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*Frontiers in Question*

*Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

... the presence of frontiers is inherent to the political as such ... there is only politics where there are frontiers ...<sup>2</sup>

... it is impossible to clarify the conceptual status of the frontier without working through its political status ... there is at the very least an uneasy relationship between the desire to establish sharp *conceptual* boundaries on the one hand, and on the other, to abolish *political* frontiers through cosmopolitanism ...<sup>3</sup>

... the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines) ...<sup>4</sup>

These remarks, extracted from the writings of Laclau, Bennington and Derrida, all touch upon one of the most central problematics of our times, namely, the issue of frontiers. It arises, not only in the full immediacy and urgency of practical politics, but also in politico-philosophical reflection on closure and limits.<sup>5</sup> The problem of frontiers is thus not indicative of a sin-

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<sup>2</sup> E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Verso, London 1990, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> G. Bennington, *Legislations. The Politics of Deconstruction*, Verso, London 1994, p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> J. Derrida, 'Living on: border lines', p. 257 in P. Kamuf (ed.), *A Derrida Reader. Between the Blinds*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London 1991. It is important to note that Derrida here explicitly denounces the 'nonreading' which claims that the text is to be dissolved into an extratextual realm. Rather, he argues that he sought to 'work out the theoretical and practical systems of these margins'.

<sup>5</sup> It should thus be clear from the start that even where the sheer physicality of borders force themselves onto us, their significance is essentially a *symbolic* one. In this respect I would argue, following Balibar, that every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary, and that the distinction between real and imaginary communities is therefore a fallacious one. See, E. Balibar, 'The nation form: history and ideology', p. 93, in E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*, Verso, London 1991.

gular problem. Rather, it signifies a complex nexus of irreducible issues which, nevertheless, are difficult to separate from one another. Indeed, what is at stake in the multiple ways of approaching the question of frontiers, is precisely the problem of separation, distinction, and differentiation (rather than separateness, distinctness and difference) which simultaneously raises questions concerning belonging, holding-together, and solidarity.<sup>6</sup>

This paper addresses the complex relation between the more general conceptual, and specifically political questions concerning limits and frontiers,<sup>7</sup> and it does so in the context of contemporary post-structuralist debates on the nature of political identity and ideology.<sup>8</sup> Even a brief survey of literature in this field reveals a strong preoccupation with questions concerning the theorisation of political identity in terms of the permeability of boundaries between and around identities, and the relation of identities to the construction and contestation of larger social imaginaries.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to concentrate on Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation of the idea of political frontiers.<sup>10</sup> This rather specific focus

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<sup>6</sup> The question of frontiers politically is thus intimately bound up with the establishment of distinctions, for example, between insiders and the outsiders, citizens and non-citizens, citizens and refugees. For a discussion of the significance of the refugee in our contemporary world, see M. Dillon, 'The scandal of the refugee: the production of the abjection the international politics of sovereign subjectivity, and the advent of another justice'. Paper presented to the conference: Sovereignty and Subjectivity, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, September 1995. For a discussion of the question of boundaries in political theory, see S. Wolin, 'Fugitive democracy', pp. 31-45, in S. Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996.

<sup>7</sup> This very distinction is not one which is unproblematic. With regard to a 'purely' conceptual clarification, one has to ask with Wittgenstein whether 'the engine is idling'? L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, remark 88, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1968.

<sup>8</sup> The term 'ideology' is used here, not as an indicator of false consciousness or as a merely superstructural phenomenon, but as a necessary and inescapable element of any social formation. As Lefort argues, any society in order to be itself, has to forge a representation of itself, and I take ideology to be a result of discursive attempts to forge such an imaginary. See, C. Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Two recent collections in which these issues are raised are, I. Grewal and C. Kaplan (eds.), *Scattered Hegemonies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1994; and L. Nicholson and S. Seidman (eds.), *Social Postmodernism. Beyond Identity Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995.

<sup>10</sup> The idea of political frontiers was first elaborated in E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London 1985. Later works contain reformulations of important aspects of the theory of hegemony, but do not return to the question of political frontiers. See, E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, Verso, London 1990; and C. Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, Verso, London 1993; and E. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, Verso, London 1996.

enables me to raise some of the more general, as well as more specific problems alluded to above, for the theorisation offered by Laclau and Mouffe is one of a few systematic attempts to engage with the implications of deconstruction and post-structuralism for the analysis of political identity and ideology.

### *I. The Genealogy of a Problem*

The question of limits and of frontiers in Laclau and Mouffe's work arises as a result of the movement from a Marxist to a post-Marxist framework of analysis. Once the unity of society is no longer viewed as a result of the workings of the necessary laws of history, and political and social identities are no longer conceived on the basis of their insertion into relations of production, the question of the manner in which identities are forged and the unity of the social is produced, has to be addressed anew. It is on this terrain that the problematic of limits and frontiers first arises.

In this respect, Laclau and Mouffe's work on hegemony, subjectivity and radical democracy forms part of a larger panorama of post-Marxist writings – including, for example, the work of Etienne Balibar, Jacques Ranciere, Claude Lefort, and Stuart Hall – all of which operate with a working assumption of the non-closure of the social and the constitutive character of difference.<sup>11</sup> That is, their starting-point is a negation of determinism and of any *a priori*, underlying logic as providing a necessary unificatory principle to social and political identities and discursive formations. Laclau puts it in the following manner:

The impossibility of the object 'society' is founded in the de-centred character of the social, in the ultimately arbitrary character of social relations. But social – or discursive – practice can only exist as an effort to constitute that impossible object, to limit the arbitrary, to constitute a centre. And this centre ... [is] always precarious, always threatened ...<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, Lefort argues that

... a society can relate to itself, can exist as a human society, only on the condition that it forges a representation of its unity ...<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> That is not to say that there are not considerable differences between these writers. There are, and they should not be neglected. They do, nevertheless, form a recognisable 'school' of thought.

<sup>12</sup> E. Laclau, 'Transformation of Advanced Industrial Societies and the Theory of the Subject', *Argument-Sonderband*, AS 84, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Lefort, *Political Forms of Modern Society*, p. 191.

