the populist threat, or from the inside by democratic actors in their attempt to protect democracy.

Although in a consolidated democracy there are many mechanisms and institutions at play that will prohibit it from collapsing into crisis (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b), the dilemma of how to deal with populist parties that might threaten democracy is still an important question that

begs attention. Not only do populist parties enjoy the support of a significant group of voters,[7] populism's dualistic character also makes a simple approach of either repression or tolerance is unsuitable. Especially because there is always the risk that when the positive aspects of populism are ignored, populist parties might become withdrawn from peaceful politics or become more antagonistic. Although intolerant parties are 'a practical dilemma which philosophy alone cannot resolve' (Rawls, 1999, p.193), it is well worth to give solving the dilemma another try.

Procedural and substantive view of democracy

Confronted with populist parties, established parties have sought and adopted various strategies to cope with them. In the literature, these various strategies have been noted, described and discussed, primarily from an empirical perspective (see e.g. Capoccia, 2001; 2005; De Witte, 1997; Downs, 2001; 2011; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b; Pedahzur, 2005; Widfelt, 2004). There has been (surprisingly) little attention for how one *should* deal with a populist party from a normative perspective (Rummens and Abts, 2010; Müller, 2012). In discussing what a proper response to populist parties would, I will therefore look at strategies that established parties used in combating extremist parties. Since '[w]hile the populist radical right, let alone the extreme right, threat is not identical to that of populism per se, much can be learned from that debate', as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser rightly stated (2012b, p.214).

In general, there are roughly two approaches in dealing with a threat: either a very repressive approach that seeks to impede or outlaw the threat, or tolerating the threatening party to a great extent unless it becomes, for example, violent. Those two main approaches stem from two different views on the nature of liberal democracy, namely the substantive, respectively the procedural view of democracy (Fox and Nolte, 1995; Fennema, 1997; Rummens and Abts, 2010).

The *procedural view* of democracy 'defines democracy as a set of procedures' for political decision-making (Fox and Nolte, 1995, p.14). The democratic procedure itself makes the outcome legitimate: there are no *a priori* values a decision should correspond to. The procedural view of democracy is thus to a great extent tolerant to various points of view. Only minimal constraints should be put on what can and cannot be said or done in democracy (Fennema, 1997, p.158). Fennema for example, places the limit at the actual violation of the democratic rules of the game, namely the use of (political) violence (1997, p.160). From the procedural view of democracy then, parties that threaten democracy should be viewed as ordinary rivals that should be fought in the political arena. Tolerance is thus a very important concept in the procedural view of democracy (Fox

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[7] Mudde (2015) showed that 'all populist parties together score an average of ca. 16.5% of the vote in national elections' in European countries.

and Nolte, 1995, p.15; Fennema, 1997, p.158). A famous proponent of this view of democracy is Schumpeter, as exhibited in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1976).

On the substantive view of democracy, the 'democratic procedure is not an end in itself but a means of creating a society in which citizens enjoy certain essential rights, primary among them the right to vote for their leaders' (Fox and Nolte, 1995, p.16). Democratic rights and values, such as liberty and equality, guarantee the effective participation in politics, allow citizens to change their mind and to move from the majority to the minority and vice versa. Those rights enable and encourage individual dissent, but a democratic right is not 'absolute in the sense that it may be used to abolish the right itself or other basic rights' (Fox and Nolte, 1995, p.16). An extremist party that has come to power through democratic procedures therefore should not be permitted to abolish those democratic rights. In that sense, tolerance is subordinate to the democratic rights. Proponents of the substantive view favour more repressive strategies towards deviant parties, in order to protect the essential rights. A familiar proponent of the substantive view of democracy is Rawls, who identifies principles of liberty as essential rights (1999). Summarizing, the procedural view of democracy is more tolerant and inclusive in nature, whereas the substantive view of democracy is more repressive and exclusive towards extremist parties.

§7.2 Applying the procedural and substantive view of democracy on populism

The substantive or procedural view of democracy and the view on the paradox of tolerance that follows from it, form the starting point for developing a strategy against an extremist party. Because aspects of Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism proved interesting in the evaluation of populism, it might also be interesting to investigate what Mouffe's stance on dealing with populism would be. Mouffe paid a little bit of attention to specific strategies for dealing with populist parties, but thereby focused on right-wing populist parties. She argued that instead of implementing a *cordon sanitaire*, a populist party should be allowed into government, since this will lead to the collapse of the party, as the examples of the *FPÖ* and the *LPF* showed (Mouffe, 2005c, p.67-68). Because Mouffe's one-sided judgment that right-wing populism is dangerous differs from my claim that populism has a dualistic character, I cannot simply use Mouffe's ideas on how to deal with populist parties.

Yet it might be interesting to take a step back and investigate at a more abstract level whether some ideas of Mouffe can be used to develop guidelines for dealing with populist parties. Therefore I will examine what Mouffe's opinions on the paradox of tolerance would be and whether she would favour the substantive or procedural view of democracy. Juxtaposing Mouffe's vision of democracy

with the procedural and substantive view of democracy, will prove instructive for developing guidelines and as well as illuminating about Mouffe's theory itself.

Mouffe on the paradox of tolerance

Mouffe has not explicitly stated what she thinks of the paradox of tolerance. Yet considering her post-foundational approach, 'things like the paradox of tolerance should be viewed as uniquely political problems and hence subject to perpetually ongoing negotiations among political actors motivated by a variety of alternative values' (Cunningham, 2002, p.41). Although I agree with Mouffe that the tolerance dilemma is in essence a political problem, her post-foundational approach is unsatisfying and may even undermine her own theory. On the one hand Mouffe urges us to leave room for dissent within democracy, on the other hand she argues that political problems should be solved by political actors. But what if the most powerful political actors set the boundaries in a way that is most beneficial for themselves, without properly examining how intolerant the opposing political actors actually are? This resembles a hegemon whose position is threatened by a political opponent and who therefore decides to eliminate the threat. Mouffe's undecidedness is thus highly problematic.

Mouffe's split-level view of democracy

Perhaps that juxtaposing Mouffe's ideas with the procedural and substantive view of democracy proves more illuminating. In brief, Mouffe argues that actors who want to participate in the agonistic debate have to endorse the ethico-political values. Yet they may disagree on the exact meaning and interpretation of those values. Actors who do not endorse those values are considered enemies. Endorsement of the ethico-political values thus forms the limit to pluralism in Mouffe's theory.

Considering the importance she attaches to the ethico-political values, at first glance it seems that Mouffe leans more towards the substantive than the procedural view of democracy. However, tolerance seems to play an important role in her theory role as well. Mouffe (2000, p.102) argued that 'the real meaning of liberal-democratic tolerance' entails 'treating those who defend [opposing standpoints] as legitimate opponents', but she did not further elaborate on the notion of tolerance. Yet by arguing that adversaries do not have to agree on the exact meaning and implementation of the ethico-political values, she leaves much more room for divergent views and conflict than in theories of democracy that are focused on consensus. Consequently, I must assume that there has to be a high degree of tolerance within Mouffe's agonistic democracy. At second glance then, Mouffe might seem a proponent of the procedural view of democracy that places high value on tolerance, as well as a proponent of the substantive view of democracy that stresses the importance of democratic values. I think that Mouffe can endorse both views of democracy, because she does not make a binary division between enemies and friends, but a threefold distinction between enemies,

adversaries and friends. The type of proponents that face each other subsequently determines whether a more substantive or procedural approach is warranted.

