



# DisTerrMem

Disputed territories & memory

## Literature Review

### An introduction to agonistic memory and DisTerrMem

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## Agonistic memory and post-conflict societies - Anna Cento Bull

In this introductory section, Anna Cento Bull (Professor, University of Bath) introduces the agonistic approach to memory and, through previous research related to mass grave exhumations, translates this theory to practice. Through a discussion of post-conflict societies Anna continues to supply potential recommendations for future research in the DisTerrMem project.

### Modes of remembering

The *agonistic* approach to memory proposed by Cento Bull and Hansen (2016) draws on Chantal Mouffe's definition of the political as an inherently conflictual realm, in which opposed views, political passions and social imagination can compete and be democratically channelled through an adversarial dynamics of public contest and confrontation. Mouffe's argument maintains that, in the absence of democratic channels for redirecting social conflicts, these tend to adopt the 'antagonistic' form of an annihilating struggle against morally vilified enemies (instead of recognizing them as adversaries in a common political field; Mouffe, 2005, p. 5). The key issue then is how to prevent antagonism and violence emerging in a democratic context as well as how to transform antagonism into agonism in a post-conflict context: 'to show how antagonism can be transformed so as to make available a form of we/they opposition compatible with pluralist democracy' (Ibid, p. 19). With specific reference to post-conflict societies, Mouffe, Đorđević and Sardelić (2013) argued that 'what democracy should try to do is to create the institutions which allow for conflict – when it emerges – to take an agonistic form, a form of adversarial confrontation instead of antagonism between enemies'. In other words, Mouffe maintains that total reconciliation or indeed consensus is neither possible nor desirable: 'Some people will say that the aim is to create a consensus but this is not possible because the demands are incompatible. What is possible is for that confrontation to take a form that is agonistic which would mean that there is a possibility of life in common'. Mouffe (2005: 153) writes: 'Instead of shying away from the component of violence and hostility inherent in social relations, the task is to think how to create the conditions under which those aggressive forces can be defused and diverted and a pluralist democratic order made possible.'

Cento Bull and Hansen (2016) distinguished between three generic, ethico-political modes of remembering. Antagonistic memory represents the past in terms of a moral struggle between essentialized collective identities, conceiving the 'other' as an enemy to be destroyed. Cosmopolitan memory represents the past as a moral struggle between abstract systems (eg, democracy and dictatorship), reaching out to the 'other' as fellow human beings and sufferers of evil. Agonistic memory represents the past as a socio-political struggle for hegemony in which the 'other' should be viewed as an adversary and potentially even as an ally. These three memory modes also differ in terms of how they approach reflection/self-reflection, dialogue and multiperspectivity. Antagonistic memory cannot reflect on the constructed nature of identities because it conceives collective identities as primordial and immutable. It is not open to a dialogue with the other, because it sees the other as an enemy, nor does it allow for multiple views. Indeed, antagonistic memory agents have been defined as mnemonic warriors: 'Mnemonic warriors tend to espouse a single, unidirectional, mythological vision of time. The alternative visions of the past –by definition, 'distorted' – need to be deligitimised and destroyed'. (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014: 13).

The cosmopolitan memory mode is reflective as it views identities as constructed and it is also open to a dialogue with the other, which it conceives as leading to a consensus on the basis of a shared human condition as well as shared victimhood. However, cosmopolitan memory does not necessarily give voice to the other, but it tends to speak *for* the other, for instance through advocacy. Finally, cosmopolitan memory relies on consensual multiperspectivity, that is to say, it promotes multiple perspectives with a view to aiming at an overarching uniform narrative. We could define cosmopolitan memory agents as mnemonic pluralists: 'Mnemonic pluralists accept that, in addition to 'us' and our vision of history, there are 'them' with their vision of the past. Most important, the pluralists believe that the others are entitled to their vision'. (Ibid) However, a more appropriate definition would be of 'consensual mnemonic pluralists', as Cosmopolitan memory does not encompass the perspectives of the perpetrators.,

Agonistic memory is reflective in several ways: it views identities as constructed, it reflects on the relation of the past to the present, and it promotes a critical understanding of the socio-political conditions and human agency leading to violent conflict and war-making. It is open to a dialogue with the other but it also conceives dialogue in open-ended terms, without presupposing that it would lead to consensus. Agonistic memory promotes radical

multiperspectivity, giving voice to the other and to subaltern narratives. It also incorporates the perspectives of the perpetrators, not in order to legitimize them but in order to understand the historical and socio-political conditions as well as the passions that led to perpetratorship. Agonistic memory agents could be defined as ‘radical mnemonic pluralists’.

These three memory modes come forcefully into play in post-conflict societies, where the role of memory is both pivotal and controversial. As Huyse (2013: 30) argued, ‘memory is a two-edged sword. It can play a crucial role in making reconciliation sustainable. But it also has the capacity to hinder reconciliation processes’. Group memories, in particular, can be mutually antagonistic and they may perpetuate feelings of enmity across generations, explaining the long-term nature of many conflicts (Tint, 2010: 239; Volkan, 2001: 87-88). For this reason, many scholars of transitional justice advocate a process of remembering focused on ‘recasting social memory as a peace strategy’ (Brewer 2006: 217), especially by relying on storytelling and on sites of remembrance ‘that bring together victims across the divide’ (2006: 224). In short, a cosmopolitan approach to memory and storytelling is considered the best way to deal with a traumatic past. By contrast, other scholars are critical of this approach, arguing in favor of an ‘agonistic’ approach to transitional justice. Thus Bell (2008: 159) rejected the desirability of developing a single overarching narrative of the past in favour of a multiplicity of perspectives: ‘a just society would strive to acknowledge the multiplicity of historical narratives existing within it’. Focusing specifically on the role of memory in transitional justice, Brown (2012: 465) argued that contrasting memories of the past should not be merged into a shared narrative but acknowledged and worked through. As he stated, ‘what may be possible is transitional justice processes that somehow allow for combative, challenging forms but that, crucially, encompass respect for the “other”’.

The main traits of agonistic memory

On the basis of the above, we can argue that agonistic memory presents the following traits and aims:

- Agonistic memory aims at promoting the **transformation** of antagonism into agonism (in post-conflict societies) and/or preventing the rise of antagonism (in democratic societies) by acknowledging and promoting different and conflicting perspectives on the past.