At stake here is clearly the question of *how*, in the absence of either natural and given forms of identity, or laws of history regulating society, we are to make sense of and account for different forms of unification.<sup>14</sup> In Laclau and Mouffe's writings, the category of frontiers is introduced to address this question. Their argument, in brief, is the following: if any identity and, by extension, society is no longer a given and immutable datum, if its character cannot be determined in a naturalistic fashion, then it can also no longer be individuated on the grounds of positively attributed characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, some other way of delimitation or individuation has to be found. Laclau and Mouffe locate this mechanism of delimitation in the drawing of frontiers: it is through the consolidation or dissolution of political frontiers, they argue, that discursive formations in general, and social and political identities specifically, are constructed or fragmented.<sup>16</sup> They argue:

... limits only exist insofar as a systematic ensemble of differences can be cut out as *totality* with regard to something *beyond* them, and it is only through this cutting out that the totality constitutes itself as formation. ... it is clear that that beyond cannot consist in something positive – in a new difference – then the only possibility is that it will consist in something negative. But we already know that the logic of equivalence ... introduces negativity into the field of the social. This implies that a formation manages to *signify itself* (that is, ... constitute itself as such) only by transforming the limits into frontiers, by constituting a chain of equivalences which constructs what is beyond the limits as that which it *is not*. It is only through negativity, division and antagonism that a formation can constitute itself as a totalizing horizon. The logic of equivalence ... is ... the most abstract and general condition of existence of every formation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The whole of Laclau and Mouffe's work may arguably be said to be an engagement with that question, in all its multifarious dimensions.

<sup>15</sup> Laclau and Mouffe argue in *Hegemony*, and Laclau in *New Reflections* that to affirm the essence of something consists in affirming its *positive* identity. See Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 160.

<sup>17</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 144. The logic of equivalence is internally related to the presence of antagonistic relations. Laclau and Mouffe argue that 'certain discursive forms, through equivalence, annul all positivity of the object and give a real existence to negativity as such. This impossibility of the real – negativity – has attained a form of presence ... negativity – that is, ... antagonism ...' *Hegemony*, p. 129. Laclau, in his later writings, introduces the concept of 'dislocation' which significantly alters the theoretical status of the concept of 'antagonism'. In *New Reflections*, antagonism becomes one possible response to a dislocation, which has to be articulated politically; the conception of political frontiers are not, however, simultaneously reworked.

Having established the *general* conditions which may delimit an identity or discursive formation, it is now necessary to turn to the political articulation of these insights. In this respect it is necessary to trace out both the Marxist and non-Marxist intellectual resources upon which they draw in the course of the elaboration of their argument.

The most important Marxist influences on the emergence of the problem of frontiers and its theorisation, is to be found in the writings of Gramsci and Sorel. Laclau and Mouffe's work on hegemony and their anti-essentialist critique of political identity draws heavily on the legacy of Gramsci. Indeed, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they situate their work explicitly in relation to the Gramscian moment, as an attempt to recover some of the basic concepts of Gramscian analysis, even while these concepts are radicalised in a direction leading 'beyond' Gramsci.<sup>18</sup>

It is in Gramsci's theorisation of political subjectivity as collective will that Laclau and Mouffe locate both the last traces of a Marxist determinism and the first glimmerings of a non-deterministic conception of political identity which will shape their post-Marxist theorisation. Gramsci develops the idea of a collective will by drawing on insights from both Sorel and Lenin.<sup>19</sup> From Sorel, Gramsci takes the emphasis on political agency as animated through myth. Myth works as 'a concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organise its collective will'.<sup>20</sup> A collective will is thus forged through the welding together of a set of elements with no necessary belonging. The influence of Lenin in this respect is also clear: from him Gramsci takes the emphasis on agency as broader than particular classes.<sup>21</sup> A combination of both of these elements crystallises in the idea of a collective will. Such a will is:

... the precipitate of a plurality of demands, political initiatives, traditions and cultural institutions, whose always precarious unity is the

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<sup>18</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 136.

<sup>19</sup> It is here that the influence of Sorel on Gramsci is perhaps at its clearest.

<sup>20</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 126. A myth thus has to be distinguished from a utopia, which is an intellectual construction that can be analysed and discussed, and that can be refuted. Sorel argues that a utopia leads people to reforms, while 'our present myth leads people to prepare themselves for a battle to destroy what exists.' Myths, therefore, in Sorel's words, are not descriptions of things, but are expressions of will and groups of images that 'can evoke as a totality ... the mass of sentiments that correspond to the various manifestations of the war waged by socialism against modern society'. Quoted in Z. Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> For Lenin, of course, this had meant class-alliances which did not affect the identity of the classes so aligned.

result of the fusion of these heterogeneous elements into global images constituting a 'popular religion'.<sup>22</sup>

The Gramscian theorisation of political subjects as 'collective wills' contains both a non-essentialist, non-deterministic dimension, and a last deterministic core. As is clear from the characterisation offered by Laclau, collective wills are strictly speaking not classes but arise from a politico-ideological articulation of dispersed and fragmented historical forces. Gramsci's intervention, in this respect, can be read as a discourse on the genesis and formation of the historical subject, whose nature is not immutable and fixed, but arises in a 'becoming' which is ineradicably rooted in the historical process.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, however, Gramsci's affirmation of the final class determination of a hegemonic formation, reaffirms an inner essentialist core which sets a limit to the logic of hegemony.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, if one is to take the logic of hegemonic constitution seriously, then the identity of subjects must be thought of as resulting from a multiplicity of practices of contingent articulation and disarticulation, rather than having the status of a priori ontological givens; the last traces of essentialism have to be eradicated from the theorisation of political identity.

Following from this, it becomes imperative to theorise the process of articulation through which identity is contingently brought into being. This, Laclau and Mouffe argue, should take place *not* on the grounds of positivities, but in terms of negativity or antagonism. That is, individuation has to be theorised not on the basis of one or another positively identifiable characteristic, for that would immediately lead us back into essentialist forms of argumentation, but in terms of *that to which an identity is opposed*. On this reading, the unity of identity is produced only in so far as it is opposed to that which it is not, and such relations, are *always antagonistic*.

... in the case of antagonism, ... the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself. ... It is because a peasant *cannot* be a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land.) Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent its being fixed as full positivity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> E. Laclau, 'Gramsci', unpublished paper.

<sup>23</sup> B. Fontana, *Hegemony and Power*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, pp. 67-9.

<sup>25</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 125.

It is crucial to proceed carefully here, for it is at this point that an important ethico-theoretical decision can be located in the argument.<sup>26</sup> The manner in which their critique of essentialist forms of argumentation is developed lead Laclau and Mouffe to a position which privileges the dimension of negativity in the individuation of identity.<sup>27</sup> In this process, the critique of essentialist forms of theorising identity is conflated with the *further* proposition that the *only* manner in which identity can be thought in a non-essentialist fashion is through negativity. I will pursue this argument and the consequences of this shift in more detail throughout this article. At this point it is simply necessary to highlight the fact that the way in which their critique of essentialism is articulated closes off other possibilities of thinking about identity which does not, at the outset, privilege the moment of frontiers and antagonisms.<sup>28</sup> As I will argue, what is presented as purely formal and abstract conditions for the individuation of identity, in fact, already contains a set of rather thicker assumptions concerning the role of conflict in the process of identity formation.<sup>29</sup>

The complaint against Gramsci is thus more complicated than what is overtly indicated by their reading. Given Laclau and Mouffe's emphasis on the role of antagonism and negativity in the constitution of identity, it seems that the problem with Gramsci is *not only* that he retains a final class

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<sup>26</sup> Derrida developed the notion of an ethico-theoretical decision in his work. See, for example, J. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973. For Derrida, an ethico-theoretical decision both is and is not a decision. It is a decision insofar as other possibilities were present; it lacks the characteristics of a decision insofar as the very path chosen is determined by the tradition of Western metaphysics.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that the denial of the importance of difference is one which relates specifically to the *individuation* of identity. It is not that Laclau and Mouffe do not give attention to the logic of difference, but that the focus on limits forces them to overemphasise the equivalential dimension.

