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# The Political as Presence: On Agonism in Citizenship Education

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Article abstract

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# *The Political as Presence: On Agonism in Citizenship Education*

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Abstract: *In recent years, an agonistic approach to citizenship education has been put forward as a way of educating democratic citizens. Claudia W. Ruitenberg (2009) has developed such an approach and takes her starting point in Chantal Mouffe's agonistic theory. Ruitenberg highlights how political emotions and political disputes can be seen as central for a vibrant democratic citizenship education. The aim of this paper is to critically explore and further develop the concepts of political emotions and political disputes as central components of an agonistic approach. In order to do this, I return to Mouffe's point of departure in the concept of the political. By drawing on Michael Marder's (2010) notion of enmity, I suggest how "the presence of the other" can be seen as a vital aspect of the political in citizenship education. By not abandoning the concept of enmity, and with the notion of presence in the foreground, I argue that Ruitenberg's definition of political emotions needs to be formulated in a way that includes emotions revolving around one's own existence as a political being. Moreover, I argue that in order to further develop the agonistic approach, the emphasis on the verbalization of opinions in political disputes needs to be relaxed, as it limits the political dimension in education and excludes crucial political practices, such as exodus.*

## Introduction

In the field of citizenship education, the question of what kind of democratic citizenship education should aim for has been widely debated (see, for example, Gutmann, 1987; Callan, 1997; see also Knight Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). This question has been addressed by Claudia W. Ruitenberg (2009) from an agonistic perspective. Ruitenberg takes her starting point in Chantal Mouffe's (2005) agonistic pluralism, and from there formulates concrete components of an agonistic approach to citizenship education. The concretization of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism in relation to citizenship education can be seen as an important theoretical development within the field, especially in relation to the dominant presence of deliberative theory. Ruitenberg's outline has been referred to by several scholars and educational philosophers (Biesta, 2011; Diorio, 2011; Zembylas, 2012) and has also recently been criticized from the perspective of deliberative theory (Englund, 2016). One of the main thrusts of Ruitenberg's agonistic approach is the emphasis on the political dimension of citizenship education. She argues that in order to educate democratic citizens, schools need to acknowledge the political dimension of democracy. In other words, to educate democratic citizens is to enable them to become each other's political adversaries. Drawing on what Mouffe's agonistic pluralism might imply for citizenship education, Ruitenberg explains how political emotions and political disputes bring the political dimension in education to the fore.

The aim of this paper is to critically explore and further develop the concepts of political emotions and political disputes as central components of an agonistic approach to citizenship education. This critical exploration points to how political emotions and political disputes are defined and emphasized in a problematic way in the agonistic approach. This can be seen to stem from Mouffe's theoretical manoeuvre to abandon the concept of the enemy *in toto* as a meaningful trajectory for exploring democratic politics. As I see it, the abandonment of the concept of the enemy in agonistic theory prevents the agonistic approach from capturing the political dimension in a thorough and substantial way in citizenship education.

This paper suggests two main reasons why Ruitenberg's (2009) definition of political emotions and emphasis on political disputes in citizenship education is problematic. First, Ruitenberg's definition of political emotions is built around the kind of object the emotion is directed towards; that is, political emotions are seen to be directed towards societal objects and phenomena and are not person-oriented. This definition disqualifies emotions that could reasonably be seen as political emotions from being defined as political. I argue that emotions revolving around one's own existence, and stemming from an enmity that is constituted by the mere presence of the other, can be seen as political emotions even if they are not directed towards societal objects. Further, Ruitenberg's approach reifies a sharp and problematic distinction between what is public and private in education. What is defined as political relates to what is public, rather than the private sphere. By drawing on previous critique of a distinction between a political-public sphere and an apolitical-private sphere, I argue that Ruitenberg's definition of political emotions needs to be revised. One way of redefining political emotions in an agonistic approach is to relate them more closely to the concepts of antagonism and enmity. In order to do this, the relevance of the concept of the enemy in citizenship education needs to be more thoroughly explored.

Second, there is a risk that the strong emphasis on political disputes, in terms of the confrontation between substantially different visions of society, will reduce the political dimension in education to the verbalization of different opinions. By placing the notion of articulatory practices in the foreground, rather than the verbalization of opinions, a definition of political disputes can be formulated that encompasses the agonistic understanding of the political (see Ruitenberg, 2010). From this perspective, what is defined as a political dispute in a classroom does not depend on its form of expression, or whether it is verbalized or non-verbalized, but rather on the agonistic idea that the political dimension in education is bound up with the lines and frontiers between "us" and "them." For this, the concept of the enemy cannot be too readily abandoned.