- Agonistic memory should aim at **incorporating contrasting narratives and viewpoints**, giving voice to the others in their own right, eg. through oral history and/or unsettling and thought-provoking artworks and installations. It should challenge and disrupt binary representations of US vs THEM, through the memory of protests and struggles which cut across the binary divide by articulating new demands. It should promote alternative democratic imaginings and alliances by creating space for subaltern narratives. A successful example of agonistic multiperspectivism through oral history is provided by a recent exhibition, entitled 'Voices of '68', which opened at the Ulster Museum in September 2018. The exhibition made use of oral narratives in providing contrasting perspectives on 1968 and the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland (Reynolds and Blair, 2018). By reflecting on the complex nature of the 1968 movement in Northern Ireland, in fact, the oral narratives brought to light the many social struggles different groups were involved in, and their capacity to cut across the ethno-religious divide. Civil rights, women's rights, requests for radical democratic changes challenged political power in ways which have since been obscured and forgotten by the entrenched divided memories of the Troubles.

- One of the ways in which it strives to achieve this aim is through **agonistic dialogue** (dialogue between different memory agents with contrasting visions of the past). Such a dialogue should allow for different and contrasting voices to confront each other without the imposition of an overarching consensual narrative. In divided societies 'this [dialogue] cannot entail an avoidance of the 'explosive' issues of history, politics and identity. Dialogue must address these concerns, not with a view to finding consensus, but with the intent of transforming the antagonist in the conflict into a 'complete, full-bodied entity' with whom it might be possible to sympathise' (Maddison 2015, p. 1021). It should aim not at reconciliation/consensus but at accepting that conflicts are constitutive of democracy. As Koczanowicz (2011) stated, 'For democracy, thus, what is most important is creating the conditions that would facilitate dialogue at all levels without the hope for arriving at ultimate understanding. From this perspective, understanding, not consensus, is a point of convergence of different contradictory powers that makes up democratic society'. However, the dialogue should also aim at a degree of consensus over the rejection of offensive violence. The problem is that justification of violence is never

constructed as offensive but always as defensive. Agonistic memory should probe and expose/unmask antagonistic movements' construction of violence as defensive.

- Agonistic memory should be **reflective** by means of exposing the different and conflicting perspectives of socio-political agents in the past but also by focusing on the temporal dimension of remembering, showing how perspectives change over time and how perpetrators, victims, bystanders etc view the past and their past deeds from the perspective of the present. In this way agonistic memory can be viewed as pluralist both synchronically and diachronically. The temporal dimension may indicate a shift by former perpetrators towards an agonistic understanding of conflict replacing their former antagonistic perspectives. I recently discussed an example of 'agonistic dialogue' that took place in Italy between 2009 and 2015, which involved both former terrorists and victims/relatives of victims (Cento Bull, 2016). While the dialogue did not result in any shared understanding of the past, many former perpetrators were able to reflect on the key role played by the linguistic as well as political construction of the other as enemy and traitor in their turn to violence. They generally acknowledged that their belief that the armed conflict would lead to a harmonious society was misplaced, as social and political conflict needs to be regulated not eliminated.

- Agonistic memory should aim at re-humanising the perpetrators, bystanders, etc. It should aim at an understanding of the **motivations, passions and contexts** underpinning both perpetratorship and victimhood, as well as the motivations, passions and contexts relating to the other historical agents. Maddison's above-mentioned reference to the possibility of 'sympathising' with the enemy derives from Eisikovits. According to Eisikovits (2010: 57), sympathy 'creates a sense of complexity and mitigates over-confident, static moral judgments of one's enemies. Sympathy can be understood as a training in discomfort'. Sympathy, according to Eisikovits, 'requires specific, detailed knowledge about the lives of others' (11). While affinity concerns 'the endorsement of an action because of an agreement with the ideology, commitments, or world-view of the actors' (12), sympathy necessitates critical reflection. 'The sympathizer asks herself: 'now that I know exactly what X was facing, what would I have done in his place?' Affinity does not involve such reflection" (p. 13).

- Agonistic memory should **reveal the passions** leading to violent conflict but also the passions fostering democratic institutions and processes. According to Mihai, emotions (a term she prefers to passions) can be conceptualised as being culturally constructed and as such they can also be transformed (from antagonistic to agonistic). Hence agonistic memory should expose the different nature of both types of passions and their interplay. It should reflect on those instances in the past when democratic passions were overcome by antagonistic ones but also those when they succeeded in keeping antagonistic passions at bay.

Learning from previous research: the case study of mass grave exhumations

As part of the EU-funded UNREST<sup>1</sup> project, the three ethico-political modes of remembering outlined above were analysed and tested in the context of mass grave exhumations in Spain, Poland and Bosnia. The findings have relevant implications for our understanding of agonism and agonistic memory.

In Spain, where the dominant post-Franco discourse was one of forgetting, the act of promoting mass exhumations to reopen the issue of the civil war and the mass extermination of Republicans was in itself an agonistic disruption. In the post-Franco climate, in which contestation on this issue was barely accepted in the public sphere, victims' associations which adopted a cosmopolitan mode, such as the Spanish Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH), proved more adept in establishing transnational links and obtaining international resonance and support than those which adopted an antagonistic mode, and also included occasional agonistic tactics in their repertoire. Inversely, an association like the *Foro por la Memoria*, which relies on the antagonistic opposition between republican freedom fighters and Francoist murderers, was less successful in challenging the hegemonic narrative of the transition to democracy. However, the cosmopolitan nature of the ARMH's memory discourse did not promote an understanding of the social interests and political power relations that led to the outlet of violence, nor of the existence of those same interests and relations in contemporary society. Furthermore, once the cosmopolitan discourse established

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see <http://www.unrest.eu/>



itself as a, if not the, prominent discourse, it started to develop antagonistic traits, in some cases stifling further contestation over the memory of the civil war.