<sup>28</sup> I have in mind here, as an alternative, a Wittgenstinian position on family resemblances. This position allows one to take into account the positive dimensions of identity without reducing it to an essentialist sameness. A Wittgenstinian position could thus be developed to counter the excessive emphasis in Laclau and Mouffe's work on the formation of frontiers.

<sup>29</sup> In *Hegemony* and elsewhere, Laclau and Mouffe argue that what they present are characteristic of all processes of individuation of identity in general. In a recent interview Laclau argues, for instance, that he has tried to show in different works that 'political boundaries are neither the result of a contingent imperfection of society, nor even of an empirical impossibility of overcoming the latter, but, instead, of the impossibility of constituting any social identity except through acts of exclusion.' D. Howarth and A. J. Norval, 'Negotiation the paradoxes of contemporary politics. An interview with Ernesto Laclau', *Angelaki*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1994, p. 46.

core, *but also* that he does not break with thinking about identity in positive terms. Not only does he retain a final class core in his analysis, he also holds onto a conception of collective wills which on Laclau and Mouffe's account is ultimately incoherent. Its incoherence results from the fact that while it provides us with a conception of identity as an articulated ensemble of elements, it does not provide us with the tools with which to think the *unity* of that ensemble.

It is here that the crucial Sorrelian/Schmittian moment enters the theorisation of subjectivity. The seminal insight from Sorel which, I would argue, informs the emphasis on limits and frontiers in Laclau and Mouffe's work, is that identity is created and sustained only in *oppositional*, that is, *antagonistic* relations. For example, in his *Reflections on Violence* Sorel argues that the general strike gives reality to the 'dichotomous thesis' of a society 'split into two fundamentally antagonistic groups.'<sup>30</sup> Owing to the strike, society is 'clearly divided into two camps, and only two, upon a battlefield.'<sup>31</sup> What is important here is not the actual victory of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, but the very fact of the open confrontation between the two groups: without confrontation there is no identity.<sup>32</sup>

It is this centrality of confrontation to the constitution of identity that the idea of political frontiers most crucially captures. This is equally evident in Mouffe's other writings, in which it is Schmitt, rather than Sorel who acts as source of inspiration in order to capture the essence of the political moment, as the moment of confrontation between 'friend' and 'enemy'. Drawing on Schmitt, Mouffe argues that:

... every definition of a "we" implies the delimitation of a "frontier" and the designation of a "them."<sup>33</sup>

and that:

A radical democratic politics agrees with Schmitt that the friend/enemy distinction is central to politics. No struggle is possible against relations of subordination without the establishment of a frontier ...<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> From this it is also evident that Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation of the formation of political frontiers in so-called Third World societies, as frontiers which divide society into two dichotomous camps, takes much from Sorel's analysis.

<sup>31</sup> Sorel, in Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> E. Laclau, 'George Sorel, Objectivity and the Logic of Violence', pp. 3-4, unpublished manuscript. This Sorellian emphasis, I would argue, also influences Laclau and Mouffe's reading of the constitution of 'popular struggles', which I criticise for its naturalism below.

<sup>33</sup> C. Mouffe, 'Feminism, citizenship and radical democratic politics', in J. Butler and Joan W. Scott, *Feminists Theorise the Political*, Routledge, 1992, p. 379.

<sup>34</sup> C. Mouffe, 'Radical democracy or liberal democracy?', *Socialist Review*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1990, p. 64.



What is abundantly clear is that the category of political frontiers, far from being a purely 'formal' mechanism which may account for the constitution of identity, is intimately related to a set of assumptions concerning the role of conflict in identity formation and struggle.<sup>35</sup>

Two related questions arise from this characterisation of identity in terms of political frontiers, the implications of which I will explore in the final section of this article. The first concerns the form of Laclau and Mouffe's critique of essentialism, and the possible alternative ways in which such a critique may be developed; the second concerns the consequences of an alternative critique, and the different directions in which it may lead. In developing these points, it has to be emphasised that the aim is not simply to look for alternatives, but to explore the consequences of an alternative which simultaneously addresses the problem of the conflation of the formal and political conditions in the theorisation of identity.

The emphasis on the dimension of negativity is evident also in Laclau and Mouffe's account of the ordering of political space and their analysis of the logic of operation of political forces. In order to further clarify the development of the idea of frontiers and its relation to the ordering of political space, it is necessary to look at the non-Marxist sources on which they drew. In this respect, the relational account of linguistic identity developed by Ferdinand de Saussure is of particular significance.<sup>36</sup> Laclau and Mouffe transposes Saussure's account of syntagmatic and paradigmatic/associative relations to the political terrain, arguing that identity is constituted, and socio-political space ordered through the operation of both systems of difference (syntagmatic relations) and systems of equivalence (paradigmatic relations).<sup>37</sup> From this basic starting-point concerning the dual axes constitu-

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<sup>35</sup> It is crucial to question the proclivity towards naturalism in Schmitt, as is particularly evident in his tendency to talk of opposing groups in *concrete* terms, as well as the tendency towards a valuation of homogeneity over difference. Connolly, in a recent review of Mouffe's work on the political, argues that Schmitt's text 'is governed by a covert aesthetic of homogeneity - an identification of the beautiful with unity and strength and the ugly with diversity and weakness - that exacerbates the political logic of exclusion.' W. E. Connolly, 'Review Essay: Twilight of the Idols', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 3, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* was, of course, seminal in the theoretical elaboration of the movement from structuralism to post-structuralism.

<sup>37</sup> Saussure summarises the distinction in the following manner: 'From the associative and syntagmatic viewpoint a linguistic unit is like a fixed part of a building, e.g., a column. On the one hand, the column has a certain relation to the architrave that it supports' the arrangement of the two units in space suggests a syntagmatic relation. On the other hand, if the column is Doric, it suggests a mental comparison of this style with others (Ionic, Corinthian, etc.) although none of these elements is present

tive of identity, Laclau and Mouffe develop their account of the division of social space.

In a move which parallels their critique of attempts to theorise identity in positive terms, they argue that the logic of difference never manages to constitute a fully sutured space since systems of difference only partially define relational identities. In order to present itself as objective and differential, that is, in order to individuate itself, certain elements have to be expelled. The objectivity of identity thus requires the expulsion of a 'surplus of meaning', made possible through the construction of sets of equivalences which define that which is radically 'other'. The production of frontier effects for Laclau and Mouffe thus come into existence through the operation of systems of equivalence which construct the beyond as that which it is not. Identity is thus not individuated through a set of positive elements, but through the creation of *political frontiers* which divide political space into equivalential constructions and externalisations.