The line of argument suggested in this paper starts with Mouffe's (2005) theory of agonism and Michael Marder's (2010) notion of enmity. Drawing on Marder's work, I elaborate on the concept of the enemy as a way of theorizing antagonism in relation to democratic citizenship education. This facilitates a re-engagement with Ruitenberg's definitions of political emotions and political disputes as central components of an agonistic approach to citizenship education.

This paper consists of three main sections. The first section describes how Mouffe's theory of agonism provides a starting point for Ruitenberg's outline of an agonistic approach to education. This approach is captured in the title of Ruitenberg's (2009) article "Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education." In this article, Ruitenberg concretizes the components of an agonistic approach, which are described in the first section. The second section of this paper considers Marder's notion of the enemy. In order to illustrate the relevance of Marder's work

for citizenship education, I draw on a case from Swedish upper secondary education, where students protested against the visit of a particular political party to their schools. The case is used to illustrate how the mere presence of the other can be understood as a crucial aspect of the political dimension in citizenship education. By establishing a specific boundary between "us" and "them," the protesters challenge Ruitenberg's agonistic approach to citizenship education in their withdrawal from both antagonistic and agonistic forms of confrontation. The same section also elaborates on what an alternative route from Marder's notion of enmity to agonistic education might look like. Finally, the third section returns to Ruitenberg's agonistic approach and criticizes two of its central components, *political emotions* and *political disputes*, from the vantage point of Marder's notion of enmity and his reading of Carl Schmitt. This critique leads to proposals for a re-definition of political emotions and less emphasis on the importance of verbal political disputes in the agonistic approach.

## Agonistic Education

In her theory of agonistic pluralism, Mouffe (2005) underlines that antagonism should be understood as an ontological condition for human societies. Taking her point of departure from Carl Schmitt's concept of the political, she puts forward how humans, as social beings, are involved in the process of forming collective identities. From Mouffe's perspective, the distinction between "us" and "them" is inevitable in society and can therefore never be totally eradicated, not even by a rational consensus. If the distinction between "us" and "them" is antagonistically formulated as a friend–enemy relation, then the confrontation between "us" and "them" could turn into a violent confrontation. One could say that Mouffe and Schmitt agree that such a confrontation would not be compatible with democracy. Whereas Schmitt abandons the democratic project, Mouffe emphasizes the importance of transforming antagonistic confrontations into adversarial relations that are compatible with democracy (Mouffe, 2000, pp. 53–57; see also 2005, p. 20). Therefore, one of the main tasks of democracy is to enable a confrontation between "friendly enemies" who "share a common symbolic space" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 13); to enable an *agonistic* confrontation between political *adversaries*. Mouffe thus highlights the need to facilitate collective identities and confrontations that are formulated in political terms, as identities and confrontations that revolve around competing visions of what a just society is. If collective identities and boundaries between "us" and "them" are not enabled, there is a danger that collective identities will be formulated in an essentialist register that draws on ethnic, moral or religious differences.

> The danger arises that the democratic confrontation will therefore be replaced by a confrontation between essentialist forms of identification or non-negotiable moral values. […] A democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives and it must provide political forms of collective identification around clearly differentiated democratic positions. (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 30–31)

Consequently, rather than striving towards the erasure of different collective identities, the democratic task is to enable an agonistic pluralism. Taking her starting point in Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, Ruitenberg (2009) suggests that an agonistic educational approach could include three central components: *political emotions*, *political disputes* and *political literacy*. In this paper, the discussion is limited to political emotions and political disputes.

Ruitenberg (2009) argues that political emotions should be given a legitimate place in a democratic citizenship education. Here, political emotions are defined as emotions that are directed towards societal structures and power relations. Ruitenberg distinguishes political emotions from moral emotions by underlining that they are directed towards different kind of objects. Thus, it is not the intensity or the character of an emotion like anger, sadness or joy that makes it political, but rather the target of the intensity and character. Moral emotions can include feeling "angry with one's cheating brother's moral transgression" (p. 277), whereas political emotions are directed towards societal objects:

> In the case of political emotions, the object is political in the sense in which Mouffe has defined it, as necessarily bound up with the power relations in a society and with a substantive vision of a just society. (p. 277)

In this definition, an example of a political emotion could be "sorrow about the homelessness of a growing number of one's fellow citizens" (p. 277). What turns it into a political emotion is the clear societal object towards which the emotion is directed, in this case homelessness. The paper's third section outlines what can be seen as problematic with this distinction in relation to education.