As regards the cases of Bosnia and Poland, they highlighted a different kind of risk linked to an unquestioning and unproblematic application of cosmopolitanism as the best approach to history and memory in relation to past conflicts. This risk consists in the relative ease with which cosmopolitanism (admittedly, a 'twisted' version of cosmopolitanism) can be put to the service of antagonism. As Hristova & Ferrandiz (2019) argued:

In Poland, nationalist and antagonistic memory frames are dressed in the cosmopolitan attire of victimhood and human rights [...] In Bosnia, cosmopolitanism has been imported by the international NGOs but it has been readily incorporated into the local dynamics of ethnic antagonism.

A top-down imposition of the cosmopolitan approach, therefore, can lead to the entrenching of deep-seated divisions and rifts, which can be expressed bottom-up either in traditional antagonistic terms or, even more worryingly, disguise themselves by taking over the language and rhetoric of human rights and transitional justice. The Polish case also demonstrated the importance of the temporal dimension and of political 'windows of opportunity' for memory politics. In Poland, in fact, the initially predominant cosmopolitan mode of remembrance seemed to create a favourable ground for an agonistic approach to Polish perpetratorship of several WWII programs. However, with the emergence of a powerful right-wing populism the debate recently shifted towards an antagonistic mode, closing down space for any further reflective debates.

What has been said above has various theoretical implications. First, agonism in the sense of anti-hegemonic contestation, is largely relational and it develops even in the absence of social agents adopting an explicitly agonistic mode of remembering. A human rights discourse, for instance, if applied in a top-down manner, can be used as an argument for going to war. Conversely, applied in a bottom-up manner it can be used to politicise and reinforce a counter-hegemonic movement. Second, the cosmopolitan mode, once it becomes hegemonic, can prevent any further openings for agonistic contestation and even have problems recognizing the contingency and plurality of its own constructed 'We'. This raises important questions for agonists themselves, as they need to develop and reflect upon the ways in which they can build a passionately solidaristic collective 'We' while acknowledging the constructed and contingent nature of this community of interests. Thirdly, these findings point to the need

to distinguish not only between different types of cosmopolitanism, recognising that some versions are closer to agonism, but also that a cosmopolitan mode of remembering can be used in specific contexts in order to repoliticise the debate and effectively challenge the hegemonic memory regime. Alternatively, what we might term a twisted version of cosmopolitanism can be put to the service of antagonistic relations. Finally, the need to inject agonistic elements into the public struggles around memory at an early stage, seems strengthened by these findings, as the turn to a cosmopolitan mode of remembering, far from ensuring conflict resolution, can prove fairly fragile and short-lived, or indeed close up space for debate and contestation – if and when it becomes hegemonic – or even, at worst, allow for the continuation of antagonism under new guise.

This last finding, that is to say, the need to inject agonistic elements into the public struggles around memory at an early stage, should stand despite the challenges of promoting agonistic interventions in a post-conflict case in which the memory of conflict is still very raw, such as Bosnia, given the risks of a return to antagonism. Specifically, in cases of extreme antagonistic confrontation it might be better to promote an approach that combines cosmopolitan and agonistic traits, as follows:

- exposing the socially constructed nature of cultural memory
- recognising the ‘other’ as a human being or, as Viet Thanh Nguyen (2019) recently put it, recognising both US and THEM as human beings imbued with good and bad traits
- accepting the need to respect basic human rights

In more settled cases, a variety of agonistic practices could be promoted, aimed at:

- questioning pre-established narrative templates and hegemonic understandings of the past
- unsettling moral labels such as the innocent victim and the evil perpetrator
- considering not only the differences between (nations, classes, parties of a conflict) but also the differences within (socially, politically, strategically etc)
- revisiting the socio-political struggles and conflicts of the past in ways that question/cut across essentialist ‘US’ and ‘THEM’ collective identities.

Questions remain around the issue of agency, not least as concerns policymakers. As Cento Bull and Clarke recently argued (2019: 248), this issue is complicated by the fact that there is no clearly discernible pattern relating specific levels of policymaking with certain modes of remembering. While at first sight it might seem that supranational institutions tend to promote a cosmopolitan approach to memory, while national level ones still favor antagonistic stances and bottom-up civil society groups promote agonistic practices, in reality the picture is more complex, especially if we take into account the point previously made concerning the reshaping of cosmopolitan traits to suit antagonistic policies. As the authors concluded (2019: 248);

It is difficult to envisage either the international or the state level switching to promoting an approach that deliberately forgoes closure in favour of ongoing contestation and acknowledges the need for material as well as symbolic reparations for past injustices without the concerted efforts of a diverse coalition of socio-political and cultural agents.

From this perspective, as argued by Ferrandiz and Hristova (2019), we can view mass graves and cemeteries, the focus of our first case study, as spaces with great agonistic potential, in which the passionate involvement of the victim's relatives, interacting with the (often divergent) strategies of the memory activists and political agents, can give rise to agonistic coalitions and practices.

## Conclusion

In this discussion we have outlined a range of agonistic strategies and practices which can be applied to different contexts. Agonistic moments or inroads depend on local memory frames and political contexts, so the ways in which the different social agents interact with them convey a varied meaning to formally similar mnemonic practices. In cases of extreme antagonistic confrontation or in societies which are emerging from a bloody conflict promoting cosmopolitan memory is usually considered the best way forward. The most recurrent objection raised by critics is that promoting agonism may refuel conflict. By revisiting the struggles of the past the old animosities may resurface, whereas by focussing on just the suffering on all sides can help heal divisions.

However, if we conceive agonism and cosmopolitanism as ideal types we can acknowledge that in some contexts it might be more desirable to introduce elements of agonism where possible rather than opting for a wholesale agonistic approach. There is also a temporal element involved, therefore it may become possible to press for an agonistic approach to memory once pacification has been assured (as in Northern Ireland). Agents and practices would also differ according to context. In post-conflict societies, for instance, injecting agonistic elements into cosmopolitan practices may be the most that can be achieved. Even more importantly, however, political agents in societies with shared but disputed pasts should design heritage institutions and memory spaces so as to permit the interaction of contested perspectives within a negotiated legal and political frame of dissent. In the absence of such policies, bottom-up social agents and movements, such as victims and associations of victims, can play an important role in countering the dominant memory regime, as in Spain where they started exhuming the bodies of the Republicans killed during the civil war in defiance of the political agreement promoting forgetting the past.