Actually, I would argue that Mouffe actually put forward a *split-level interpretation of democracy*. On the first level, which I will call the antagonistic level, a distinction is made between enemies and friends/adversaries, with adherence to the ethico-political values as the demarcation criterion. On the second level, named the agonistic level, a distinction between friends and adversaries can be made, based on their interpretation of the ethico-political values. This split-level interpretation of democracy explains why Mouffe can simultaneously adhere to the substantive as well as the procedural view of democracy.

On the antagonistic level, where enemies and friends/adversaries compete, the substantive view can be applied: enemies should not be tolerated in the political arena because they do not endorse the ethico-political values. However, I do not think that there should be no interaction with the antagonistic party at all, or that they should be morally condemned. The moral condemnation of the party could prohibit the possible transformation of the antagonistic party into an agonistic party (Mouffe, 2005c, p.59). In order for this transformation to happen, there will likely need to be some engagement with the antagonistic party. Although Mouffe rejects deliberative democracy for its orientation towards consensus, I would argue that some sort of dialogue with the antagonistic party might be necessary in order to transform it. As Malik (2008, p.95) rightly argues, 'the mere fact of being part of the process [of articulating reasons] is important because it can enlarge the perspectives of the participants by acculturating and socialising those who are engaged in dialogue'. Here acculturating should not mean that the antagonistic parties should fully assimilate the views of the democratic parties, only that they begin to endorse the ethico-political values. By allowing some sort of engagement between the antagonistic and the agonistic/friendly parties, it might be possible to establish a conflictual consensus on the ethico-political values. Additionally, the hope is that by including the antagonistic parties in some way, they will not express their opinions in a more violent way.

On the second, agonistic, level, where adversaries and friends compete with each other, strategies that follow from the procedural view of democracy can be applied. Since adversarial parties share with friendly parties a commitment to the ethico-political values, they should be tolerated. Without this tolerance, it would not be possible for the friends and adversaries to disagree on the meaning and implementation of the ethico-political values. However, when those adversarial parties start to degenerate into antagonistic parties, more repressive measures are warranted. It is difficult to establish though when this tipping point occurs. The demarcation criterion is endorsement of the ethico-political values, but since adversarial parties are allowed to differ on the exact meaning of them, it might be difficult to precisely establish when a party definitely no longer

subscribes to those values. It is thus also difficult to establish whether the adversarial aspects of a party outweigh the antagonistic character traits.

By juxtaposing Mouffe's theory with the classic procedural and substantive view of democracy I have elucidated that 1) Mouffe has a split-level interpretation of democracy and 2) how the substantive and the procedural strategies can be applied to enemies and adversaries. Although this discussion has been illuminating for Mouffe's theory, the substantive and procedural approach cannot be applied to populist parties because of their dualistic character. Because populist parties have both agonistic and antagonistic features, a more comprehensive approach that combines aspects of both the substantive and procedural view is needed. In the next section I will try to develop such an approach.

§7.3 Populism as an inter-parliamentary challenge

It has been argued before that combating extremism warrants a more comprehensive approach, than an approach that follows from either the substantive or procedural view of democracy (Capoccia, 2005). Because by giving the extremist too much leeway on the procedural view, an anti-democratic party could ultimately destroy democracy through democratic procedures (the Weimar scenario). On the substantive scenario, the use of repression and restrictions on democratic rights could lead to an authoritative state. In addition, those views focus too much on the legal and judicial side of combating extremism and not enough on promoting and fostering democracy throughout political and civil society, according to Capoccia (2005). In reaction to these shortcomings of the procedural and the substantive views of democracy in combating extremism, Capoccia developed the model of *defending democracy* (2001, 2005). This model implies

> the elaboration and enactment of short-term political strategies, whether inclusive or repressive in nature, which are explicitly aimed at reacting against those political forces that exploit the rights and guarantees of democracy in order to undermine its fundamental bases (Capoccia, 2001, p.432).

Those short-term strategies can be applied against an immediate threat and prevent it from becoming more successful (Capoccia, 2005, p.4). Capoccia distinguished two types of short-term strategies. *Militancy* refers to anti-extremist legislation that is repressive of nature. *Incorporation* is accommodative in nature and refers to strategies that 'bring into the system parts of the extremist opposition, thereby simultaneously weakening the extremist camp and increasing the legitimacy of the regime and the support for it' (Capoccia, 2005, p.49). Instead of using strategies of either militancy or incorporation, Capoccia argued that both strategies could be successfully applied in a comprehensive approach.

The idea of defending democracy has been further developed by other authors, such as Pedahzur (2004) and Rummens and Abts (2010). Pedahzur (2004, p.111) takes over Capoccia's definition of *defending democracy*, but argues that we should not only focus on short-term strategies but on long-term strategies as well. Such long-term strategies are aimed at embedding the democratic values and procedures in society. Examples of long-term strategies are educational and social controls, in order to invest a profound loyalty to democracy. In that way, 'the state is able to contend with the challenges of extremism long before they materialize into political alternatives' (Pedahzur, 2004, p.113). In their version of defending democracy, Rummens and Abts (2010) focus more on how established parties should react to extremist parties. They developed a *concentric containment policy* (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.653):

> a central guideline of decreasing tolerance which holds that although some tolerance of extremism at the periphery of the democratic system is appropriate and even useful, our attitude towards extremism should become increasingly restrictive when political actors move closer to the centres of actual decision making.

Rummens and Abts' proposal offers an interesting starting point for the development of agonistic guidelines. It is a well-developed proposal that focuses on the role established parties could play in dealing with extremist parties. Moreover, it does not only offer a normative theoretical discussion of an overall strategy, but discusses some concrete strategies as well.

Concentric Containment Policy

With their concentric containment policy Rummens and Abts argue that the closer extremist parties come to the heart of the decision-making process, the less tolerant established parties should be towards them. Rummens and Abts are primarily concerned with right-wing extreme parties, whose politicians 'should be considered as potentially dangerous antagonistic enemies of the liberal democratic regime as such' (2010, p.653). The three core characteristic of liberal democracy, as identified by theories of deliberative democracy form of the base of Rummens and Abts' model:

1. 'The substantive ideals of liberty and equality for all citizens' (2010, p.651)
2. 'Process of democratic decision making, in which the citizens themselves can actively participate' (2010, p.652)
3. 'The two-track nature of the democratic decision-making process […] [requires] an informal public sphere at the periphery and more formal decision-making institutions at the centre'(2010, p.652)

From the first characteristic, it follows that any participant in democracy should respect the values of liberty and equality. The democratic decision-making process subsequently helps to define the specific content of the democratic values. The two-track nature of democracy helps to track the views of citizens in the informal public sphere and then to filter out which concerns are compatible

with the values of equality and liberty, which can be discussed in the formal public sphere, and which cannot. These principles thus help distinguishing undemocratic extremist parties from democratic parties.