From Ruitenberg's (2009) stance, political disputes can be distinguished from moral disputes. She also argues that it is important that citizenship education highlight the differences between them. As I understand it, in establishing this distinction between political and moral disputes, Ruitenberg draws on Mouffe's (2005) argument that it is necessary for a vibrant democracy that conflicts be played out in a political register rather than a moral one. The other should therefore not be articulated as a morally corrupt enemy, but rather as a legitimate political adversary who has another vision about what a just society is. According to Mouffe, the risk of articulating conflicts in moral terms is that the us–them distinction becomes an antagonistic relation, in which violent confrontations between "us," as morally good, and "them," as morally corrupt, are constant threats. By enabling the other to be formulated as a political adversary, conflicts can be played out in a political register in an agonistic public sphere. In the educational perspective sketched by Ruitenberg, this implies that disputes in citizenship education should be accepted as *political* disputes. This means that disputes between students are not necessarily categorized as moral or personal disputes, but can involve substantially different visions of society. Such disputes, Ruitenberg argues, should be given a legitimate place in the classroom. By maintaining political disputes as *political*, debates between students are not reduced to a competition between different teams, but are rather seen as a confrontation "of arguments for 'clearly differentiated democratic positions'" (Mouffe, as cited in Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 278). Further, a debate does not take place on a neutral ground that goes back and forth, but in a shared "common symbolic space" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20).

However, by defining agonistic confrontations as taking place within a shared symbolic space, Mouffe (2005; 2013) emphasizes that not every political position is adversarial. Adversaries share a symbolic space, while enemies do not. In democratic politics, this shared symbolic space is constituted by a conflictual consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality (2013, p. 8). Thus, the confrontation is not about whether these values are desirable or not, but "concerning their meaning and the way they should be implemented" (2005, p. 31). In other words, a political dispute between adversaries does not take place on neutral ground or on ground that is open to every political position. Rather, the ground for adversarial confrontation is always a hegemonic constellation, or more precisely, a hegemonic constellation of liberty and equality.

What political emotions and political disputes have in common is that they distinguish between the political dimension and the moral dimension in education. Political emotions are distinguished from moral emotions, and political disputes are distinguished from moral disputes. Together with the third component, political literacy, they constitute an agonistic approach to education that aims to educate political adversaries. In my view, this approach needs to be reconsidered because the two components outlined by Ruitenberg frame the understanding of the political in a problematic way. Before this is further developed, however, a theoretical position that does not abandon the concept of the enemy in the exploration of the political dimension of democratic citizenship education needs to be outlined.

## Enmity as Presence

The following section describes Marder's (2010) reading of Schmitt and elaborates on how the concept of enmity can be understood in relation to education. This is followed by an example of how this concept can be used to highlight and recognize the political dimension in education. This theoretical outline is then used as a point of departure for the critique of Ruitenberg's notion of political emotions and political disputes as components of an agonistic approach to citizenship education.

### The Presence of the Political Other

In characterizing the Schmittian concept of the enemy as the antagonistic constellation of the us–them distinction, Mouffe (2005) draws the conclusion that such enmity is incompatible with democracy. On this point, Mouffe sees herself agreeing with Schmitt, although she disagrees about which normative "ought" this implies. Even though Mouffe can see how and why Schmitt abandons a democratic trajectory, she formulates the democratic "ought" as the transformation of antagonistic friend–enemy distinctions into agonistic relations between adversaries. Both Mouffe and Ruitenberg therefore abandon the concept of the enemy as a fruitful way of elaborating on democratic politics and citizenship education. Instead, they turn to the concept of the adversary as the (only) relevant formation for democratic conflicts and confrontations (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 16–20; Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 278). But do they abandon the concept of the enemy too swiftly? Such an abandonment could be seen as what leads Ruitenberg to a problematic definition of political emotions and shapes her agonistic outline in a way that places too strong an emphasis on political disputes. By turning to Marder (2010), I argue that a profound conception of the enemy can be formulated that has relevance for democratic education and has something to offer the agonistic approach to citizenship education.