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## The potential of agonism across disputed territories: exploring historical, geographic and individual boundaries - Mattia Cacciatori

In the second half of this introduction, Mattia Cacciatori, (Lecturer in International Security, University of Bath), further evaluates the potential of three traditions of thought – antagonism, cosmopolitanism and agonism – in helping to understand how notions of ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ can be constructed, and challenged. By exploring different articulations of boundaries, this discussion brings up important questions for cross-border research and the potential for agonistic memory in supporting contestation and ‘agonistic pluralism’.

### Introduction

In this paper I aim to highlight the differences that exist in the conceptualisation of boundaries in three traditions of thought: cosmopolitanism, antagonism, and agonism. The idea of a boundary, I will articulate, comprises at least three dimensions: historical boundaries, geographical boundaries, and individual boundaries. My aim here is to highlight how only agonism has a profound recognition of the centrality of boundaries in its theoretical articulations. This consideration, on one side helps in better identifying the fault-lines that exist between the three schools of thought. On the other, reinforces the idea that dialogue, even violent dialogue, can only happen in agonistic spaces.

Broadly speaking, ideas of cosmopolitan afflatus find their structural space in liberal governments. This is because liberalism and cosmopolitanism share similar visions on the eschatological elements of history (or the idea that all events in history point towards a common ‘destiny’ for humanity), argue in favour of the blurring of geographical landscapes, and they propose that otherness should be treated as an ideal ramification of the self. (Reading, 2011) On the other hand, antagonistic attitudes are usually reflected in neo-nationalist governments. This seems evident when considering the fact that both conceptualise history in an anti-eschatological manner, either by idealising the past as something to return to, (Burke, 1986) or idealising the present as something so peculiar that calls for immediateness instead of reflexive thinking. (Lievens, 2017) Furthermore, both antagonism and neo-nationalism conceptualise national boundaries and ‘the other’ as

something useful only to the extent to which it helps in defending the staticity of self-asserted values. (Haddad, 2011) Conceptualised in this manner, it is not hard to understand antagonism as a reaction to cosmopolitanism, and cosmopolitanism as a reaction to antagonism. The three elements above, and namely historical, geographical, and individual boundaries, constitute the conceptual backbone to argue that agonism is fundamentally different from both. It is worth remembering that, while not essential for the paper, agonism as conceptualised by Mouffe is also a reaction to Marxism. (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006) Marxism shares some of the problematics that we will outline in this paper, especially related to the mechanistic vision of history and the progressive blurring of geographical boundaries. This is also the reason why many contemporary thinkers argued that Marxism and Cosmopolitanism can actually be reconciled – if Marxism is diluted from its antagonistic elements.(Moolenaar, 2004)

The tension between these three traditions of thought is one that attempts, in different forms, at conceptualising the relationship that exists between the particularity of the individual and the totality of the group. Furthermore, memories of things past help in shaping this relationship by either emphasising the role of the other or homogenising it. In relation to the three elements above, agonism differs from cosmopolitanism and antagonism because it can lead to the following three claims:

1. History is a collection of histories constitutive of the present, where the only constant is transformation;
2. Geographical boundaries are constructed and can help in creating spaces for contractation and contestation;
3. The other, and the differences that exist with the other, are essential for the definition and recognition of the self.

The remainder of this paper engages with these three elements by attempting to identify the fault lines that distinguish cosmopolitanism, antagonism, and agonism in their approaches to historical, geographical, and individual boundaries. While there is a tendency of isolating these elements for analytical purposes, it is also the aim of this paper to show how interlinked they actually are.

The notion of a boundary is traditionally associated with the idea of a dividing line that distinguishes two areas. These areas can be physical, social, temporal and more. But this definition also implies the existence of a boundary space where different actors get close one to the other. As already noted, I explore here three kinds of boundaries: the first is the historical one and deals with notions of temporality. The ways in which the three schools under scrutiny approach history (as a concept) define the uses that they make of historical events. So that if history is seen as an eschatological phenomenon, as cosmopolitans do, all historical events can be considered as stages in the necessary development of the human being. If, as antagonists do, history is to be read as an imagined and romanticised space to return to, then historical events can be read as mistakes to redress and not repeat. If, on the other hand, history is to be understood as agonists do, as a collection of histories that signals that the only constant in the process is transformation, then this recognition unveils the constructed and unrealistic portrayal that both cosmopolitans and antagonists propose. I then move to conceptualise the relationship between the three schools and geographical boundaries. There is a deep conceptual connection between notions of history and notions of geography. In the sense that cosmopolitans see in history the justification to claim that boundaries are a historical contingency and will vanquish eventually in the long arch of human progress. Antagonists see in history the support they need to claim that geographical boundaries should be sacred and static. But both these schools agree that geographical boundaries are essentially problems that will be solved, either through their removal or their strenuous defence. On the other hand, agonists do not perceive boundaries as peripheral spaces that can be eradicated or should be defended from transformations. On the contrary, they are at the centre of the political space precisely because they constitute the first instance in which different societies come into contact one with the other. The last section of the paper aims at understanding how different approaches to history and geography relate to the notion of individual boundaries, or otherness. Neither cosmopolitans nor antagonists have a real interest in the other as such but are more interested in redressing the societal conditions that give birth to the other (cosmopolitans) or idealising the other as the perfect enemy (antagonists). For agonists, on the other hand, the other is essential for the understanding and existence of the self.



One important caveat to make before venturing in the remainder of this paper is that I conceptualise cosmopolitanism, antagonism, and agonism, as coherent schools of thought. While this is an oversimplification of a complex mixture of authors and ideas, I do that in order to investigate macro-dynamics in the concepts that these schools advance. In other terms, this paper cannot be read as a full account of ideas and developments within each school, but more as an attempt to highlight the major differences among the three.

Throughout the paper I will make reference to discursive structures that embody the political dimension of cosmopolitanism and antagonism. These are by no means exhaustive of the narratives that emerged out of these schools of thought. They are only used as indications of the typologies of discourses that embody either cosmopolitan or antagonist sentiments. I do so to propose two further inter-related hypotheses. The first is that cosmopolitanism and antagonism are the underpinning approaches that define contemporary politics. And second, that they are mutually constitutive, since it is possible to understand one as the reaction against the other. However, this leads to a problematic question: is there space for agonism in contemporary politics?