According to Rummens and Abts, discussion in the informal public sphere discussions 'should be as free as possible and not obstructed by conversational restraint or rules of exclusion' (2010, p.653). This almost unrestricted freedom of expression primarily applies to individual citizens. When citizens organise themselves, for example in a political party, and try to influence the decision-making process with their extremist beliefs, their freedom should already be more restricted. If those repressive measures cannot persuade such a party to endorse the democratic principles, as a final means that party can be banned (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.655). Thus, the strategies that follow from this concentric model are partially inclusive and exclusive. They are inclusive in the sense that the (extremist) concerns of citizens that are expressed in the informal sphere should be taken into account in the decision-making process, but partially repressive in order to prohibit extremist views from influencing the decision-making process through 'an ongoing civilising pressure on extremist parties' (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.656). As long as parties have extremist ideas, they should not be seen as equal political partners, but need to be subjected to an ongoing civilising pressure by the other political parties.

Rummens and Abts' containment model forms an interesting example of what a defending strategy could look like which is not based on either the substantive or on the procedural view of democracy. Yet there are several reasons why this model cannot be applied to my view on populism. The first problem is Rummens and Abts' conception of "extremist" and friendly parties. According to the authors, extremist parties are antagonistic enemies that do not endorse the democratic principles, as opposed to agonistic adversaries and friendly parties (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.653). A closer look at their discussion of what an extremist party is, makes me think that they are actually talking about populist parties. The extremist parties' reference to the homogeneous conception of the common good and the "true people", as well as those parties' preference for a more direct expression of the will of the people (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.653), are all well-known populist characteristics. In addition, in an earlier article of the authors (Abts and Rummens, 2007), to which Rummens and Abts themselves refer, they have already discussed 'the undemocratic nature of extremist parties' (2010, p.652). In the earlier article however, the extremist parties in case were populist parties, that should be seen not as 'ordinary adversaries, but [as] *political enemies*' (Abts and Rummens, 2007, p.422, original emphasis). Thus, where I have argued that populist parties have antagonistic as well as agonistic features, according to Abts and Rummens (2007) they are full-fledged enemies. This different conception of populist parties, also influences what the appropriate response is.

But what I find most problematic about Rummens and Abts' model, is the limited room for dissent it offers. Rummens and Abts argue that 'political forms of extremism can articulate and provide an outlet for feelings of dissatisfaction among parts of the citizenry' in the informal public sphere, where there should be an almost unlimited freedom of expression (2010, p.654). Those feelings of dissatisfaction can then be tracked by established parties and inform the decision-makers in the formal public sphere. In the formal public sphere itself, freedom of expression is much more restricted, especially for extremist parties. Rummens and Abts (2010, p.655) argue that

> while it might be acceptable for individuals to voice their extremist beliefs in public, it is much more problematic when citizens actually organise themselves in order to spread and cultivate such unfiltered extremist beliefs and attempt to maximise their impact on the democratic decision-making process. In cases like these, a more repressive approach might be appropriate whereby certain constraints on the right to protest or the right to assemble are imposed.

Thus, when extremist individuals organise themselves and operate in the formal public sphere, their room for manoeuvre (including their freedom of expression) should be confined. Rummens and Abts would thus relegate populist parties to the informal public sphere, but I consider this problematic for five reasons.

Reason 1: populist concerns as second-class

This approach ignores the fact that populist parties are not only antagonistic enemies, but also agonistic adversaries. Some of the concerns that populist parties bring to the fore, are legitimate concerns (in accordance with the ethico-political values) and represent feelings of dissatisfaction. Rummens and Abts (2010) argue that those concerns and feelings will be taken into account in the formal public sphere, through the tracking and filtering process. I think that this route is insufficient. By allowing those feelings and concerns only to be expressed by individuals in the periphery of the decision-making process, those concerns are in effect conceived of as second-class. It will look like those concerns are not taken seriously by parties in the formal public sphere. This will actually strengthen the populist' claim that "the elite" does not take serious the concerns of "the people".

Reason 2: hegemonic position of established parties

It cannot be guaranteed that the concerns of the populist parties are actually taken into account by the parties that are already in the centre of the decision-making realm. The established parties have a hegemonic position and can filter out the views and concerns of the populist parties, which *according to them* do not correspond to *their* conception of the ethico-political values and that therefore should not be allowed in the formal public sphere. Again, this will play into the hands of the populist parties: "the elite" does not take seriously "the people". This approach could thus strengthen, instead of overcome, the polarization between "the elite" and "the people".

Reason 3: covers up the conflict

Allowing extremists to express their feelings and concerns only in the informal public sphere, is actually a denial of the conflictual dimension of politics. Relegating an extremist party to the informal public sphere, that is less visible or transparent than the formal public sphere, covers up a political struggle that should be fought in the formal (and more transparent) public sphere. Allowing the conflict to take place in the political arena is I think one of the most valuable insights of Chantal Mouffe's political thought. Moreover, only indirectly dealing with extremist viewpoints in the informal sphere resembles some kind of 'ignore it and it will go away' strategy by the established political parties: by depriving 'the pariah of any sense of legitimacy or importance to be gained purely by becoming the subject of attention' in the public sphere (Downs, 2001, p.26), the established parties ignore the fact that some citizens and parties have extremist views. Consequentially, this could lead to a situation in which citizens start to express their demands and feelings in other, less peaceful ways.

Reason 4: restriction of the freedom of speech

Relegating populists to the informal public sphere is also problematic because it actually implies a significant restriction on the freedom of expression for politicians. It is worth taking a closer look at this freedom of expression. Rummens discussed the freedom of expression for political parties and politicians in an article with Stefan Sottiaux (2012). Against the background of the concentric containment model, Sottiaux and Rummens (2012, p.120, emphasis added) argue that

> political speech should be widely protected in terms of its *content*. Even speech that is manifestly at
> odds with core democratic values may still contain a politically relevant message and should therefore
> be protected, at least at the *periphery* of the democratic system.

The authors add that the freedom of expression can be restricted 'where there is a real risk' that political actors whose ideas conflict with the democratic principles come close to the centre of the decision-making (Sottiaux and Rummens, 2012, p.122). 'Smaller antidemocratic movements and the ideologies they represent in the political arena' may express relevant societal feelings and concerns, but because they have 'no immediate opportunities to gain access to government power', those parties should enjoy more freedom of expression than antidemocratic parties closer to the centre (Sottiaux and Rummens, 2012, p.122).

I think that Sottiaux and Rummens' (2012) guideline of decreasing freedom of expression for extremist parties as they come closer to the centre of decision-making is inadequate. To start with, it will be very difficult to determine when an extremist party, or in this case a populist party, poses a real risk to the democratic system. Sottiaux and Rummens themselves seem not quite clear on this either, they mention various but divergent factors. At some point they talk about access to

government power (Sottiaux and Rummens, 2012, p.122), at other times they speak about influencing policy proposals and legislation (Sottiaux and Rummens, 2012, p.122). At another point they mention several relevant factors for determining whether an extremist party constitutes an imminent risk, namely 'a party's size, its election results, its opportunities for actual government participation, […] its power to influence public opinion' (Sottiaux and Rummens, 2012, p.122). Indeed, all those factors may be relevant, but they all indicate a different distance from the centre of decision-making. It is thus not clear at what point extremist parties should not be tolerated anymore.