On this account, any enumeration of positive characteristics will be insufficient to individuate identity since there is no principle which can bring to a halt the almost endless possibilities of elements which can be articulated together as merely different from each other. A principle of articulation is thus needed to stop the play of differences, delimiting identity from *what it is not*. That is, the drawing of a political frontier is necessary in order to individuate an identity.<sup>38</sup> The consequences of the ethico-theoretical decision which I located in the nature and character of Laclau and Mouffe's critique of essentialism is, thus, also evident in their utilisation and elaboration of Saussure's insights into the nature of individuation of (linguistic) identity. Saussure's theorisation at no point privileges the moment of the paradigmatic over the syntagmatic.<sup>39</sup> The huge emphasis on the former in Laclau and Mouffe's rendering of Saussure follows the same structure of argumentation as the one elaborated above with respect to Gramsci: difference is subordinated to equivalence as a precondition for the individuation of identity.<sup>40</sup>

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in space: the relation is associative.' F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Collins, 1974, pp. 123-4. It is important to note, however, that in the linguistic argument on the relation between paradigms and syntagms, there is no a priori privileging of the paradigmatic moment.

<sup>38</sup> The construction of an equivalence between the different groupings is possible only on condition that the focus shifts from the concrete identity of each group, to that by which they are commonly threatened.

<sup>39</sup> In fact, it could be argued that for Saussure the syntagmatic is privileged over the paradigmatic since he states that, from the point of view of the organisation of language, syntagmatic solidarities are the most striking. Saussure, *Course*, p. 127.

<sup>40</sup> In this sense, more recent publications by Laclau, can be argued to be a reiteration of an argument already implicit in *Hegemony*.

Having established the conceptual roots and basic dimensions of the logics involved in the drawing of political frontiers, it is now necessary to look in more detail at several further specifications of this category. The category of political frontiers in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is intimately bound up with a number of other issues. I will concentrate here on how it informs Laclau and Mouffe's account of variations in the character of frontier formation in the cases of advanced industrial societies and so-called Third World contexts respectively.

## II. The Ordering of Political Space

Political frontiers serve not only to individuate identity, but also to organise political space through the simultaneous operation of the logics of equivalence and difference. The simultaneous operation of these logics in the construction of political frontiers may be elucidated with reference to the Gramscian idea of transformism. Transformism, for Gramsci, is a process that involves a gradual but continuous absorption of 'the active elements produced by allied groups - and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile.'<sup>41</sup> A transformist project, expressed in terms of the operation of the logics of equivalence and difference, will consist of efforts to expand the systems of difference defining a dominant bloc, and if such a project is successful, will result in a lessening of the antagonistic potential of the remaining excluded elements. A failure of transformism, on the other hand, may lead to the expansion of the logic of equivalence, the construction of clear-cut political frontiers and a proliferation and deepening, rather than a limitation, of antagonistic relations.

Laclau and Mouffe argue that an expansion of the logic of difference tends to 'complexify' social space, while the opposite situation, where the logics of equivalence is expanded, will tend to a 'simplification' of such space.<sup>42</sup> Given this, they elaborate a series of political logics which demand

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<sup>41</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>42</sup> It has to be pointed out here that the logics of equivalence and difference stand to one another in a relation of reciprocal delimitation. Consequently, neither the conditions of total equivalence, nor that of total difference ever fully obtain. Following Derrida, I would add that they are always found in *hierarchical* combination, where one takes precedence over another in the ordering of political space. On this reading, the moment of frontiers would not be privileged *a priori* as it is in the work of Laclau and Mouffe. Rather, which dimension takes precedence would depend entirely on the political context under discussion.

further attention. These concern the distinction between popular and democratic struggles in relation to First and Third world contexts; the question of the complexity of frontiers; the friend/enemy distinction and the centrality of antagonistic opposition to Laclau and Mouffe's account of identity formation.

Let us quote the relevant passage where the first set of distinctions are articulated, since much depends on the exact formulation. Laclau and Mouffe maintain that:

... an important differential characteristic may be established between advanced industrial societies and the periphery of the capitalist world: in the former, the proliferation of points of antagonism permits the multiplication of democratic struggles, but these struggles, given their diversity, do not tend to constitute a 'people', that is, to enter into equivalence with one another and to divide the political space into two antagonistic fields... We shall use the term *popular subject position* to refer to the position that is constituted on the basis of dividing the political space into two antagonistic camps: and *democratic subject position* to refer to the locus of a clearly delimited antagonism which does not divide society in that way.<sup>43</sup>

On this reading, political space will be divided into two antagonistic camps in Third world contexts where centralised forms of oppression endow popular struggles with clearly defined enemies. This is in contrast to political struggles in advanced industrial societies where a proliferation of antagonisms makes the construction of unified chains of equivalence and the division of political space into clearly defined areas, very difficult.

It is important to be precise about the claims advanced here. Firstly, starting from the distinction between types of struggle, closely associated with the Gramscian and Sorellian moments identified earlier, Laclau and Mouffe posit a coincidence between types of struggle and of society. Thus, they argue that political struggle in Third world contexts would tend to take the form of a war of movement, while in advanced industrial societies it more closely resembles war of position. In the latter case, it is difficult to foster unified chains of equivalence, while that is typical of division of political space in Third world societies. This claim is based upon the idea that in Third world contexts centralised forms of oppression tend to endow popular struggle with clearly defined enemies:

... in countries of the Third World, imperialist exploitation and the predominance of brutal and centralised forms of domination tend *from the beginning to endow the popular struggle with a centre, with a single and*

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<sup>43</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 131.

*clearly defined enemy ... Here the division of the political space into two fields is present from the outset...*<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, this picture is further overlaid with the claim that the division of political space in Third world contexts is less complex than that in advanced industrial societies. The reason for this is, once again, closely bound up with their *naturalised* characterisation of Third world struggles. As Laclau and Mouffe argue:

... in the countries of advanced capitalism since the middle of the nineteenth century, the multiplication and 'uneven development' of democratic positions have increasingly diluted their simple and automatic unity around a popular pole. ... The conditions of political struggle in mature capitalism are increasingly distant from the nineteenth-century model of a clear-cut 'politics of frontiers' ... The production of 'frontier effects' ... ceases thus to be grounded upon an *evident and given separation*, in a referential framework acquired once and for all.<sup>45</sup>

Each of the claims advanced also marks the site of a problem. I will concentrate on the following: firstly, that there are two types of society which correspond to different kinds of political struggle; secondly, that these struggles can be characterised as 'popular' and 'democratic'; thirdly, that there are marked differences in the degrees of 'complexity' displayed by different kinds of political struggle. Let us take each one in turn.