#### On Historical Boundaries

To conceptualise history in different manners is not only indicative of a mere epistemological exercise, but also highlights the relationship that binds societies with their past, while illuminating on the ideas about the future that different political projects propose. In this sense, history can be considered either as an ideal space where contestation is non-existent (cosmopolitanism and antagonism), or an actual space defined by dialogue and contestation (agonism). The idea of history as a physical space punctuated by boundaries is, after all, present in discursive structures that we commonly use. 'Leaving the past behind', 'returning to the Cold War', 'moving forward into the future', are all examples of how we implicitly associate temporal and geographical dimensions. However, as it will be shown, agonism is the only tradition among the three that sees historical events as constitutive of the present.

Cosmopolitan thinkers, and liberals alike, understand history as a linear and eschatological process that follows the passing of time. Progress, in this sense, is intimately linked with the idea of inevitability where all past human actions serve the purpose of constructing the contemporary. As Haas noted, ‘...when the Enlightenment [Cosmopolitan] thinkers invented the modern idea of progress, they thought that increased human knowledge about the world would lead to increases in human power to control the world’.(Haas, 2018, p. 9) If this is true, it is not hard to see why such conceptualisations of progress lead to a sense of mechanistic linearity in history. In fact, it is undeniable that gaining more knowledge of the world is both a quintessential aspiration of the human being, and an empirical evidence. There is no doubt that thinkers of the Enlightenment knew more about the world than their Medieval counterparts, just as much as we know more about it than they did. This leads to the idea that because human knowledge about the world has always been growing and is likely to continue to grow. The second part of Haas’ postulate indicates that knowledge about the world also leads to a better ability to shape it to our own will. So that progress will also lead to the creation of world(s) that are more fit to human understanding and life.

These two corollaries trigger what we might call the Cosmopolitan cycle, in which progress is in continuous development, and the world will mirror human understandings more and more. And by mirroring human understandings, knowledge will also increase. Therefore, from these understandings, progress is inevitable. Even great tragedies in history, such as the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are stages in human progress because they increase our knowledge of nature and therefore increase our ability to shape it. From this perspective, there is no going back to a previous stage in history, because going back would mean knowing less and being able to do less. (Wallerstein, 1993) For the purpose of this article, this vision of history indicates that contestation is only a stage in history, necessarily surpassed through the almost mechanistic accumulation of knowledge that will lead to the shaping of worlds more suitable for human understanding.

The Bush’s administration ‘Response to Globalisation’, published in the wake of the Twin Towers terrorist attacks, provides quite an intriguing example of what has been said above. As I already indicated, ideas of globalisation and cosmopolitanism are mutually constitutive. In the sense that globalisation has been conceptualised as the phenomenological

manifestation of (a form of) cosmopolitanism. In the direct aftermath of such a tragedy, the focus of the response was three-fold. The first point related to the necessity of understanding globalisation as '[...] a reality, not a choice or a policy.' (Department Of State, 2001) This is indicative of the fact that even under tragic circumstances, the administration felt the necessity of underlining the immanent character of the phenomenon. Globalisation was presented, in other terms, as a historical necessity. And with it, all its fundamental traits were there to inform policy options for states. However, the second point related to the threats posed by globalisation, and the Department of State felt the necessity of underlining that states, and particularly the US, still mattered. It did so by quoting Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of History' by arguing that 'Microsoft and Goldman Sachs will not send aircraft carriers and F-16s to the Gulf to track down Osama bin Laden.' (The Globalist, 2002) This underscores the necessity for states to adapt to the immanent force of globalisation. In fact, even under such catastrophic circumstances, the report advanced that the phenomenon is something that can benefit all. After all, the statement remarks, before 9/11 globalisation was seen as something almost entirely positive. Where '[...] more people than ever before benefited from speedy long-distance travel, email, cellular telephones, fax, household satellite dishes, and the unprecedented flow of trade, investment, and information.' (Department Of State, 2001) The last point advanced in the document stresses that if states approach globalisation with a positive attitude, they will remain or become the leaders of the future. Or, to put it in Bush's terms, 'American leadership remains key. And sometimes we will need to act alone.' (Department Of State, 2001)

Antagonistic visions of history differ quite evidently from the above. When Laclau conceptualised antagonism, he was quite clear in elucidating that antagonism is the product of a negative construction that divides the world between us and them. (Thomassen, 2006) While this has been applied to different societies living in different geographical spaces, less has been said about the implications of this understanding to shape particular visions of history. If we are with Laclau in considering antagonism as the product of a 'us/them' construction that allows for policies unacceptable under other conditions, this also means that history, for antagonists, has to be understood as the struggle that emerged among different communities, historically located. (Marchart, 2014; Laclau, 1979) More to that, struggle is the result of different societies coming in contact one with the other. So that

history becomes a re-telling of previous struggles with antagonists emphasising the other's responsibility in them. In other terms, history is not the history of different subjects relating one with the other, but rather the history of a subject (we) that needs to understand the object (them). This distinction implies that subject and object are, and should remain, conceptually and practically distinct. The other, should remain the other. An object of distant study and understanding, but never a key factor in social processes that can shape the subjects' lives. In this sense, antagonists would agree that the human being has obtained more knowledge of the world, and also is better able to shape it to its own will. However, they contend, this carries an implicit normative danger that blurs the lines between what can be done and what should be done. Such visions are not conceptually different from Romantic understanding of the relationship between the human being and nature, that were not by chance a product of the reaction against the Enlightenment. In this sense, authors like Schelling argued that nature would find a way to oppose human developments that were in contradiction with it and, perhaps more importantly, that a society based on technological innovations and pushed forward by a desire for progress for the sake of progress would produce an abject individual. (Schelling, 2012) In this sense these authors argued in favour of a more conservative approach to history, an idealisation of the past to be replicated in the present. In a way, going forward meant going backwards where normative ideas took precedence over the mechanistic progress advanced by Enlightenment thinkers.