A second and even more important reason why this guideline is inadequate, is that, as Sottiaux and Rummens (2012) state themselves, the freedom of speech is essential for a proper functioning of democracy. Citizens can only be properly (and equally) informed about the decisions they need to make, if there are no constraints on the exchange of ideas, concerns and information. For that reason, freedom of speech is necessary. Additionally, freedom of speech protects citizens against the tyranny of the majority. As John Stuart Mill argued in *On Liberty*: 'If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind' (1859/1974, p.76). Those two reasons for freedom of speech (the proper functioning of democracy and protection against the tyranny of the majority) are especially important to bring about populism's positive effects. Freedom of expression is needed to strengthen the democratic logic, to strengthen the voice of ordinary citizens that might be overlooked by established parties and to combat the hegemonic ruling parties.

Third, freedom of expression is also necessary to combat the negative effects of populism. Although in Sottiaux and Rummens' theory the freedom of speech is only restricted for extremist parties, the mere fact that it *could* be restricted might make other (non-extremist) politicians more cautious about the statements they make. In general, politicians should feel as free as possible in saying what they want, without the fear of being silenced. This is also the reason why in almost all parliaments, politicians enjoy parliamentary immunity (Hardt, 2013, p.1):

> Elected representatives, who collectively personify the public will and translate it into the laws which govern our lives, need to be able to debate freely in parliament and to discharge their mandate independently. They must not fear politically motivated prosecution or other forms of obstruction of the parliamentary process.

Politicians should not fear that their freedom of expression will be restricted, especially not in debates with populist parties. These are often fierce debates and it takes strong arguments to stand up against the populist party and to refute its arguments. Only when *all* politicians enjoy protection of their freedom of expression, it will be possible to properly fight a political struggle. Thus, in order

to successfully deal with populist parties, those parties should enjoy the same (protection of) freedom of speech in the formal public sphere as other parties, I would argue.

Reason 5: populism as an extra-parliamentary challenge

The fifth reason why relegating populist parties to the informal public sphere is problematic is that it makes populism an extra-parliamentary instead of an inter-parliamentary challenge. It creates a situation in which not politicians, but ordinary citizens seem to be responsible for battling populism. One may expect from politicians, as the guardians of democracy, that they know how to refute the arguments of the populist party. It is their job to take a stand, develop arguments and battle in a debate. They have had debate training and get more experienced every day. Moreover, politicians will (regrettably) have more experience with being offended and grow a thicker skin. Ordinary citizens are in general less equipped for dealing with extremist points of view. Certainly, citizens can play an important role in combating extremist views. Long-term strategies that Pedahzur (2004) advocates, such as educational controls, consolidate this possibility. However, I think it is the role of politicians to combat extremist views. The formal public sphere is thus the primary place in which this fight should take place.

By combating populist views in the formal public sphere, politicians could also send out an important (symbolic) message: one is allowed to hold opinions that deviate from the norm, but those opinions will be scrutinized and if necessary refuted. Given the stakes of the debate (functioning of democracy, democratic values as liberty and equality, minority rights etc.) it is of the utmost importance that populist arguments are debated in the formal public sphere, by politicians that are equipped for it. Thus instead of making populist parties an extra-parliamentary threat to be dealt with by ordinary citizens, populist parties should be an inter-parliamentary threat to be dealt with by politicians.

In conclusion, Rummens and Abts' (2010) concentric containment policy, although promising at first, is not adequate for dealing with populist parties. Their proposal to relegate extremist parties to the informal public sphere is highly problematic. Rather than relegating populist parties to the informal sphere and restricting their freedom as they come to the centre of the decision making, they should be allowed in the formal public sphere, in order to combat the antagonistic effects and to incorporate the parties' positive effects.

§7.4 Combating populist parties in the political arena

The fact that populist parties should be allowed to express their opinions in the formal public sphere, says nothing the freedom populist parties should enjoy in other proceedings in democracy, such as government formation and policy making. In those proceedings, should established parties seek

cooperation with those parties or should they rather ignore them? I will end this chapter with a short discussion of several strategies that established parties can employ in dealing with populist parties. The strategies can be roughly divided in three categories: introducing legislation, cooperation and non-cooperation (Rummens and Abts, 2010; Downs, 2001; Widfelt, 2004).

Introducing legislation

Established parties can introduce legislation that is aimed at protecting democracy from the negative effects of populism. Examples of such legislation are anti-extremist legislation and public funding rules for political parties (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.657). Anti-extremist legislation 'regulates the ban on undemocratic parties or organisations and [...] prohibits the propaganda of racial or other forms of discrimination' (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.657). Public funding rules determine that only parties that are committed to the democratic principles, as expressed for example in their party programme, are entitled to state funding (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.657). Both these instruments are what Downs (2001; 2011) has called *legal isolation* strategies and aim at the *specific marginalization* of the extremist group (Widfelt, 2004, p.153). Such legislation has a deterrent effect: political parties will know that they have to operate within the democratic boundaries, otherwise they will no longer receive public funding or be banned. Anti-extremist legislation and public funding rules also have a symbolic function, in the sense that they 'mark the constitutional boundaries of tolerance' (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.657).

This strategy of legal isolation has some disadvantages when it comes to populist parties. As Downs (2001, p.27) rightly argues, muting 'a party that gains voice for its anti-system message through institutionalised channels of participation and representation [...] is itself of dubious democratic merit'. Instead of marginalizing the populist party and reducing the support for the party, voters may become further alienated from politics because "their" party is targeted. This is especially dangerous when the populist party represents a minority that feels overlooked by other parties. Another disadvantage concerns the effectiveness of legislation. Populist parties and their leaders often know exactly how they can express their (extreme) ideological views, while staying within the boundaries of what is permissible. Leader of the *PVV* Geert Wilders may be a good example of this. In 2011, a Dutch court did not find Wilders guilty for group insult and inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims (Hinke, 2011). According to the court, Wilder's messages were rude and condescending, but at the border of what is permissible. Moreover, it will probably take a considerate amount of time before a political party is actually banned from parliament. The case of *Vlaams Blok*, that was only convicted after four years of trial (De Lange and Akkerman, 2012), accounts to that assumption. A third disadvantage is that anti-extremist legislation will make a

populist party an extra-parliamentary threat and consequently citizens will be charged with combating populism. As I have argued above, this situation is undesirable.

Notwithstanding those disadvantages, I regard it of vital importance that democracies have anti-extremist legislation. It gives a symbolic, but also legally established message that anti-democratic behaviour cannot be tolerated. The deterrent effect that flows from the legislation and public funding rules also has a civilising pressure on the populist party. In that way its antagonistic features will diminish. However, anti-extremist legislation is a rather passive strategy for established parties to combat populist parties in the parliament and it can take a while before the populist party is banned. Rather than solely relying on anti-extremist legislation, established parties could also actively deal with populist parties, either through cooperation or non-cooperation.