Marder (2010) emphasizes how, in Schmitt's writing, my enemy is someone who puts me in question and "is defined by this very act" (p. 88). However, this act should not be understood in terms of a verbalized questioning or debate. Marder underlines that it is an onto-existential questioning that is unavoidable and raised by the enemy *as* an enemy. Marder also writes:

> If, as Schmitt stipulates, the enemy is not a "debating adversary," then she or he puts me in question silently, non-argumentatively, and, hence, without giving me a chance to respond by verbally defending myself. […] The onto-existential questioning, which does not require vocalization, let alone engagement in a discussion, and which disturbs me to the core of my

> being, derives from the other who puts me in question simply by virtue of *being* my enemy. (Marder, 2010, p. 94, emphasis in original)

So far, the concept of the enemy does not impugn Mouffe's idea of antagonism and enmity, but highlights another vital aspect of enmity, namely enmity as the *presence of the other,* rather than enmity in terms of verbalization or violence.

Marder's (2010) notion of enmity draws on existential and phenomenological concepts and facilitates an understanding of antagonism that is not just a violent confrontation between friend and enemy. Rather, by emphasizing that it is the enemy "in virtue of being my enemy" who puts me in question, Marder reveals the significance of *presence* within antagonism. Thus, it is the presence of the other, as my enemy, that disturbs my own existence. This does not necessarily involve an explicit conflict, but "[w]hat always matters is only the possibility of conflict" (Schmitt, as cited in Marder, 2010, p. 34). In other words, what Marder highlights and Mouffe seems to overlook is the aspect of *presence* in antagonism. Marder does not formulate antagonism in terms of the verbalization of threatening opinions or utterances, nor as an explicit violent confrontation, but as the presence of the other that "disturbs me to the core of my being," where it is the possibility of conflict that matters. I argue that these notions of enmity and presence have something substantial to offer agonism as an educational approach and theory.

My attempt to elaborate on this notion of enmity in relation to Mouffe's agonistic pluralism can be criticized in that it seems to stem from an essentialist understanding of identity and enmity, and can therefore hardly be compatible with Mouffe's agonistic pluralism. Such criticism could highlight that the fundamental differences between the two accounts of identity and enmity entail that Marder's notion of enmity cannot inform or contribute to the theoretical development of agonistic pluralism.

However, Marder's (2010) reading of Schmitt, on which this paper draws, does not rely on an essentialist notion of identity or enmity. In his account, the other is not an enemy by virtue of some pre-given disposition or essential trait. On the contrary, the notion of enmity that Marder develops is an enmity in which the frontier between friend and enemy is a contingent relation that ultimately "rests" on a groundless existence.[1] As he highlights, the frontier between friend and enemy stems from the onto-existential questioning that disturbs my own existence. Without dwelling too long on this, it should be stressed that even though Marder formulates this questioning as deriving from the other as an enemy (as the above quote shows), the source of the questioning is more intricate and ambiguous. In Schmitt's writing, the idea of the enemy in terms of the "other who puts me into question" is partially unclear and sometimes enigmatic in its formulation (Marder, 2010, p. 87). However, what Schmitt seems to be pointing towards is how the other, as our enemy, "is our own question as figure" (p. 87). Schmitt further writes, "Who may I finally recognize as my enemy? Manifestly, he alone who can put me in question. Insofar as I recognize him as my enemy. […] And who can effectively put me in question? Only myself" (Schmitt, as cited in Marder, 2010, p. 87).[2] In short, the notion of enmity drawn on in this paper should not be understood as an essentialist account of antagonistic relations, but rather

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[1] Marder's (2010) book on Schmitt points to this in its very title: *Groundless Existence: The Political Ontology of Carl Schmitt.*

[2] In this paragraph, besides giving the answer "[o]nly myself," Schmitt adds, "Or my brother. That's it. The other is my brother," thus making the answer ambiguous and enigmatic. See Marder (2010, p. 87–91) for further analysis and discussion of this paragraph.

as an account that emphasizes enmity in terms of the presence of the other as a central aspect of the political.

The next section briefly describes the case of Swedish students in several upper secondary schools protesting against the visit of a political party. The case is used to show how the concept of enmity, in terms of presence, is relevant in an agonistic approach to citizenship education.