A prime example of this is Nigel Farage's constant bashing of globalisation and cosmopolitanism underpinned by a idealisation of things past. Many argued that this has been one of the cornerstones of the pro-Brexit campaign, and it is not hard to see why. (El-Enany, 2016; 2017)

As El-Enany noted,

The Leave campaign argued that exiting the EU would allow Britain to 'take back control of its borders' and would 'make Britain great again'. [...]The referendum debate was eclipsed by the topic of migration, and not exclusively that of European citizens. Present in the discourse of some of those arguing for a Leave vote was a tendency to romanticise the days of the British Empire, a time when Britannia ruled the waves and was defined by her racial and cultural superiority. (El-Enany, 2017)

This is natural not only true for what happened in the UK, but nostalgia of an idealised past is a crucial element in almost all neo-nationalist movements that are spreading across Europe. Examples of this have been abundant in recent years for instance in Germany, France, (Gaston, 2011) Hungary, (Are We Europe, 2013) Greece, (Alan Jay Levinovitz, 2018), and Italy (Corriere di Bologna, 2019) What all these movements, from Golden Dawn to the Lega Nord, have in common, is that they idealise the past to antagonise the present.

Agonistic views of history are radically different. For agonism, the creation of an idealised space where all beings coexist harmoniously and contestation has vanished lies at the roots of actual contestation. (Nietzsche, 1997) Which is to say, the contestation-less utopia advanced by both cosmopolitan and antagonistic thinkers, and the attempts to realise it, are actually the root from which contestation emerges. (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006) It is in this sense that an agonistic approach to history can be considered as the history of contestations, with no mechanistic reality that underpins it. This is why many agonists argue that history is actually cyclical. (Foucault, 1978) Not in the sense that events repeat themselves identically, but in the sense that contestation is deeply rooted within every society and because of the impossibility of eradicating it, this is likely to break out cyclically. Cyclicity is the fundamental characteristic that distinguishes agonism from cosmopolitanism and antagonism when conceptualising history. Derived from natural observations, classical agonistic thinkers postulated that just as the seasons come and go cyclically, so does history.

In this sense, agonism neither shares the eschatological nature of cosmopolitan approaches to history, nor the antagonistic idealisation of the past. History then becomes a collection of histories and historical events that indicate that contestation is something inherent to every society. (Bull and Hansen, 2016) If history is perceived as cosmopolitans do, then contestation is only a mediation process in the actualisation of a determined mechanistic reality. If history is perceived in antagonistic terms, then contestation is only the result of contemporary dynamics that have been produced by the blurring of the lines that should (almost divinely) distinguish subjects and objects of history. Contestation is something that can be eradicated by going back to a *status quo ante* when the fault lines between us and

them were clearer and respected. But for both these schools, contestation is something that *can, will, or should* be eradicated from society. On the other hand, if history is to be perceived in agonistic terms, then contestation has to become one of the central principles to develop political projects that aim at understanding it and not necessarily eradicating it. Analysing contestation means analysing the relationship between individuals and among equal subjects, but also relationships between individuals and groups, or communities. If we start from the presumption that contestation is nothing more than a glitch in the system, we will not take it seriously.

#### On Geographical Boundaries

If history can be understood as a process of creating temporal spaces to confront societies with the notion of contestation, then physical and geographical boundaries become the physical dimension where this contestation manifests. Cosmopolitanism, antagonism, and agonism propose different ways to problematise physical and geographical boundaries and, as has happened for history, these are deeply related with the way in which these three schools engage with the notion of contestation.

Cosmopolitan thinkers from a vaguely Kantian perspective have constantly argued about the inevitability of the blurring of geographical boundaries in the creation of a globalised network of free individuals.(Kaldor, 2004; Kwiek, 2000) By linking notions about the inevitability of progress, and the idea that the rational individual is the ultimate recipient of history, cosmopolitans argued that geographical boundaries are destined to vanquish to leave room for the flourishing of a world society. This can have various forms, from a utopic world government (More, 2006) to a pseudo-anarchic conglomeration of free individuals able to pursue and fulfil their desires.(Harvey, 2007) In all these visions, geographical boundaries are physical limitations, stages in history, that will be transcended in order for the human being to be able to express its full potential.(Delanty, 2000) Such a view eliminates the geographical spaces for contestation because it enlarges the boundaries that divide communities to enshrine them all under a single banner.

It is hard to locate state discourses on the necessity of the erosion of state-boundaries, which is a cornerstone of cosmopolitan thinking. This is because, after all, the primal and

most pressing need for states is to ensure their own survival. But eminent academic cosmopolitan scholarship seems to echo the idea that nations were perceived, during the zenith of cosmopolitanism, as something that would eventually and necessarily be transcended. For instance, Eric Hobsbawm argued in 1992 that ‘... the owl of Minerva is now circling around nations and nationalism’. (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 192) Similarly, Gellner argued that the nation and nation-states were not something transcended but they would be subject to the judgment of history, because they belonged to a specific modern period. (Sabanadze, 1999:169) Even outside academic circles, the idea that state boundaries would collapse under the pressures of globalisation has continued to pervade political discourses. George Soros, one of the prophets of globalisation, has recently remarked that ‘...thirty years later, nationalism has turned out to be much more powerful and disruptive than internationalism. But I am committed to my convictions and to the goals pursued by open societies.’(Soros, 2019) So, while it is obviously difficult to find state-sponsored narratives that claim that the state will cease to exist, in contemporary times the idea of a progressive and necessary erosion of state boundaries has shaped cosmopolitan discourses since, at least, the publication of Karl Popper’s ‘The Open Society and its Enemies’ in 1945.

On the other side of the spectrum antagonism, by arguing that contestation emerges from the coming in contact of communities that should not be in contact, postulates boundaries as static conceptualisations of physical spaces, something to defend against the other. (O’Leary and McGarry, 2016) The geographical boundary becomes then the last line of defence to avoid the emergence of conflicts. In this case, geography and history are even more clearly intertwined. In the sense that reacting to the blurring of state lines, in antagonistic terms, is necessary to avoid the repetition of historical mistakes.(Kwan, 2004) Unlike cosmopolitans then, antagonistic thinkers do not perceive physical boundaries as something limiting the human being in the fulfilment of its full potential, but as something that protects it from the violence that emerges when these boundaries are removed. (Uitermark, 2002) The resurgence of nationalism in recent times created a fertile ground for this conceptualisation to manifest in the political sphere. Viktor Orban, recently speaking about migrants and borders, posited some agonistic questions such as ‘...can you force groups of aliens on them or should you allow them to decide on who they want to adopt?’(Walker, 2019) Even more clearly, Matteo Salvini, the former Italian Deputy Prime