Cooperation

Established parties can cooperate with populist parties to various extents. I will discuss three possibilities: (1) accommodating the demands of the populist party, (2) cooperating with a populist party in government and (3) supporting the populist parties' proposals on an *ad hoc* basis. The first strategy, co-opting some of the demands of the populist party (or "general accommodation") is aimed at acquiescing the public opinion (Widfelt, 2004, p.153). It is hoped that by acting in accordance with the public opinion, the public support of the populist party will decline in favour of the established parties. Although this strategy shows the public that their concerns are taken into account, the question is whether this is a sound strategy. Taking over the demands of the populist parties *might* lead to less popular support for the populist parties, but in the meantime their demands, that could be harmful to democracy, are being met. Meeting their (possibly undemocratic) demands in such a direct way, could give a signal to the wider public that democratic rights and values can be overruled. Although the demands of "the people" should be taken serious, democratic values should always be upheld.

This line of argumentation applies even stronger to cooperating with a populist party in government. This strategy of "specific accommodation" is aimed at exposing "the lack of realism" of the populist party and 'to force the party to take political responsibility' (Widfelt, 2004, p.153). The idea behind this strategy is that if a populist party wants to take part in a coalition government, it will have to become more moderate. Only then established parties might want to govern with the populist party. A populist party is therefore faced with an 'adaptation dilemma', revolving around adaptation and differentiation (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.658). The populist party will have to soften or sacrifice its anti-establishment character and other aspects that differentiate it from the established parties, in order to be able to take part in government. But if a populist party loses some of its distinctive characteristics, it may become less attractive to voters. But if the populist party does

not adapt itself to the established parties, government participation will be less likely. Not being able to take government responsibility could also make the party less attractive to voters. Hence the adaptation dilemma for the populist parties.

Mouffe (2005c, p.68) is a supporter of allowing a populist party in government and argues that this will contribute to an accelerated decline of the populist party's popular support, as the example of the *FPÖ* testifies. Although participation in government can make a populist party more moderate, as Van Spanje and Van den Brug (2007) demonstrated, allowing the populist party to govern seems counterintuitive. Because it are not only the positive effects of populism that are brought into government, but also the negative aspects. Although government cooperation with a populist party clearly shows that the demands of the populist party are taken into account, this may be at the expense of other groups in society and the democratic values. Moreover, participating with a populist party in government might signal to the public that there is nothing wrong with cooperating with a party that endangers democracy. Of course, coalition partners do not entirely agree on every subject, they will challenge each other's political ideas. But systematically working together with a populist party in a government coalition, suggests that a populist party is an ordinary and legitimate political opponent. Whereas the dualistic character of populism implies that populist parties also have an antagonistic character.

Considering the above, supporting the proposals of a populist party, such as amendments and motions, on an *ad hoc* basis, could prove a better strategy. Supporting certain proposals of a populist party shows to "the people" that their concerns and demands are taken seriously. This will prevent a further polarization/opposition between the established parties and the populist party. Moreover, the *ad hoc* basis of this support allows for a more critical assessment of the populist party's proposals than entirely co-opting its demands. A critical assessment of a populist party's proposal will be more difficult for established parties that actually govern with the populist party. Other interests, such as the survival of the government, or coalition-agreements, will be at stake.

A downside of this strategy is that it is indeed *ad hoc*. It is a pragmatic, instead of a principled approach, and thus there is always the risk that established parties "accidentally" support a populist's proposal that is undemocratic. Established parties may not always make a proper assessment of the proposal (since the meaning of the democratic values are not cast in concrete), they may not always recognize the true intensions or effects of a proposal, or support the proposal for electoral reasons. Another disadvantage of *ad hoc* cooperation is that it does not send a very strong signal to the public that the antagonistic side of populist parties should be combated. Established parties can of course express their displeasure with the undemocratic utterances and proposals of populist parties, but at the same time they work together with those "dangerous" parties. This sends a diffuse signal to voters. Moreover, it could be questioned whether under this

strategy populist parties are treated differently from ordinary political opponents. Established parties also work on an *ad hoc* basis with other political opponents (established parties), unless they are coalition partners. The difference between the treatment of populist parties and of established parties is then the extent to which a populist party is condemned as undemocratic.

Comparing the three types of cooperation strategies, I would argue that supporting populist party's proposals on an *ad hoc* basis, is the best option. It allows for an independent critical assessment of the proposals, not hampered by any coalition-agreements. Only proposals that do not conflict with the democratic values will get the support of established parties. Whereas the strategies of accommodating the populist demands and cooperating with a populist party in government only deal with the positive effects of populism, the *ad hoc* cooperation strategy is the only one that also combats the negative effects of populism.

Non-cooperation: *cordon sanitaire*

The third type of strategy that established parties could adopt is principled non-cooperation, or *cordon sanitaire* as it is often called. *Cordon sanitaire* refers to the situation in which (almost) all other parties in parliament form a "blocking" coalition against the populist party and decide not to co-operate with the populist party in any way (Rummens and Abts, 2010). Parties will not share government responsibility with the populist party, nor will they support the party's legislation proposals, amendments, etc. In that way, the coalition blocks the populist party's effective power in decision-making (Downs, 2011; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021b; Rummens and Abts, 2010). Principled non-cooperation with populist parties is an example of a political isolation strategy (Downs, 2011). Akin to legal isolation, this strategy tries to restrain the political power of an extremist party. However, whereas with legal isolation a judge decides whether a party violates anti-extremist legislation, political isolation is executed by political parties.

I want to emphasize that I think that a *cordon* must not be seen as a 'wall of silence' (Fennema, 1997, p.167) that rules out any debate about the populist party or the demands it puts on the agenda. Such a silencing strategy would signal that dissenting opinions can simply be ignored and hides the conflictual dimension of politics. Moreover, a silencing strategy would decrease the chance that an enemy transforms (back) into a proper adversary, if every engagement with the party is excluded. The aim of implementing a *cordon sanitaire* is not silencing a populist party, but refraining that party from exerting legislative power.

There are several reasons why a *cordon sanitaire* can be effective in protecting democracy. The most important and straightforward reason is that a *cordon* will prohibit a party from influencing the decision-making. Consequently, there will be no support from other parties for proposals that might harm democracy and minority rights. Second, the non-cooperation of established parties can nudge

voters towards strategic voting in future elections. If the populist party, despite being in parliament, does not have any decision-making power, 'voters will consider a vote for it as "wasted"' and vote for other parties (Art, 2007, p.335). Third, with a *cordon sanitaire*, established parties make clear to citizens that the populist party is regarded an illegitimate enemy. This reason resembles the symbolic effect of legal isolation, but with the addition that in this case the focus is on reducing the party's popular support (Art, 2007, p.335). Fourth, a *cordon sanitaire* will make it difficult for the populist party to recruit members that want to become active in the party (Art, 2007, p.335). The reason for this is that there is little chance that the party can be effective in decision-making and thus for the party members to make a successful political career. A *cordon sanitaire* thus also influences the internal organisation of a populist party in a negative way. The last three reasons that Art (2007) brings to the fore, could lead to less popular support for the populist party, making future electoral success less likely.

A *cordon sanitaire* could thus be effective in dealing with a populist party, but is it a legitimate strategy? On the one hand, a *cordon* is legitimate because it protects democracy. On the other hand it prohibits a democratically chosen political party from influencing the decision-making process. In an opinion article in the *NRC*, a Dutch newspaper, Rummens and Abts (2009) argued that a *cordon sanitaire* is legitimate from both the substantive and the procedural view of democracy. On the procedural view of democracy, that attaches primary importance to the decision-making process, a *cordon sanitaire* can be regarded legitimate, if a majority of representatives decides to implement it. From the substantive view of democracy, a *cordon sanitaire* is legitimate when it is implemented against a party whose standpoints conflict with the democratic values. In that case, other parties have the right, perhaps even the duty, to distance themselves from that party and to prevent its undemocratic ideas from spreading, Rummens and Abts (2009) argue.