## Students' Exodus From Agonism

In Sweden, elections for the national parliament, regional councils and city councils are held every fourth year. During the election period, it is common for upper secondary schools (students aged sixteen to nineteen) to invite political parties to hearings and debates. Students who have reached the age of eighteen are eligible to vote in these elections. And in 2014, students in eleven upper secondary schools organized protests to stop the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) from visiting the schools, which resulted in news headlines in the national media.

The Sweden Democrats has been represented in the national parliament since 2010. The party describes itself as a conservative party that cherishes traditional values and is neither right- nor left-wing (Sweden Democrats, 2011). However, the party's success has been a burning political issue in Sweden, in that its political roots lie in the extreme nationalist movement BSS or "*Bevara Sverige svenskt*" ("Keep Sweden Swedish") of the late 1980s and early 1990s. It also had connections with the Swedish white power movement "*Vitt ariskt motstånd*" (White Aryan Resistance) (Larsson & Ekman, 2001). Since then, the party has changed its rhetoric and programme and now proclaims zero-tolerance against racism in the party (Sd-kuriren, 2014).

The protests organized by the students could be seen to more or less follow two different strategies. In some cases, students occupied the school entrances to prevent the Sweden Democrats from entering. In other cases, when party delegates had entered, students turned their backs to the speakers. These protests attracted a lot of media attention and the role of the Sweden Democrats both in the schools and in citizenship education became an issue for public debate. However, no cases of violence were reported by the media.

How might these protests be understood against the background of antagonism and enmity? As a case that clearly brings the political dimension in the education of citizens to the fore, it calls attention to how the boundaries between "us" and "them" can be drawn in education. One starting point for exploring this case further is Mouffe's (2000) distinction between *antagonism* as the friend–enemy relation, and *agonism* as the relation between political adversaries. An adversarial relation is distinguished from the antagonistic enemy relation in that adversaries share a common symbolic space. The adversary is the other who shares the common ground of ethico-political values, but who does not agree on how these values should be interpreted (pp. 102–103; see also 2005, pp. 19–20). In the case of the protesting students, they seem to abandon the attempts made by the principals and teachers to create a public space in which different visions of society can confront and meet. By occupying the entrances and turning their backs on the debaters, the students deny the Sweden Democrats the status of a legitimate political adversary with whom they share a common symbolic space. In one sense, their actions can be understood as an *exodus* from agonism.[3] The students as the recipients and the teachers and principals

[3] For a discussion of other conceptualizations of exodus in relation to agonism, see Mouffe (2013, pp. xvi, 74–75).

as the organizers of the events clearly seem to disagree about where the boundaries of the common symbolic space should be drawn and with whom they share the same ethico-political values. By blocking the school entrances, the students undoubtedly show that they will not share the same "ground" as the Sweden Democrats. However, this exodus from agonism and its shared symbolic space is not an "entering" into a violent antagonistic relation where the enemy is attacked.

The media reports of the protests make no mention of any violence taking place in any of the eleven schools.[4] It therefore seems misleading to describe these situations in terms of an antagonistic violent confrontation between friend and enemy. One of Mouffe's (2013) main arguments for agonism is that the absence of an agonistic public sphere, where the distinction between "us" and "them" can be expressed in terms of adversaries, can lead to violent conflicts. She writes: "I have often argued, when institutional channels do not exist for antagonism to be expressed in an agonistic way, they are likely to explode into violence" (p. 122). Against this distinction between agonism and antagonism, the protests seem to be a form of enmity that does not fit into either slot. The students' exodus is one that neither attacks nor accepts the other, but abandons both the debate and the violence. However, even if it is an exodus from confrontation, in both its verbal and physical forms, it is not an exodus from conflict. This form of enmity could be understood as aversive in its denial and rejection of all engagement *with* the other, regardless of whether that engagement is in the form of antagonistic violence or agonistic debate. However, when it comes down to it, the conflict is maintained through the enmity. As I see it, the protests did not revolve around what the Sweden Democrats said or planned to say in the debates and hearings. Rather, they emerged from the presence of the party's representatives in the schools as political beings. What we seem to have here is an enmity that stems from the presence of the other, and that maintains a level of conflict without confrontation while at the same time resists the categories of both antagonistic violence and agonistic debate.