Minister, claimed that ‘...the Balkan route has reopened,’ adding: ‘if the migrant flow does not stop we don’t rule out *physical barriers* on the frontier as an extreme remedy.’ (Kington, 2019) As already noted, the idea of reinforcing physical boundaries to return to a status quo ante, is typical of antagonistic discourses and currently pervades a good portion of the international political spectrum, from Trump and his Mexican wall,(Bailey, 2019) to the siege mentality that underpins the far right Greek Movement Golden Dawn. (Maltezos, 2019)

While apparently in contraposition, the two schools above are similar in the sense that they perceive physical boundaries as something crucial in the understanding of contestation. More to it, they perceive physical boundaries as problems to be solved. For cosmopolitans, they are a historical contingency that will be transcended in the necessary path of progress. For antagonists they are peripheral spaces where different communities engage in conflict. However, both schools do not acknowledge the fact that the preservation of spaces where these boundaries are blurred can be used to manage contestation. In their imagination the boundary is either something peripheral that is hard to manage and where violence occurs (antagonism) or something historically contingent destined to vanish (cosmopolitanism).

Agonism’s idea of geographical boundaries presupposes that these are the product of socio-political transformations that happened throughout history, that cannot be eliminated, but also that they could lay the basis for future reconfigurations of the geographical space. In this sense, boundaries cannot be considered as something fixed (antagonism) or destined to vanish (cosmopolitanism). They are something in continuous transformation, necessary for the creation of spaces of contestation that finds in them a physical venue to be expressed. So boundaries are not peripheral, but at the centre of the political space. (Bregazzi and Jackson, 2018; Spencer, 2012)

From this brief excursus, it seems clear that the different conceptualisations of history that divide cosmopolitanism, antagonism, and agonism, are mirrored in the schools’ understandings of physical boundaries; In fact, cosmopolitan thinkers see in history the proof that physical boundaries will vanish to favour progress. Antagonists see in history the justification to claim that they are the sources of conflict. Given that for agonists history is a



collection of histories that is likely to cyclically indicate that contestation can not be eradicated, physical spaces become a place for these different histories to come into contact with each other, and to this end they should be preserved. So that, in short, agonists perceive physical boundaries to be at the centre, and not the periphery, of the political space. It is the centre that is managed through the disputes that occur at the boundaries. And the relationships that emerge in these physical spaces are based on contestation and contractation.

#### On Individual Boundaries

For the sake of coherence, I use here the term individual boundaries to identify the distinction that underpins the relationship between the self and the other. I will attempt at highlighting how for both cosmopolitans and antagonistic thinkers, the 'other' has no space in society. This is not to say that they argue in favour of physically eliminating the other, but their conceptual roots do not include the other as a fundamental constitutor of identity and therefore society. (Cohen 1996; Lu 2000; Vertovec and Cohen 2002).

Cosmopolitan thinking, derived from liberal assumption in the ways of Kantian philosophy, assume that supreme rationality is destined to emerge out of a progressed and progressive society. (Dupré, 1998) Therefore, if we put all individuals under the same conditions, the same kind of individual will emerge. The corollary to this line of thought is that the other is not a distinct entity different from myself. Our differences only emerge out of different societal conditions, that need to be redressed. So that knowing myself implicitly means knowing the other, or at least it will lead to an understanding of the reasons why the other acted in a certain manner. This is the cornerstone of Rational Choice approaches to sociology. (Coleman and Fararo, 1992; Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997) In other terms, I do not have to engage with the other to know him or her or to understand their motivations, but I just have to engage with the societal conditions under which he or she was born and raised. Cosmopolitanism, in its liberal roots, assumes that rationality is an *a priori* characteristic that binds all humankind. In other words, the difference between the self and the other, in cosmopolitan understandings, emerges out of a misconception of the societal

circumstances out of which the other emerges. Through the inevitable progressing of these circumstances the other will become identical to the self. The relationship between the self and the other is to be constructed in a way that allows the rational individual to emerge in all societies. The main crux for cosmopolitans lies therefore in the societal conditions out of which the other emerges, and not the other as such.

Antagonistic thinkers have a different way of conceptualising disinterest for the other as such, in the sense that they postulate that the other is so different from ourselves that we cannot learn anything from it directly. However, given the social nature of the human being, the construction of the other is necessary in our everyday lives to give us purpose. (Norris, 1998) As already noted, the idea of violence associated with otherness permeates antagonistic visions of history and geography alike. In the sense that romanticising the past, or glorifying geographical boundaries, implicitly means associating violence with the coming in contact between the self and the other. While it is not our aim to unpack the reasons behind such constructions, we aim to highlight that the other in antagonistic views is not a real other but an idealised one, as was the case for history and geography. The idealisation of the other as an enemy *tout court* unveils the fact that antagonistic thinkers have no real interest for the other as such, but are interested in the ways in which they can represent the other as an enemy. (Balibar, 2005) Just as much as cosmopolitans idealised the other and sacrificed its reality to the altar of progress, antagonists idealise the enemy to make it a scapegoat. (Girard, 1996) And this is the real conceptual difference between the three schools: agonistic approaches do not idealise the other because the other has no eschatological purpose (cosmopolitanism) nor is assumed as the necessary source of violence (antagonism).

In this sense agonistic perceptions of history and geographical boundaries produce a different way to conceptualise otherness. The agonistic approach aims at developing a dialogical process that lies in between the creation of opposed (antagonistic) identities and forcibly shared ones (cosmopolitan). In this sense, agonism can be considered as a *via media* that exposes the constructed nature of both cosmopolitan and antagonistic histories and geographies (a point immensely relevant when thinking about the fact that these lead to policy prescriptions based on the idea that both these approaches are 'natural'). There are three elements that underpin agonistic approaches to otherness, as well as distinguishing

the three schools analysed in this article: the necessity of recognizing the negative construction of identity (against the cosmopolitan); the idea that such a construction entails a profound knowledge of the other (against the antagonistic); and that ontology is defined by the idea that existence actually means coexistence (against both the cosmopolitan and antagonistic figures).