It could plausibly be argued that the distinction between the First and Third world is an unthought leftover from debates on the relation between capitalist centre and periphery and, as within that problematic, the operation of the distinction in Laclau and Mouffe's work leaves open the possibility of a developmental logic from one to the other. This problem cannot be skimmed over, for the consequences of this simplistic distinction for theorising political struggles are far-reaching. In fact, what is called for here is a rethinking of the nature of the Third/First world distinction itself. Several considerations have to play a role in its recasting. It is, firstly, important not simply to do away with the distinction, since it captures something of the unevenness of relations and asymmetrical distribution of power and wealth which no post-Marxist analysis of political struggle can afford to ignore. It is, secondly, important to consider the extent to which a binary opposition succeeds in capturing the complexity of forms of social division at stake in our contemporary world.

Against the backdrop of these considerations, most recent attempts to rethink the First-Third world relation fail to provide a viable alternative.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4. Emphasis in the original.

The global-local distinction, for instance, has the advantage of not being elaborated upon pre-given geographical regions, and is capable of addressing the issue of unequal distribution within as well as between national and regional entities. However, like other binarisms (First-Third world, centre-periphery), it tends to overlook the complex, multiple constituted identities that cannot be accounted for by binary oppositions.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, as Stuart Hall notes, in focusing on the local one runs the risk of romanticising it as a site of pure difference, opposed to a globalising homogenisation.<sup>47</sup>

The substitution of the term 'postcolonial' for 'Third world' is also not without its problems. Apart from the sometimes overly literary appropriation of the term, which tend to empty out its political and critical import, it has become so general that it is difficult to see how it may be deployed to overcome the problems outlined above. Nevertheless, a recent attempt by Grewal and Kaplan to resituate the term points in a direction which may be of use. They argue that to keep the idea of the 'postcolonial' subversive one would have to resist the centre/margin dichotomy that situates the 'postcolonial' as geographically and culturally 'other'; one would have to refuse the construction of 'exotic authors and subjects'.<sup>48</sup> In other words, both the geographic and cultural specificities of the term would have to be emptied out, so as to keep in view the complex interweaving of identity and locality which no longer are subsumable under easy binary divisions.

The thrust of this argument coincides with the suggestion by Howarth that we need to shift our attention away from concerns with space as bounded, and as linked to territoriality, since such conceptions valorise tradition and particularism. Instead, attention should be given to the elaboration of a non-hypostatised space which 'can actively accommodate and foster differences and plurality within it.'<sup>49</sup> In order to do so, we need to:

blur and weaken the drawing of clear boundaries and spaces so as to facilitate multiplicity and openness to otherness. Similarly, we need to

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<sup>46</sup> For an insightful discussion of these issues, see I. Grewal and C. Kaplan, 'Introduction: Transnational feminist practices and questions of postmodernity', pp. 1-33, in Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The local and the global. Globalisation and ethnicity', in A. D. King, *Culture, Globalization and the World System*, 1991. Hall argues that a return to the local as a response to globalization will only be productive for social change if it does not become rooted in exclusivist and defensive enclaves. For an in-depth discussion of the 'politics of location', see, C. Kaplan, 'The politics of location as transnational feminist practice', pp. 137-52, in Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*.

<sup>48</sup> Grewal and Kaplan, 'Introduction', p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> D. Howarth, 'Reflections on the politics of space and time', in *Angelaki*, vol. 1., no. 1, pp. 53-4.

deconstruct our notion of identity so as to facilitate the permeability and overdetermination of identity construction.<sup>50</sup>

Even if these suggestions are followed through - if contextual difference is no longer thought in territorially bounded terms, and if it is, consequently, recognised that the unevennesses and asymmetries associated with the original distinction can no longer be assumed to coincide with geographically discrete spaces - it still seems necessary to retain distinctions between different frontier formations in different contexts.

Before this can be explored more fully, it is necessary to deal with the manner in which Laclau and Mouffe theorise the distinction between kinds of political struggle and the carving up of political space. They argue that, coinciding with the Third world/advanced industrial society distinction, there is a distinction in the manner in which frontiers are formed. This leads them to establish the distinction between *popular* and *democratic* subject positions. Popular subject positions correspond to cases where the social is divided paratactically into two antagonistic camps, and democratic subject positions to cases where society is not divided in that way.<sup>51</sup>

This characterisation, however, gives rise to a possible confusion. In naming these frontiers 'democratic' and 'popular', an illegitimate *content* is attributed to a *form* of social division. That is, what can only be *constituted in the process of struggle* and what has to be result of a *political articulation*, is treated as something which can be read off from the form of social division. The problem that arises here is the following: what is termed 'popular struggles', may have a democratic content, while what is called 'democratic struggles' are not always articulated within democratic horizons. For example, many 'popular struggles' have been fought in the name of democracy; one only needs to think here of the various anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century. Many 'democratic' struggles, on the other hand, bear no relation to democracy at all.

A clearer separation between the form of division of social space, and the substantive content in terms of which that division is discursively constituted, thus needs to be maintained. In this respect it may be useful to reserve the term 'paratactical frontier' for situations in which relatively clear-cut frontiers are articulated in a process of struggle; and

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<sup>50</sup> Howarth, 'Reflections on the politics of space and time', p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 131.

the term 'fragmented frontiers' may be introduced to characterise contexts where that is not the case.<sup>52</sup> That would allow one to retain the sense of difference in the manner in which frontiers are constructed politically, while avoiding ascribing a (political) content to the form in which social division is articulated.

But, if the distinction between different ways of dividing social space cannot be made in terms of the content of struggles, then how is it possible to maintain the distinction, which intuitively seems a relevant and useful one? One way in which the thought informing the distinction may be maintained, I would argue, is by emphasising the *context* in which struggles occur, rather than their content. In the case of a conjunctural crisis, for example, where structural dislocation is limited, an articulation of frontiers which divides the social paratactically, is unlikely to occur. Rather, one would expect to see an articulation of struggles around very precise issues, which may prevent struggles their being 'linked up' with one another. On the other hand, should there be a large degree of dislocation, such as that found in conditions of organic crisis, the domain of elements available for rearticulation is vastly expanded, and the likelihood of the formation of frontiers around a wide set of equivalences, is enhanced. If the problem is addressed in these terms, it is no longer a question of making a distinction between 'types of society'. Rather, Laclau and Mouffe's crucial insight into the different processes of frontier formation is retained, but is now related to the degree of sedimentation of social forms. In addition, the distinction between frontiers - one I have argued should be designate by the terms *paratactical* and *fragmented* frontiers - is no longer conceived of as a distinction in kind, but as one of degree.