The following section returns to Ruitenberg's outline of an agonistic education. By highlighting the *presence of the other* as an important aspect of the political dimension in education, two of Ruitenberg's components of an agonistic education—political emotions and political disputes—are critically explored and developed.

## Agonism in Education Reconsidered

### Political Emotions in Education

Ruitenberg (2009) defines political emotions as emotions that are directed towards society and its power relations. Such emotions, she argues, should be given a legitimate place in an education that aims to educate democratic citizens. However, in my view, Ruitenberg's definition needs to be reconsidered.

[4] It could be argued that act of occupying and blocking the entrances to a school is one of violence, although within the framework of Mouffe's distinction between agonism and antagonism, such a definition of violence would be excessive. Mouffe does not, as far as I know, explicitly define the concept of violence in relation to antagonism, but given her examples and descriptions of antagonism, the act of blocking a school entrance hardly seems to qualify as the form of violence that she is after. Instead, she writes about "antagonisms that can tear up the very basis of civility" (2000, p. 104) or constitute a "war between enemies" (p. 31). Moreover, they are antagonisms that can be understood in terms of "annihilation […] of the other" (2013, p. 41) and the example she gives is what the "case of the disintegration of Yugoslavia testifies" (2005, p. 16).

In the case of the students' protests, which is used to highlight the *presence of the other* as an important aspect of the political dimension in education, the very presence of the Sweden Democrats at the schools created politically intense situations. With reference to Marder (2010), it is suggested that the presence of the other, rather than the other's actions and utterances, can be seen as something that puts one into question. Being put into question in such a way can be described as an emotion that is directed towards one own existence as a political being. Thus, because such an emotion is not directed towards a societal object such as homelessness, it does not qualify as a political emotion in Ruitenberg's definition. In other words, when political emotions are defined by Ruitenberg as emotions that are directed towards societal objects, emotions that are directed towards one's own existence are excluded. One's own existence as a political being could thus be seen as an illegitimate target for emotions in education. This is why I think that Ruitenberg's definition needs to be reformulated. I would like to suggest a different way of defining political emotions in education and highlight how this definition can circumvent the risk of consolidating the public–private distinction in relation to political emotions (see Boler, 1999).

In her approach to political emotions, Ruitenberg (2009) chooses to define them in accordance with their object, rather than their intensity or character. She argues that it is important "that students learn to distinguish between emotions on behalf of themselves and emotions on behalf of a political collective, i.e., on behalf of views for the social order" (p. 276). For example, she shows how political emotions differ from moral emotions in terms of which objects they are directed towards and not in terms of their intensity (see also Ahmed, 2014, pp. 5–8). In contrast to Ruitenberg's conceptualization, Mouffe (2014) distinguishes emotions from passions, where the former is "usually attached to individuals" (p. 149) and the latter includes a "certain type of common affects, those that are mobilized in the political domain in the formation of the we/them forms of identification" (p. 155). In this definition, Mouffe uses passions, rather than emotions, when discussing collective identities and the frontiers between "us" and "them." Thus, the route that I suggest is one that takes its starting point in the antagonistic understanding of the political. Even though from Mouffe's perspective this would be about passions, I use the concept of emotions rather than passions in order to directly elaborate on Ruitenberg's educational proposal.

In my view, in an agonistic framework, a definition of political emotions should start with what makes something political in the first place, and not with the kind of object it is directed towards. By drawing on Schmitt's notion of the political, a political emotion could be defined as an emotion that is necessarily bound up with the antagonistic nature of collective identities established through the us–them distinction. This would imply that political emotions do *not necessarily* have to be directed towards social objects, such as homelessness, but that they are by necessity linked to the frontiers and identities of an us–them distinction. This definition would therefore include the emotion of being put into question by the mere presence of the other when it actualizes a distinction between "us" and "them." At the same time, emotions like "sorrow about the homelessness of a growing number of one's fellow citizens" (Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 277) could be seen as political in the virtue of a bond to a collective identity such as "fellow citizens." What makes the sorrow political is therefore not found in the societal object "homelessness" but rather in how the collective identity "fellow citizens" actualizes a boundary between "us" and "them." In this case, the boundary between "us" and "them" could be found in how the growing homelessness of fellow citizens is not prevented by "those others" who presumably have the power to do something about it. From an agonistic perspective, the educational task would be to

mobilize such emotions towards us–them distinctions that are compatible with democracy and, therefore, also towards the ethico-political principles of liberty and equality (see Sund & Öhman, 2014, p. 654; Mihai, 2014).

