



From polarisation to pluralisation: A deliberative approach to illiberal cultures

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Abstract

This article outlines the advantages of a deliberative democratic approach to ‘illiberal cultures’ and polarised debates in contemporary multicultural societies. In doing so, it draws on the insights of agonistic pluralism, and shows that a cross-fertilisation between certain variants of deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism is both possible and desirable. Focusing particularly on the works of John Dryzek and William Connolly, the article highlights three normative criteria for polities to aspire to, if not fully achieve, to democratise the debates over illiberal cultural practices. These include: i) an expanded notion of inclusion underpinned by the principle of agonistic respect; ii) the presence of spaces that facilitate interaction and contestation among the multiple publics of a culturally contested issue; and iii) the generation of concrete outcomes based on discursive contestation among multiple publics. To illustrate how approximation to these criteria might look in practice, the article focuses on the example of the honour-killing debate in Britain.

Keywords

Agonism, Britain, deliberative democracy, honour killing, illiberal culture, polarisation

Introduction

In recent years, many have claimed that multiculturalism is now in retreat in Western societies. Diagnoses indicating the retreat of multiculturalism in both Europe and the Anglophone West began to gain currency as a result of a series of events including the attacks of 9/11 in 2001, the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands in 2004, the 2005 bombings in London, and more recently the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France. All these events fed into perceptions that multiculturalism was creating ‘parallel societies’ or encouraging ‘home grown terrorism’ and provided sceptics with an opportunity to pronounce its death (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010).

Although the discourse declaring the death of multiculturalism is relatively new, scepticism towards multiculturalism has always been present in immigrant-receiving countries. Yet, the recent

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scepticism differs from its previous variants in many important ways. The most striking aspect of the recent multiculturalism debate is the convergence in the positions of people of traditionally opposing ideologies. This time, it is not only members of populist anti-immigration parties who attack multiculturalism; for different reasons, those with seemingly more liberal and progressive viewpoints have also begun to scrutinise the state of multiculturalism in culturally diverse societies. What has brought these two opposite camps to voice the same concerns and encouraged them to question the multicultural policies has been the increased visibility of 'illiberal cultures' and the 'threats' such cultures pose to their members, or to the members of mainstream society.

Illiberal cultures are commonly defined as communities which are 'far from enabling autonomy' for their members and which violate the liberal principles of individual freedom and equality (Rosen, 2002: 804). The treatment of women and girls in such cultures – most notably the practices of wearing burkas, forced marriage and honour killing – is usually depicted as the defining feature of illiberal immigrant cultures and evidence of the deep divide between minority and majority cultures in contemporary multicultural societies (Kofman et al., 2015). As such, illiberal cultures are associated with 'risk and uncertainty' and defined in shorthand as problem-cultures, which are 'in need of modification and fixing but also difficult to modify or fix' (Mouritsen, 2008: 5). In most cases, liberal democracies tend to address the issues related to problem-cultures in a top-down manner, by imposing liberal values on members of such cultures (Young and Triadafilopoulos, 2013). The context of failed multiculturalism and the absence of any viable alternative have eventually encouraged governments to confront the members of illiberal cultures with 'love it or leave' types of solutions.

In this article, I problematise such solutions and outline the advantages of a deliberative democratic approach to illiberal cultures, and the polarised debates they generate in multicultural societies. I develop this approach by drawing on the insights suggested by agonistic pluralism, and through a close examination of so called honour killing – an example of a 'illiberal cultural practice' – and the culturally polarised debates it has generated in Britain in recent years.

Honour killing is the murder of, usually, young women by family members on 'cultural grounds' for behaviour said to offend the principles of family or community honour. Although males can also be victims of these murders, in multicultural societies honour killings are usually linked in debates with the treatment of women in traditional minority cultures (Kofman et al., 2015). In multicultural societies, honour killings usually lead to polarised debates whereby a diversified public coalesces in two mutually exclusive groups. Such debates delineate the issues at hand in a bipolar way by drawing a line between two simple answers and asking people to take a stand on one side of the line or the other. In the case of honour killing, this goes hand in hand with the stigmatisation of an entire immigrant community as inclined to criminal practices and the exaggeration of differences between minority and majority cultures. The two opposing voices, one condemning killing in the name of culture, the other defending it, are often assumed to have no common ground on which a meaningful conversation might take place.