If political frontiers, whether they are paratactical or fragmented, always result from processes of political articulating and struggle and if different ways of dividing social space cannot be distinguished from one another on the basis of a given geographical division, they also cannot be distinguished with reference to the presumed degree of 'complexity' of their modes of constitution. Laclau and Mouffe argue that in contrast to the case of 'popular struggles', political struggles in mature capitalist societies tend to exhibit a far greater complexity, which increasingly moves away from the 'nineteenth century' model of a clear-cut politics of frontiers. Here two related problems are present. First, the crucial insight into the fragmented

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<sup>52</sup> I am emphasising the element of political articulation and struggle here, since in Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation, they argue repeatedly that in Third world contexts there is a 'given and evident' form of separation which precedes political articulation.



nature of (modern) identity is 'reserved' for advanced industrial societies. Consequently, the construction of paratactical frontiers is regarded as a somehow less complex operation than in the case of fragmented frontiers. This misconstrual of the complex construction of paratactical frontiers occurs because the model for paratactical frontiers/popular struggles is that of the 'nineteenth century' where, on Laclau and Mouffe's reading, lines of division are 'evident and given'. The assumption that the nineteenth century model of clear-cut frontiers corresponded to some 'evident and given form of division', and that this is transposable to the thought of contemporary paratactical divisions, is simply untenable. In politics, no naturalism exists, not for the 'Third world' and also not for the nineteenth century. While it may be the case that the non-naturalness of identity has become increasingly visible over time, it does not mean that earlier lines of division were based upon natural and given forms of identity as Laclau and Mouffe seem to assume.<sup>53</sup> Once this is clarified, it is possible to show that the construction of paratactical frontiers which tend to divide the social into two camps, is every bit as 'complex' as the articulation of more fragmented frontiers.<sup>54</sup> That is, the experience of a fragmentation and multiplication of forms of identification, cannot be limited to advanced capitalist societies. The production of political frontiers – regardless of whether they are fragmented or paratactical – always proceed as a result of a complex articulation of division between the logics of inclusion and difference on the one hand, and that of exclusion and negativity on the other.

It is precisely the complexity of this process of identity formation which is sacrificed in the over-emphasis on the moment of antagonism in the theorisation offered by Laclau and Mouffe. This is particularly evident in the utilisation of the 'friend/enemy' distinction as exemplary of the nature of identity construction. Laclau and Mouffe argue that the us/them, friend/enemy distinction is *necessary* to the process of individuation of identity. In addition to the foregoing, several issues are condensed into this claim, and it is my contention that they need to be treated separately if the proper political nature of frontiers is to be understood in its full complexity.

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<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note in this respect, that Laclau and Mouffe, in their discussion of the concept of war of position, criticise Gramsci for presupposing a division of political space into two camps. Yet, they go on to impute a similar phenomenon to the 'Third World'. See, Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 139.

<sup>54</sup> I have analysed the complexity of the processes involved in constructing paratactical frontiers in apartheid discourse, in *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, Verso, London 1996.

III. *General and Political Logics: From Limits to Frontiers*

Instead of a single claim that the individuation of identity necessarily requires the construction of a friend/enemy distinction or an antagonistic relation, there are in fact several different argumentative strains present in Laclau and Mouffe's basic thesis. They concern, firstly, the individuation of identity; secondly, the relation of that process to antagonism and frontiers; and, thirdly, the theorisation of frontiers themselves, specifically in relation to the question of complexity and the problem of homogeneity. As I have argued in Part 2, the problem of the individuation of identity, for Laclau and Mouffe, arises from their critique of essentialism which is developed in such a way as to simultaneously privilege the moment of negativity, antagonism and frontiers. This is in sharp contrast to the intellectual 'sources' upon which they draw: in both Gramsci and Saussure, I have argued, there is no privileging of the oppositional moment or of paradigmatic relations. For that, one has to turn to Sorel and Schmitt, where the oppositional moment becomes dominant and defining. Now, it is possible, and this is the central thesis of the paper, that identity may be individuated without making essentialist claims *and also* without an overemphasis on the idea of exclusion, opposition, antagonism, and so forth. That is to say, a critique of essentialism may be developed which does *not* conflate the *general* logic of individuation of identity, and the *specific* logic of political frontiers. For such a critique, one could draw on both Derrida and the later Wittgenstein. In the case of the latter, it is quite clear that the idea of 'family resemblances' offers an account of identity formation which fulfils both the stipulated demands. As Wittgenstein argues with respect to the concept 'game', there is no need for us to be able to give a *Merkmal* definition of 'game' to be able to use it. The demand for determinacy of sense is but one demand amongst others. This critique of the demand for determinacy of sense, however, does not rely on the moment of exclusion to think the individuation of identity. This is achieved, for Wittgenstein, by the idea of a series of overlapping resemblances, none of which are essential to the concept, and which makes it into a concept of 'game', and not, for example, 'work'. It is useful to discuss in more detail an example of the deployment of Wittgenstein's work in feminist theory which articulates a non-essentialist conception of 'woman'. Linda Nicholson outlines it in the following manner:

I want to suggest that we think of the meaning of 'woman' in the same way that Wittgenstein suggested we think about the meaning of 'game,' as a word whose meaning is not found through the elucidation of some specific characteristic but is found through the elucidation of some

network of characteristics. ... To give up on the idea that 'woman' has one clearly specifiable meaning does not entail that it has no meaning. Rather, this way of thinking about meaning works upon the assumption that such patterns are found in history and must be documented as such.<sup>55</sup>

It is the absence of such a non-essentialist specifiable meaning or 'minimal remainder' which forces Laclau and Mouffe, contra Wittgenstein, to conflate the moment of individuation of identity and articulation of political frontiers. To repeat, for Wittgenstein it is perfectly possible to think a non-essentialist conception of identity without arguing that identity can only be individuated with reference to what it excludes. A similar argument can be developed from a Derridean perspective. Derrida's discussion of the role of iterability in the constitution of identity, proceeds along similar lines to the argument sketched out above. In the case of iteration, the repeatability of a word is assured by the fact that any repetition involves a repetition of the same. Yet this repetition cannot in any simple manner be regarded as repetition of the same as essentially the same, since every repetition always already involves alteration. Thus, an essentialist form of individuation is avoided, while the minimal remainder forecloses the need to have recourse to pure exclusion as the necessary foundation of any process of individuation.<sup>56</sup>

Once this is accepted, it is possible to retheorise the relation between the process of individuation of identity and the articulation of political frontiers. As I have argued, the process of individuation of identity has to be separated from that of the articulation of frontiers, or the moment of antagonism. That is, while differentiation is a moment in the individuation of identity, the general logic does not require that the critique of essentialism has to be conflated with the political logic of antagonism. Thus, contra Laclau and Mouffe, where the concept of political frontier does *both* the work of individuating identity, *and* indicating the point at which antagonistic relations are constituted, it is my contention that the general *logical* argument concerning the individuation of identity should not be conflated with the specific argument concerning the political logic of antagonism. This conflation

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<sup>55</sup> L. Nicholson, 'Interpreting gender', pp. 60-1, in Nicholson and Seidman, *Social Postmodernism*. Nicholson develops this approach in order to avoid a naturalistic reductionism and reference to a non-historical conception of 'the body' which has tended to ground many feminist arguments.