A further problem with defining political emotions in accordance with the objects towards which they are directed is that such a definition tends to strengthen the distinction between what is public and what is private in education. In her book *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education,* Megan Boler (1999), to whom Ruitenberg (2009) refers, underlines how emotions have been constructed as private phenomena "which we are taught not to express publicly" (Boler, 1999, p. 8). By being constructed as private phenomena, emotions have traditionally been excluded from education in the western culture and seen as irrelevant for the enlightening and rational endeavour of education (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2007). Ruitenberg's definition, which emphasizes the importance of political emotions in citizenship education, can therefore be seen as a way of contesting the traditional construction of emotions as irrelevant or illegitimate in education. She constructs political emotions as being relevant in education by defining them as directed towards societal objects and thereby becoming relevant by being defined as public rather than private phenomena. The overarching problem with this argumentation is that it risks consolidating the distinction between what is public (and therefore relevant) and private (and therefore irrelevant) in education. Political emotions could in this way end up being legitimate in the classroom, not because they are political, but because they are public.

If, on the other hand, political emotions are defined in relation to the political and the antagonistic boundary between "us" and "them," as outlined above, the distinction between what is public and what is private is not reified in the definition. By not defining political emotions with regard to whether their object is on the "outside" or the "inside," the question of whether the emotion is public or private is not asked. Thus, the distinction between outside and inside becomes redundant in defining what is political about political emotions. In line with Sara Ahmed, it could be said that it is emotions that "create the very effect of an inside and an outside" (2014, p. 10). Instead of relying on a pre-constituted distinction between outside and inside, the political in political emotions instead draws on the distinction between "us" and "them" (see Mouffe, 2014). The idea that political emotions are not simply about what is public or societal, or in other ways on the "outside," can be captured in the words of Adrienne Rich and her experience of politics: "I think I began at this point *to feel that politics was not something 'out there' but something 'in here'* and of essence of my condition" (Rich, as cited in Boler, 1999, pp. 114–115, emphasis in original).

To summarize, the argument in this section is that Ruitenberg's definition of political emotions needs to be reformulated so that it encompasses an understanding of the political as a concept where antagonism and enmity is never totally eradicated. In such a definition, political emotions can be seen as legitimate in citizenship education by virtue of being political, whether they are defined as outside or inside, public or private.

## Political Disputes in Education

The second component of Ruitenberg's (2009) outline of an agonistic education is political disputes. To enable the classroom to become a vibrant sphere where substantially different visions of a just society can meet and confront each other, Ruitenberg emphasizes the importance of distinguishing political disputes from moral disputes and debates in which different teams meet in a competition. The

characteristic of political disputes is that they are disputes about "clearly differentiated democratic positions" (Mouffe, as cited in Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 278). In other words, political disputes in the classroom can be seen as verbal confrontations between substantially different opinions about what a just society is and how it should be achieved. As a component of an agonistic approach, political disputes put the verbalization of opinions in the foreground of democratic education. Against the background of how the mere presence of the other can be a vital aspect of the political dimension in education, this emphasis on the verbalization of opinions can be seen as problematic.

The Swedish students' protests and their exodus from agonism, as sketched above, was a strategy that did not attack or engage in a debate or dispute with the other. It closed down the sphere of conflicting verbalized opinions about what a just society is. This strategy could be understood in relation to how the mere presence of the other created intense political situations in these schools. The political dimension of education was actualized in terms of presence, rather than actions or utterances. Marder's (2010) theoretical elaboration of the concept of enmity can be used to illustrate how the enemy does not necessarily have to be seen as a "debating adversary," but can be understood in terms of the other who "puts me in question silently, non-argumentatively, and, hence, without giving me a chance to respond by verbally defending myself" (p. 94). The non-verbalized questioning that emerges from the mere presence of the other is an aspect that is thoroughly overlooked by Ruitenberg's agonistic approach.