The relationship between agonism and otherness is therefore founded on three characteristics. The first characteristic derives from a phenomenological (Husserl; Heidegger) approach to identity and entails the idea that the construction of an identity has to go through value-judgements. So that without value-judgements all we can say about the individual is that it exists, but we cannot define it in terms of its fundamental characteristics. When we define an individual through a value judgement (e.g. that person is an enemy) we immediately put it in relation with the rest of the 'enemy' community and with the totality of the 'friend' community, to use Schmitt's terms. Saying that a person is an enemy only makes sense in a world where friends exist. And the value judgement helps us characterising that person in his/her identity. That can only be achieved through contrast with the idea and physical existence of a 'friend'.

The second characteristic stems from the first one, and opposes all forms of 'weak thought'(Vattimo et al., 2013). The agonistic individual defines itself in terms of value-judgements that point out what the individual **is not**. A person is an enemy and because it is not a friend. But to be able to exalt the in-group differences among individuals, one has to have a profound knowledge of the other. And this can only come through a profound dialogic moment in which the individual engages actively with the other. This exaltation of differences rejects both the idea that we should be separated because different (as value-judgements link us all together) and that we can avoid engaging with the other, because the other is not us (the antagonistic-relativistic position), and that since we are all the same (the cosmopolitan-subjectivist position) we already know the other by knowing ourselves. The combination of the above entails that in order to ontologically exist, the other has to exist as well. And actually, that knowledge of the other is the only way in which we can know ourselves. And that in order to be able to assert our ontological existence, the other has to exist as well. So that not knowing the other means not knowing ourselves and that the

annihilation of the other is necessarily an annihilation of ourselves. In this sense, existence is co-existence.(Levinas, 1979)

## Conclusions

In this article I aimed at conceptually unpacking the distinctions between cosmopolitanism, antagonism, and agonism in how the three traditions engage with historical, geographical, and individual boundaries. On history, the lack of a 'longing to' distinguishes agonistic approaches from the other two. The non-eschatological and non-romantic nature of agonism implies perceiving history as a collection of histories more than an idealised temporal space to long for or return to. These histories are constitutive of the present, in the sense that they shape the relationships among different communities. The historical process is therefore a problem to be surpassed for both cosmopolitans and antagonists. While it is the everything for agonists. On geographical boundaries, I indicated that agonism differs from the other traditions by emphasising the role that heterogeneous physical caucuses play in shaping social realities. Unlike cosmopolitanism and antagonism, such physical spaces (often border-spaces) are essential for the creation of a dialogue, and for the imagination of such a dialogue. If for cosmopolitans boundaries are something destined to vanquish, and for antagonists something quasi-divine that should prevent societies from coming in contact one with the other, for agonists they constitute the physical space for contractation and contestation, at the centre of the political space. On individual boundaries, we highlighted that agonism is the only tradition that presupposes the idea of the other as essential for the idea of the self. The other becomes in this sense mutually constitutive to the self, to the extent that existence means coexistence. For agonists, defining the self would be impossible without the other. To summarise, we can visualise the main conceptualisations offered in this article in the table below

	History	Geography	Otherness
Cosmopolitanism	Inevitably progressive. Based on the accumulation of knowledge and the ability to understand and shape the world.	Physical boundaries historically contingent inevitably transcended in the path for progress.	The other is only the other because of societal pressures. The other as a mere extension of the self.
Antagonism	Past something to return to. Idealisation of the past or idealisation of the present.	Geographical boundaries as a peripheral defence from violence caused by contact with the other.	Idealisation of the other as the perfect enemy.
Agonism	Collection of histories where cyclicity is determined by transformation. History repeats itself in the sense that transformations will always occur.	Geographical boundaries at the centre of the political space because they constitute physical spaces for contractation and confrontation.	The other as essential to understand and constitute the self through a reflexive process of recognition and differentiation.

This is by no means a definitive paper on the subject matter. In line with the objectives of DisTerrMem, I have tried to shed some light on the underpinning conceptual debates that are linked with the idea of borders, whether they are historical, and linked to memory, territorial, or individual. The project is suited to probe these theoretical insights by investigating the zones in which different communities come in contact one with the other, thus challenging mainstream narratives on the relevance of history, geography, and identity. I have tried to show how agonism is the only theoretical position, among the ones illustrated here, that allows for the idea of contestation to be seriously analysed. In this sense, the heterogeneity of the project will prove to be quintessential to further identify the

fault lines between agonism, antagonism, and cosmopolitanism, and to empirically investigate the aforementioned dynamics.

On these lines, there are three avenues that I would want to explore in the future. The first one deals with Marxism and how it differs from agonism in the three dimensions of boundaries articulated in the present paper. I already outlined that the recent revival of Marxism is, in my opinion, due to the fact that the new face of cosmopolitanism has swallowed certain core themes of Marxism such as globalisation and the problem of horizontal revolution. However, I feel that a lot can be furtherly explored here, especially in relation to the notion of power, which constitutes the second avenue of further research. Different conceptualisations of power are, in many ways, derived from different understandings of history, geography, and otherness. If this is true, then we have to consider the possibility that cosmopolitanism, antagonism, and agonism, conceptualise power differently. I tentatively argue that agonism is the only tradition that can understand power as a relational concept. Because cosmopolitanism and antagonism do not engage practically with the other, their understandings of power can be summarised either as the power to do what we want, without external interferences (antagonism), or, the power to make others do what we want, because the other is essentially a ramification of us that has yet to achieve our stage in history (cosmopolitanism). Both these understandings treat the other as a recipient of power, as a recipient of our choices. Therefore, for both power is not a relational concept, and remains an abstract idealisation. Agonism, on the other hand, assumes that the other is different from us but inevitably essential for our own existence. Therefore, power has to be understood as the clashing of reciprocal powers that inevitably come in contact one with the other. The results of this clash, and the ability of different powers to coexist, is power in application. The last avenue that comes to mind deals with immediateness and history. There is a strand of antagonistic thinking, derived from Carl Schmitt, that postulates that the past is less relevant than the present. And that understanding history cannot be used to posit solutions to the present.(Weber, 1992) This 'immediateness' of the historical process can be further explored to understand if within antagonism there are two distinct visions of history, or if one is the product of the other. This would help in further identifying the fault lines between the three schools of thought analysed in this paper, and to understand intra-school differences.

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