<sup>56</sup> It could be argued that the idea of the 'constitutive outside' as developed in Staten's reading of Derrida, could act as a counter to the argument presented above. I return to this at a later point in the argument. See, H. Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, University of Nebraska Press, London 1984, pp. 15-9.

tion creates serious theoretical and political problems which can only be resolved by separating the two arguments. This is important, not only for the attainment of conceptual clarity, but also for a clarification of the consequences for political analysis which may be argued to derive from the different accounts offered above. Following Wittgenstein and Derrida, I would argue that the general logic of individuation tells us *nothing* about where and how political antagonisms may arise. That means that the general (logical) argument concerning the necessity of distinguishing the self from an other in order to individuate identity,<sup>57</sup> has to be separated from the *further* question concerning the problem of when such 'oppositions' become exclusionary and antagonistic. It is only once these arguments are systematically distinguished, that we can address the difficult problems regarding *where* and *on what basis* frontiers are and ought to be, drawn. It is only so long as these two dimensions of the argument are kept separate, that we can refine our theorisation of the political logic of frontiers.

In Part 2 I began to outline in what way it is necessary to refine and deepen the important insights developed by Laclau and Mouffe in their work on political frontiers. There is, however, one issue which demands further explication, namely, the question of the 'complexity' of political frontiers. Here many of the issues discussed above come together. I have thus far advanced the argument that the process through which paratactical frontiers are constituted is no less complex than that of fragmented frontiers. However, a further issue needs to be addressed in this respect. It concerns the complexity of the self/other relation at the core of frontiers. The process of production of subjectivity is much more complex than the 'friend/enemy' distinction would lead one to believe.<sup>58</sup> In this respect it may be helpful to turn briefly to the deconstruction of binary relations, and to extend insights drawn from it to the theorisation of that complex relation. Derrida's work on binary hierarchies at the core of the metaphysics of presence - essence/accident, mind/body, speech/writing, and so forth - shows both that the identity of each of the terms is essentially reliant on that of its other, and that the frontier separating the two, is essentially impure. Now, what Derrida says about philosophical texts holds *mutatis mutandis* for all

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<sup>57</sup> The general argument is one that is widely accepted in the literature on identity. See, for example, K. A. Appiah, 'African Identities', p. 110, in Nicholson and Seidman, *Social Postmodernism*.

<sup>58</sup> While it has to be recognised that especially in Laclau's recent work there has been a shift towards a more psychoanalytic account of the constitution of the subject, it is not clear that that theorisation has any pertinence for the argument on political frontiers.

identity in general, since the non-closure he describes, is the non-closure of any discursive form. Deconstruction thus not only lays bare the essential violence contained in the conditions under which it becomes possible for dualisms to be established, but also brings into view - and this is what is important for the analysis at this point - the very *impurity* of dualistic thought. It is for this reason that the idea of a 'constitutive outside', as developed by Staten in his reading of Derrida and extended to political analysis by Laclau, should not be taken as a model for the theorisation of political identities.<sup>59</sup> The idea of a constitutive outside is misleading to the extent that it lends itself to be read simply as emphasising the distinction self/other, rather than leading to a deconstruction of that binary.<sup>60</sup> The crucial insight offered by deconstructive analysis is that it uncovers the essential subversion of the 'separate identities' upon which dualistic thought relies. As Derrida argues in *The Other Heading*:

I must nonetheless formulate in a somewhat dogmatic way ... a very dry necessity whose consequences could affect our entire problematic: *what is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say "me" or "we"; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself* [*avec soi*]. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference *with itself*.<sup>61</sup>

From this, it must be clear that the relation between 'the self' and 'the other' is infinitely more complex than the dichotomous friend/enemy distinction allows. As Derrida argues, the outside infects the inside, and *vice versa*, making any simplistic dualism and either/or thought suspect.<sup>62</sup> The

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<sup>59</sup> Even though I have utilised this idea in my own work, I am now of the opinion that the potential misreadings which it inspires, could be so damaging that the use of the concept for the purposes of political analysis should be abandoned.

<sup>60</sup> Judith Butler suggests one way in which the idea of the 'constitutive outside' could be rendered more sensitive to distinctly political issues. She argues that one ought to distinguish between 'the constitution of a political field that produces *and naturalises* that constitutive outside and a political field that produces and *renders contingent* the specific parameters of that constitutive outside.' Whilst going some way to avoid the problem I have specified, this formulation still leaves too close an association between the individuation of an identity and its political articulation in antagonistic and exclusionary forms. See, J. Butler, 'Contingent foundations', p. 20, in J. Butler and J. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorise the Political*, Routledge, New York 1992.

<sup>61</sup> J. Derrida, *The Other Heading*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis 1992, pp. 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> This does not, however, mean that identity is so open that it becomes contradictory to speak of identity at all. Quite the contrary. For Derrida the theme of identity and therefore of stability is always crucial to the treatment of identity, that is, if one understands by that stability not something in the order of absolute solidity, but

full implications of the deconstructive focus on the *subversion* of apparently natural dualisms, thus, have to be taken on board. This means that an adequate theorisation of political frontiers has to show both the *impurity* of all forms of relation identity, and has to make visible the *irreducible multiplicity* of the site in which those violent dualisms are produced. Foregrounding the friend/enemy distinction as the essence of all politics precludes sensitivity to the multiplicity and plurality of the 'between', the fact that there is an 'excess of being' - as Connolly argues - of difference over identity, and it directs attention away from the complexity of the processes in which political identities are forged.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, it could lead one to believe that all identity has to be thought in the form us/them. The consequences of this 'must' for political analysis, if not for practical politics, are potentially very damaging. In terms of political analysis, it tends to direct attention to the moment of exclusion, to the development of antagonisms, that is, to the relation to 'the other' *at the expense of an analysis of those dimensions of identity which cannot be captured in the us/them form*. It is here that the further consequences of following the alternative critique of essentialism outlined above, become apparent. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, it would be important to focus, not only on the moment of differentiation from 'the other' but on the 'minimal remainder' which makes this identity *this* identity and not an other. This insight allows one to acknowledge the importance and specificity of capturing the contextual feature of identity formation, at the same time as it recognises

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rather as standing in the order of historicity, a stability which can always once again be destabilised. However, the question remains as to how identity can be characterised as stable, such that it remains recognisable as the same across many different occurrences. Here the crucial notion of *iterability*, which designates both repetition and alteration, provides a tool with which to account for identity without assuming an eternal essence to be grounding such identity. For Derrida, iterability presumes a minimal remainder which is not reducible to a singular essence, which is repeatable in principle and which allows for such stabilisation to occur. Yet, this element is always impure, its meaning never quite sutured, allowing for it to be altered when grafted onto new contexts. This allows a further deepening of our understanding of the essentially contextual dimension of the formation of identity which, nevertheless, always involves an element of decontextualization. Moreover, it facilitates an understanding of the interplay of both continuities and discontinuities in historical articulation of identity. For a discussion of iterability, see J. Derrida, 'Limited Inc.', *Glyph 2*, pp. 192-254, 1977.