A strong emphasis on the verbalization of opinions seems to make it difficult to assent to an attentiveness to antagonisms and enmities in education that evolves from the non-verbalized presence of the other. This does not imply that disputes and articulations of opinions should be seen as unimportant, but rather points to the need to develop responsiveness in the agonistic approach towards non-verbalized aspects of the political dimension in education. From this standpoint, an agonistic approach is not necessarily about enabling political disputes in which substantially different visions about society confront each other. Such disputes could be understood as a way of practising an agonistic approach in education, but should not be seen as the only way or as a necessary component of agonistic education. Instead, an agonistic approach should emerge from an attentiveness to the fact that the political dimension can arise in different forms in education and is sometimes verbalized and sometimes not. Consequently, the agonistic approach would not be defined in relation to its form (disputes, debates, and so on) but in relation to the agonistic notion of the political in terms of how the boundaries between "us" and "them" are continually redrawn in education (see Todd & Säfström, 2008, p. 9).

My argument for a reduced emphasis on the importance of verbalization of opinions in the agonistic approach should not be understood as a de-emphasizing of all *articulatory practices* of political demands. Articulatory practices are not synonymous with verbal practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2001, p. 105; Ruitenberg, 2010, p. 375). Thus, it is not a question of pacifying political conflicts or conflicting opinions. Rather, it is a question of an agonistic approach that acknowledges the heterogeneity of ways in which the political dimension in education can be manifested. I think that Ruitenberg (2010) is right when she highlights the importance of articulatory practices in education, because this points towards an agonistic approach that goes beyond the mere verbalization of opinions. Moreover, Todd's (2011) notion of "conflict articulation" seems to point in the same direction in terms of not being "so much about positions, perspectives and worldviews, but are articulations that are contested at the very level of who I am" (p. 111). An articulation, as defined by Laclau and Mouffe, is

"*any practice* establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (as cited in Ruitenberg, 2010, p. 375, emphasis added). This definition opens up for an agonistic approach in education that could develop attentiveness to practices other than the verbalization of conflicting opinions, such as the practice of *exodus*.

## Conclusion

To conclude, we could ask whether the notion of the enemy is relevant for democratic citizenship education. The argument put forward in this paper is that it can be relevant when the notion of the enemy refers to an onto-existential questioning of political beings and is not just understood in terms of violent confrontations that "can tear up the very basis of civility," as Mouffe (2000, p. 104) puts it. The notion of the enemy can, in this sense, point towards the heterogeneity of manifestations through which the political dimension in education becomes present. To exemplify, it highlights how the political dimension in education extends beyond political emotions in terms of emotions directed towards societal objects and political disputes in terms of the verbalization of opinions. Failing to take the notion of the enemy into consideration, as Ruitenberg does in her outline of an agonistic approach to citizenship education, is therefore problematic.

Even though Mouffe abandons the notion of the enemy as a way to explore democratic politics, it cannot really be abandoned in any further elaboration and theoretical development of an agonistic educational approach, even if the approach stems from Mouffe's agonistic theory and follows the lines outlined by Ruitenberg. In an interview on agonism, Mouffe makes a clear distinction between her idea of agonism and other agonistic ideals that draw on the work of Hannah Arendt and Friedrich Nietzsche. Mouffe explains that "what you have is 'agonism without antagonism,' whilst my position is 'agonism with antagonism.' My understanding of agonistic relation is that it is sublimated antagonism" (as cited in Dreyer Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 268). As a theory that does not put aside antagonism, but aims to transform it, it cannot do away with the notion of the enemy. When the starting point for the theory of agonistic pluralism is antagonism, a theoretical development of an agonistic approach to education cannot abandon the concept of antagonism or enmity. However, if the notion of the enemy, in terms of an onto-existential questioning, is put into relation with education, it can be seen as a starting point for exploring the possibilities of the political, regardless of its manifestations. In other words, with this idea of the enmity in the foreground, the question about what should be seen as relevant aspects of the political dimension in education is not dependent on the form of the manifestation.

To clarify, I am not suggesting that an agonistic approach should aim towards educating citizens as enemies. What I am arguing is that the notion of the enemy should not be too readily abandoned or rejected as irrelevant for democratic citizenship education. If it is, vital aspects of the political dimension in education could either be lost or be seen as apolitical and therefore unrelated to citizenship education (such as emotions directed towards one's own existence). For example, seeing the political in terms of presence could have implications for how politically intense situations in classrooms, or conflicts between students, are understood. It could have consequences in terms of what counts as political in education. For instance, from this perspective, a political conflict between students could be regarded as being political even if it lacks verbalized opinions or "traditional" political

statements about society. In exploring the political in education, what is important is to identify the frontiers and lines between "us" and "them" that are drawn and redrawn in education.

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