Notwithstanding those reasons why a *cordon sanitaire* could be effective and legitimate, it also has some disadvantages, I would argue. First, one can question the effectiveness of the *cordon sanitaire*. In 1991, a *cordon sanitaire* was implemented against the Flemish party *Vlaams Blok*. Despite the *cordon, Vlaams Blok* and later under its new name *Vlaams Belang*, was able to grow further in succeeding elections, gaining 19 percent of the votes in 2007 (De Lange and Akkerman, 2012). Eventually the party lost votes due to internal struggles in the election of 2010. Although a *cordon* prohibits a party from participating directly in the decision-making process, it is not necessarily effective in decreasing the support for a populist party.

A second disadvantage of the *cordon sanitaire* is that it actually plays into the hands of populist parties. A *cordon* runs the risk of reinforcing the populists' message that "the people" are ignored by "the elite". In fact, they are not only ignored, their opinions are rejected by the other parties. When a populist party becomes bigger after the next election, this problem will only get bigger. Third,

the *direct* influence of a populist party under a *cordon sanitaire* may be minimalized, but this party may still *indirectly* affect the decision-making process and the political standpoints of other parties. Populist parties can still put issues on the public and political agenda and ask attention for it (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b). Bale and colleagues (2010) showed that in reaction to radical right populist parties, some other parties have taken a tougher stand on immigration and integration and thus partially adopted the populist party's agenda. Notwithstanding the *cordon*, populist parties are still able to indirectly influence policies.

Regarding Rummens and Abts' (2009) argument that a *cordon sanitaire* is legitimate from the procedural view of democracy because it is decided on by a majority, the situation becomes complicated when a party gains a considerate amount of votes, such as *Vlaams Belang* in 2007 that gained almost one-fifth of the total amounts of votes (De Lange and Akkerman, 2012). The party against which the *cordon* is issued then enjoys a considerate amount of support, while the parties that created the *cordon* have become smaller since the last election. From a procedural point of view, the *cordon* loses legitimacy. From the substantive view of democracy, the *cordon* is still legitimate since it protects the democratic values.

The arguments pro and con the *cordon sanitaire* are both convincing. A *cordon* protects democracy from populist parties' detrimental policy proposals, but allows the other established parties to consider the demands and concerns of the voters of the populist party. Therefore I think that a *cordon sanitaire* is not only an *exclusionary* strategy, as it is often primarily seen (Rummens and Abts, 2010, p.662), but also an inclusionary strategy. Precisely because it allows for discussion and debate, but is exclusionary at the level of decision-making.

§7.5 Ad hoc *cooperation versus principled non-cooperation*

This general discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of specific strategies, showed that the *cordon sanitaire* as well as *ad hoc* cooperation may be appropriate strategies for dealing with populist parties. To determine which strategy best deals with populist parties, I will now compare these strategies with the positive and negative effects of populism I discussed.

Compatibility with negative effects

The negative effects of populism that I discussed are:

1. populism endangers the liberal constraints on the will of the people in liberal democracy;
2. populism has an exclusionary effect on democracy;
3. populism has a polarizing and destabilizing effect on democracy;
4. populism has a moralizing effect on politics and consequently impedes the formation of agreement;

5. populism undermines the legitimacy and power of institutions that are crucial for an effective democracy;

6. populism has a diminishing effect on the democratic space.

Ad (1) The strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation allows established parties to prevent the populists' dangerous policy proposals from being implemented. All proposals of a populist party will be under severe scrutiny of the established parties, to check whether they do not undermine the liberal constraints that protect minorities against the tyranny of the majority. However, with *ad hoc* cooperation there is always the risk that a populist's proposal that is actually detrimental to democracy gets the support of one or more established parties. This risk is not present when a *cordon sanitaire* is implemented. Because established parties do not cooperate with populist parties as a matter of principal, populist parties will not have the possibility to implement any policies that endanger democracy.

Ad (2) With both strategies, established parties cannot entirely forestall populism's exclusionary effects to come about. Policy proposals that are detrimental to minorities can be blocked, but established parties cannot prevent the populist party from expressing views that can create a climate of fear. Established parties can signal to the public that exclusionary speech acts are unacceptable. This signal will be less strong though, when it is combined with a strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation than in combination with a *cordon sanitaire*. A *cordon* continuously informs the public that populist parties are (partially) dangerous to democracy, whereas with *ad hoc* cooperation parties send a mixed signal because they also cooperate with the populist parties. Both strategies can partially prevent the populist party from institutionalizing exclusionary effects, but a *cordon sanitaire* communicates most forcefully to the public that those effects are unacceptable.

Ad (3) Established parties cannot prevent the formation of a new political cleavage or thwart populism's polarizing and destabilizing effect on democracy. What they can do is prevent that the cleavage and polarization becomes further deepened, by adopting a strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation instead of implementing a *cordon sanitaire*. When cooperating with the populist party, established parties can show that they share some concerns with the populist party and that they thus are not solely opposed to that party. A *cordon sanitaire* on the other hand, contributes to the polarization because it implies the moral condemnation of the populist party as an illegitimate enemy. In that way, established parties further emphasize the distance between themselves and the populist parties. In order to prevent further polarization, the pragmatic strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation is more appropriate.

Ad (4) The moralizing effect that populism has on politics cannot be forestalled with a *cordon sanitaire*. On the contrary, a *cordon* actually contributes to, and enhances the moralization because with a *cordon* established parties send a signal to the wider public that a populist party is an evil enemy. *Ad hoc* cooperation may therefore be more desirable, since it does not principally regard populist parties as evil, but also takes into account the agonistic features of populism.

Ad (5) Populist parties question the legitimacy of the democratic institutions, because those institutions (allegedly) ignore and betray "the people". With a strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation, established parties can counter this effect by showing to the supporters of the populist party that their demands (provided that they are not undemocratic) are taken seriously and if possible implemented. Established parties can still argue that the democratic institutions should be protected, while simultaneously agreeing with the populist party that those institutions could be made more hospitable to the voice and demands of "the people". With a *cordon sanitaire*, established parties can also state that the democratic institutions should always be protected, but they cannot effectively counter the populist party's claim that the will of "the people" is ignored. After all, the established parties themselves refute the proposals of the populist party.

Ad (6) With a *cordon sanitaire* established parties can demonstrate to the public that one is allowed to hold opposing views and to express them, but that those ideas cannot be institutionalized if they are at odds with the democratic values. In this way, established parties allow populist parties to bring to the fore the concerns of the people they represent, while simultaneously emphasizing that those citizens who do not belong to the populist's conception of "the people", also have the right to express their views and belong to the pluralistic society. With a *cordon sanitaire*, established parties will do this on a more principled and forceful nature than with a strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation.