<sup>63</sup> Connolly, 'Review essay', p. 133. Connolly also points out that both Foucault and Nietzsche attempts to foster an ethic of care for abundance, before closing on a fixed, systematic set of limitations.

the role that differentiation from an other plays in the processes constitutive of political identity.<sup>64</sup>

To recapitulate. The core of my argument has been that the general logic of individuation has to be distinguished from the formation of political frontiers (and the constitution of antagonistic forms of identity). One of the consequence of this refocussing is that it then becomes necessary to investigate the specificity of the political logic of frontiers. The constitution of political frontiers becomes one possibility of articulation amongst others, rather than the essence of the individuation of identity. This weakening of the claims for political frontiers, far from invalidating Laclau and Mouffe's argument, in fact reveals their specific contribution to the theorisation of the constitution of *political* identities in its full light. Theirs remains a valuable insight into the constitution of *antagonistic* forms of identification. However, the fact that the stronger claims for political frontiers and antagonism – namely that it is essential to any individuation of identity – has been put into question, allows one to take cognisance of those dimensions of political identity which are equally important in the analysis of ideologies, but which escape the focus on exclusion and antagonism. Finally, it allows one to refine the theorisation of political forms of 'exclusion'.

Concerning the *political logic of exclusion*, it is important to go beyond the argument, put forward by Laclau and Mouffe, concerning the grounds upon which frontiers may be drawn. Laclau has argued that this question can only be answered conjuncturally with reference to a concrete situation.<sup>65</sup> To some extent this is, of course, correct: it is not possible to prescribe, in an *a priori* fashion, on what grounds and where distinctions and frontiers will be drawn; too much depends on political traditions, context and so forth. However, this answer masks two further problems, both of which are linked to a lack of theorisation of different *forms* of exclusion.

The first concerns the issue already raised in different guises throughout this paper, namely the conflation of limits/frontiers and antagonistic relations. If the argument that the structure of identity formation requires that identity is formed through differentiation, but that it does not logically follow that all differences have to be treated as 'evil', as 'other' is accepted, it becomes possible to *theorise* a more nuanced account of relations to the other. On this reading, the site of identity formation can be regarded as one of *indeterminacy*: it is an open space for considering a variety of ways in which

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<sup>64</sup> It is in this respect that some of the formulations drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis become problematic. See my discussion of this problem in *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, pp. 62-4.

<sup>65</sup> Howarth and Norval, 'Negotiating the paradoxes', pp. 46-7.

the relation between self and other may be conceived. From this site, it becomes possible to think of social division in terms other than the friend/foe relation. What is important, from this perspective, is the possibility of relating to those who are 'different' without excluding them as 'enemies'; of consolidating identity through the constitution of difference rather than otherness. This would involve doing justice to both sameness and difference, to conceive and develop practices in which it is possible to recognise the instability of identity, *and* to respect the otherness of the other.<sup>66</sup> Contemporary political theory is replete with examples, systematically drawn from historical cases, which outline different ways of thinking and systematising different relations to 'the other'. Bauman's work on the figure of the stranger; Dillon's work on the figure of the refugee; and Connolly's writings on relations of agonistic respect. Since all of these are forms of differentiation, are related to greater or lesser degree to political circumstances they avoid the problem of falling into empty formalisms, so missing nuances which are both politically and theoretically important and interesting. These may to a greater or lesser extent be systematised, even if such a systematisation would not occur outside of all context. Indeed, my argument would be that a systematisation outside of all context, will simply lead to an empty and abstract formalism. Rather, it is at this point that sensitivity to historical context and the nature and character of exclusions become crucial.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Once this separation is effected, it may then be possible to articulate a specifically (radical) democratic practice of relating to difference. As Connolly argues, a democratic politics of difference, in which the conventional standards sealed in 'transcendental mortar' are loosened through contestation, is a politics which would refuse to resign itself unambiguously to limits imposed by the structural requirements of any particular order. Instead of succumbing to the temptation to convert differences into otherness, into evil, a democratic politics ought to ensure that as many differences as possible are drawn in, before the inevitable moment of closure arises. Cf. W. E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, Ithaca, New York 1991, pp. 8-9.

<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, as is clear from the work of, for example, Balibar, it may be possible to map something of the complexity of models of racism, and the forms of exclusion which it fosters and sustains: the distinctions between auto-referential (those in which the bearers of prejudice, exercising physical or symbolic violence, designate themselves as representatives of a superior race) and hetero-referential racism (in which it is, by contrast, the victims of racism who are assigned to an inferior or evil race); between a racism of extermination/elimination (an 'exclusive' racism; e.g. Nazism) and racism of oppression or exploitation ('inclusive' racism; e.g. colonial racisms) all give one important insights into the manner in which contemporary exclusions may function. What is particularly striking in Balibar's work is his sensitivity to the fact that these categorisations are not ideally pure structures but they identify historical trajectories which disallows talk of a single invariant racism, or a single form of exclusion. Indeed, what is crucial in his analysis is the emphasis on the intermixing and *impurity* of these



It is finally necessary to consider whether these alternative forms of thinking about differentiation are compatible with Laclau and Mouffe's political account of identity formation. While some dimensions of their account may conceivably be stretched to accommodate those insights, it is my intuition that a Wittgenstinian understanding of the individuation is more open to the issues raised here. This is so since, while it does give attention to differentiation, it does not privilege, in an a priori fashion, the moment of exclusion. Politically, we have seen that the emphasis on exclusion is dangerous in that it leaves us, metaphorically speaking, with white/black choices, and it disallows the theorisation of more complex interweavings which are constitutive of the processes of identity formation. Theoretically, it comes perilously close to that 'red feather' described by Derrida:

The ethic of speech is the *delusion* of presence mastered. ... the delusion or lure designates first a hunter's stratagem. It is a term of falconry: "a piece of red feather ... in the form of a bird, which serves to recall the bird of prey when it does not return straight to the fist." ... To recognise writing in speech, that is to say difference and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure. There is no ethics without the presence *of the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing.<sup>68</sup>

Unless we take this into account, we run the risk of remaining trapped by a conception of frontiers which emphasises closure, antagonism and strict delimitation, instead of that dimension of frontiers which promise a certain opening, a certain lack of definition, which is nevertheless not unusable.

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forms of categorisation in our contemporary world. E. Balibar, 'Racism and Nationalism', pp. 38-9, in Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*.

<sup>68</sup> J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1974, pp. 139-40.