Compatibility with positive effects

Now I will discuss whether the two types of strategies bring about, or do not hamper, the positive effects that populism can have. Those effects are:

1. populism can lead to the inclusion of groups that were formerly alienated from politics and put their issues and demands on the political agenda;
2. populism can establish ideological bridging between parties and in that way strengthen the representation of certain groups in society;
3. populism can politicize issues that were previously played out in the juridical or economic realm;
4. populism can highlight the conflictual dimension of politics and in doing so revitalize democracy.

Ad (1) A strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation is a good way to let populist parties increase the responsiveness, representativeness and inclusiveness of democracy, while at the same time thwarting the negative effects. It allows established parties to take into account and act on the concerns that populist parties bring to the fore and to support the proposals of populist parties that do not violate democratic principles. With a *cordon sanitaire*, established parties are only able to listen to the populist party. They cannot implement proposals of populist parties, even if they express a legitimate concern, because of their agreement of non-cooperation. Principled non-cooperation actually subscribes to the populist's claim that established parties do not listen to "the people". *Ad hoc* cooperation is therefore a better strategy to support this positive effect.

Ad (2) If populist parties cannot cooperate with any established party because of a *cordon sanitaire*, ideological bridging with a populist party will not be possible. The only type of ideological bridging that is possible, is that between established parties. Because this does not involve the populist party, the representation of the supporters of the populist party is not strengthened. When established parties employ a strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation, ideological bridging will be possible. One or more established parties can work together with the populist party on those topics that are not undemocratic, but for which they cannot find a majority in parliament with other established parties.

Ad (3) *Ad hoc* cooperation and a *cordon sanitaire* both do not hamper the politicization of certain topics by the populist parties. Populist parties can create public and political attention for their concerns or topics that thus far have been the concern of the judicial or economic realm. Which strategy established parties adopt, does make a different for the actual treatment of those topics though. Through *ad hoc* cooperation, established parties can work together with the populist parties to develop or implement policies. When a populist party is subject to a *cordon sanitaire*, established parties can only take over the concerns of the populist party and make an own proposal regarding those concerns. But this is a rather paradoxical situation. Not only is this an inefficient process, establishes parties also send a diffuse signal to the voters: 'a populist party occasionally presented a good proposal, but because we otherwise condemn that party, we cannot support that proposal'. Instead, the established parties could make its own version of it. *Ad hoc* cooperation is thus better suited for dealing with this effect.

Ad (4) The strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation, as well as principled non-cooperation, allows the populist party to highlight the conflictual dimension of politics. Under both strategies, populist parties can actively discuss their own opinions and that of the established parties. But a revitalization of democracy requires the renewed participation of formerly politically-apathetic citizens. This renewed participation is less likely to come about when a *cordon sanitaire* is implemented, because under that strategy the concerns and demands of voters cannot lead to renewed policies. With a strategy of *ad*

hoc cooperation, renewed participation is more likely because the demands of citizens can actually be taken into account and transformed into concrete policies.

Comparing the strategies of *ad hoc* cooperation and principled non-cooperation with the negative and positive effects that I found, leads to the overview below. The "**+**" signals that a strategy can effectively deal with the negative effect or does not hamper the positive effect. A "**±**" denotes that a strategy scores mediocre on dealing with a negative effective or on allowing the positive effect. A "**−**" sign indicates that this strategy is not suitable for dealing with the effects: it does not remedy a negative effect, or prevent the positive effect from coming about.

	Ad hoc cooperation	*Cordon sanitaire*
Negative effects		
(1) endangers liberal constraints	±	+
(2) exclusionary	±	+
(3) polarizing and destabilizing	±	-
(4) moralizing	±	-
(5) undermines institutions	+	±
(6) diminishes the democratic space	±	+
Positive effects		
(1) increases representativeness, responsiveness and inclusiveness	+	±
(2) allows ideological bridging	+	-
(3) politicizing	+	±
(4) highlight conflictual dimension	+	±

Figure 6: *ad hoc* cooperation versus a *cordon sanitaire*

What stands out from this overview is that with regard to dealing with the negative effects of populism, the strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation scores mediocre across the board. The strategy of principled non-cooperation scores more varying: three plusses, one minus and two plus-minus signs. Overall then, the *cordon sanitaire* scores mediocre as well. Regarding the positive effects, *ad hoc* cooperation clearly scores better than the *cordon sanitaire*: four plusses against three plus-minus signs and one minus sign. Thus, where a *cordon sanitaire* primarily deals with the negative effects of populism, the strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation leaves more room for the positive effects of populism to come about.

Comparing the two strategies on how well they deal with the negative and positive effects thus leads me to the conclusion that the best strategy for dealing with populist parties in parliament is *ad hoc* cooperation. The strategies of *ad hoc* cooperation and *cordon sanitaire* are equally as good in thwarting the negative effects, but *ad hoc* cooperation is much better equipped in supporting the positive effects of populism. Through *ad hoc* cooperation, established parties can handle the dualistic character of populist parties: it does justice to the adversarial features of populist parties, while simultaneously thwarting the antagonistic characteristics.

By putting forward *ad hoc* cooperation as the best strategy to deal with populism, I disagree with Mouffe as well as Rummens and Abts. Mouffe (2005a; 2005c) argued that the best way to diminish the public support for populist parties is to allow them to participate in government. But I have showed that this does not take seriously enough the negative effects of populism. Rummens and Abts (2010) stated in their concentric containment policy that a *cordon sanitaire* is the best strategy, because they regard populist parties as full-fledged enemies. I showed however that a *cordon sanitaire* does not sufficiently take into account the dualistic character of populism and thereby attenuates the positive effects of populism.

§7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I investigated what, considering populism's dualistic character, the best way for dealing with populist parties is. This exploration brought to the fore various insights, not only about the right way of dealing with populism, but also about Mouffe's theory of agonism. Comparing Mouffe's theory with the substantive and procedural view of democracy brought to the fore that Mouffe holds a split-level interpretation of democracy. On the first, antagonistic level a distinction is made between enemies and adversaries/friends, on the second, agonistic level, a distinction can be made between friends and adversaries. Each level warrants its own approach for dealing with political opponents. The comparison with the substantive and the procedural view of democracy has also brought to light the importance of tolerance in Mouffe's theory. Without a high degree of tolerance, a "conflicting consensus" or room for dissent is not possible. In scrutinizing Rummens and Abts' concentric containment model (2010), I showed that the authors' proposal to become more intolerant the closer an extremist party comes to the centre of decision-making actually works counter-effectively. Instead of relegating populist parties to the informal public sphere or restricting their freedom of expression, populist parties should be allowed in the formal public sphere where they can be dealt with politically.

Allowing populist parties in the formal public sphere does not mean that those parties can go about their business undisturbed. Established parties need to listen to the populist party, while at the same time combating their views and preventing them from unimpededly influencing the decision-

making. I argued that a strategy of *ad hoc* cooperation is the best way to do this. It forestalls the negative effects of populism, while it simultaneously fosters the positive effects.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

> The question is, Who should decide which path to take? In my opinion: the people. Whoever doubts the role of the people as the highest sovereign, questions the very essence of democracy.

In its most basic form, democracy means rule of the people (Przeworski, 2010). The statement above could therefore been made by any pro-democrat. Nevertheless, many people will suddenly find this statement problematic when they find out that it is an excerpt from the book *The Freedom that I mean*, written by deceased FPÖ leader Jörg Haider (as cited in Mouffe, 2005c, p.63). The FPÖ is an Austrian right-wing populist party that has been very successful and participated in Austrian government in the period 2000-2007 (Fallend, 2012). Because populist parties are often regarded antidemocratic, this quote might make some people feel uncomfortable.

But why are populist parties primarily seen as antidemocratic, if they also emphasize what democracy in essence is about: the sovereignty of the people? Does modern democracy not need a stronger focus on what the people want, given the increasing "gap" between politicians and citizens, declining voter turnouts and political participation (Howarth, 2008; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012)? Do populist parties not bring to the fore concerns of citizens that other political parties do not (want to) see and thereby serve as an alternative to those political parties (Howarth, 2008)?

In this thesis it was my intention to sketch a more nuanced picture of populism, that takes into account both its advantageous and detrimental features. I deem a proper understanding of populism necessary, because if one wants to say something about how society, and especially established political parties, should deal with populist parties, one first needs to properly understand the character of the political phenomenon. The goal of this thesis was therefore twofold: 1) examining the positive and negative effects of populism, and 2) proposing how established parties should deal with populist parties. This led to the following research question:

Although populism is often considered detrimental to democracy, can it also be seen as beneficial to democracy? Furthermore, how should established parties deal with populist parties?

For a thorough theoretical discussion of the effects of populism, it is necessary to have a proper understanding of this political phenomenon itself. In chapter two I argued that populism is a thin-centred ideology, with "the people" as a "homogeneous whole" and "the elite" as its key elements. Chapter three discussed "agonistic pluralism", a theory put forward by Chantal Mouffe (2000; 2005a). She argues that the best way to deal with differences in a pluralist society is not to try to reach a reasonable consensus, but to provide a political outlet in which differences and conflict can be played out. This will prevent a conflict to be played out in an antagonistic way, between enemies who see each other as illegitimate enemies that need to be destroyed. Instead, the conflict will be

between adversaries that endorse the ethico-political values of liberty and equality, but differ on the exact meaning of those values. What democracy thus needs is a 'vibrant clash of democratic political positions' (Mouffe, 2000, p.104). Mouffe's ideas about pluralism and conflict provided valuable insights for the evaluation of populism.

In chapter four I made a general evaluation of the relationship between populism and democracy. I showed that different "types" of democracy lead to different understandings of this relationship. If one takes the meaning of democracy simply to be "rule of the people", there is considerable overlap between populism and democracy. With regard to representative democracy, populism is not at odds with the representative character *an sich*, but rather opposed to the wrong kind of representation. That is, representation by "the elite". Populism's relationship with liberal democracy is the most problematic, because populism tries to remedy the under-responsiveness of liberal democracy with over-responsiveness, thereby undermining the liberal laws that protect the democratic values and minorities. Overall then, populism's relationship with "democracy" is ambiguous.

To further investigate this ambiguity, I zoomed in on the specific positive and negative effects that populism can have, thereby using insights of Mouffe's theory. Starting with the negative effects in chapter five, I argued that populism is detrimental to democracy because it is exclusionary, polarizing and destabilizing. Furthermore, it undermines the liberal constraints on the will of the people, the legitimacy and power of institutions and the formation of agreement, that are all necessary for a proper functioning of democracy. In chapter six, I discussed the positive effects that populism can have. Populism can be beneficial to democracy because it enhances the responsiveness, representativeness and inclusiveness of democracy, can create ideological bridging between parties, politicize issues that were previously played out in the economic or juridical realm and highlight the conflictual dimension of politics.

However, much depends on how "the people" is constructed. The construction of "the people" always implies the exclusion of certain groups that, because of populism's Manichaean outlook, will be regarded evil. But what form "the people" takes, depends on the host ideology to which populism attaches itself. Because of the detrimental as well as the beneficial effects that populism can bring about, I have argued that populism has a dualistic character: populism is *agonistic* in the sense that it highlights the conflict in politics and counters the hegemonic established parties, but *antagonistic* for the Manichaean way in which it constitutes "the people". Populism is democratic because it increases the responsiveness, representativeness and legitimacy of democracy, but undemocratic in undermining the equality and liberty (ethico-political values) of those citizens that do not belong to "the people".

The dualistic character of populism affects the way in which we should deal with populist parties. I discussed this problem, that resembles the classic paradox of tolerance, in chapter seven. There I argued that despite its partial antagonistic character, populist parties should be allowed in parliament. Instead of relegating populist parties to the informal public sphere or restricting their freedom of expression, as Rummens and Abts (2010) proposed, populism should be an inter-parliamentary challenge. In that way, the dangerous side of populist parties can be challenged politically by the established parties. The fact that populism should be allowed in parliament, does not mean that the problem ends here. Populism may have some beneficial effects, but also serious detrimental effects that should be attenuated. I discussed how other, established parties in parliament could play a role in doing so.

There are roughly three types of approaches that political parties could use for dealing with populist parties: (1) introducing anti-extremist legislation, (2) cooperation and (3) non-cooperation. Of course every strategy has its (dis)advantages. Notwithstanding the importance of anti-extremist legislation as a way to protect democracy from undemocratic forces in general, I argued that *ad hoc* cooperation and a *cordon sanitaire* prove better and more direct ways to deal with populist parties. After comparing those two strategies on how well they deal with the specific positive and negative effects of populism, I concluded that *ad hoc* cooperation is the best strategy for established parties to pursue. Although both the *cordon sanitaire* and *ad hoc* cooperation can attenuate the negative effects, *ad hoc* cooperation is better at sustaining the positive effects of populism.

In my quest for answering the research question I applied a broad scope on populism. This broad scope allowed me to highlight several aspects about populism itself and its relation to other topics. But due to the broad scope, I was not able to extensively discuss certain topics, such as the concepts "democracy" or "the people". More attention could have been devoted to those subjects. The broad scope of this work therefore proved an advantage as well as a disadvantage.

One of the topics I could have paid more attention to is agonism. In this thesis I solely focused on Mouffe's version of agonism, whereas the versions of other authors, such as Bonnie Honig and William Connolly, could lead to different conclusions about populism and how to deal with it. Connolly's version of agonism may be particularly interesting, given his concepts "agonistic respect" and "critical responsiveness" that denote a specific way of dealing with conflict and opinions that deviate from established identities (Khan, 2008; Wenman, 2013, p.109-110; White, 2010, p.56-57). Applying Connolly's version of agonism to populist parties, that can be seen as a new group that provokes the established parties, would be an interesting subject for further research.

Attention could also have been paid to Pierre Rosanvallon's discussion of populism in his book *Counter-democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust* (2008). Rosanvallon analyzed the current state of democracy, thereby focusing on the role of (dis)trust. Rather than through casting a vote every

number of years, citizens have found others ways of expressing their distrust. These other types of expressing distrust Rosanvallon calls "counter-democracy" (2008). Although populism can be seen as a manifestation of distrust, it also is 'a tragic expression of our inability to overcome it', according to Rosanvallon (2008, p.273). Rosanvallon's view on democracy and populism would therefore have been an interesting addition to my own examination.

Despite those shortcomings, I aimed to shed a new light on the political phenomenon populism and on the best way to deal with populist parties. In times of increasing tensions in society and increasing success for populist parties, it is more important than ever to know what we are talking about.

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