In contrast to this rather widespread assumption, in this article I argue that it is possible to envision a deliberative engagement between these seemingly oppositional voices, especially if such engagement is informed by the theory of agonistic pluralism and oriented towards understanding rather than decision-making on the issue at stake. In establishing this argument, I draw particularly on the notion of 'agonistic respect' as advocated by William Connolly, and suggest a set of normative criteria for politics to aspire to, if not fully achieve, to enhance the deliberative democratic quality of the debates on illiberal cultural practices. To be clear, my aim is not to verify or falsify these criteria. Rather, I use these criteria as a lens to reconstruct the honour killing debate from a deliberative perspective, and to illustrate the overall utility of this perspective in cases that are characterised by the presence of irreconcilable value differences and polarised debates.

A deliberative approach to illiberal cultural practices

'The core idea of deliberative democracy,' Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (1996: 1) note, 'is simple: when citizens or their representatives disagree morally, they should continue to reason together to reach mutually acceptable decisions.' This holds also for the resolution of conflicts of culture. Generally speaking, deliberative democrats agree that the best way to address such conflicts is to provide cultural minorities with the opportunity to articulate and justify their concerns in public forums. Nevertheless, they disagree over the rules of engagement and the scope of deliberation in such forums. The divisions among various deliberative democrats become particularly visible when it comes to the question of whether deliberative forums should and can offer a platform for engaging with illiberal cultures and addressing the 'deep differences' between the members of such cultures and majority culture.

Some deliberative democrats argue that the search for deliberative solutions should stop when cultural demands violate liberal values. Amy Gutmann (2003: 43), for example, argues that only those claims that defend the principles of 'equal freedom, opportunity and civil equality' can be subject to public deliberation. Similarly, Seyla Benhabib (1992) asserts that norms governing the procedures of deliberation cannot be neutral; they should be in line with the fundamental principles of liberalism. This means that the claims put forward in the course of public deliberation should comply with the principles of universal human rights, respect for persons, justice and egalitarian reciprocity (Benhabib, 1992: 45–46). When seen from this perspective, deliberative solutions seem to be pertinent only in cases where cultural claims meet the terms of fundamental individual rights and where conflicts between cultures prove to be 'reconcilable', at least in principle. As Simone Chambers puts it, to make deliberation possible, we must not only share the same natural language in order to understand each other, but also 'share or assume we share the same objective world, the same normative world and commensurable subjective worlds' (Chambers, 1996: 95).

Other deliberative democrats, such as Monique Deveaux, however, argue that we cannot rule out some claims prior to deliberation just because they are at odds with liberal principles. If such claims are crucial in the dispute 'they need to be put on the table where they can be discussed, evaluated, and contested' (Deveaux, 2006: 220). Similarly, John Dryzek emphasises the need to include all relevant claims in public deliberation, although he defines deliberation differently from Deveaux, as I elaborate further below.

In line with Dryzek and Deveaux, in this article I suggest extending the application of deliberation in cases that are not necessarily characterised by the presence of reconcilable values among conflicting parties (at least not in the first instance). Yet in doing so, in contrast to Dryzek and Deveaux, I suggest drawing on the insights provided by the theory of agonistic pluralism, as advocated particularly by William Connolly. Before moving on to illustrate the utility of the deliberative approach I suggest in the context of 'real life' debates over illiberal practices, let me briefly outline what I think each of the abovementioned scholars offer, and how their insights might be combined to offer a democratic response to the problem of illiberal cultures.

To start with, following Dryzek (2000), I understand deliberation in discursive terms as a broad communication process entailing the contestation of discourses in the public sphere. On this account, deliberation takes place in a variety of sites that includes but also goes beyond structured forums. The existing literature defines this approach commonly as a 'macro' deliberative approach in contrast to a 'micro' deliberative approach (Hendriks, 2011). The main difference between these two approaches is that, while micro theories of deliberative democracy tend to focus on deliberation in relatively small groups in structured forums (such as citizens' juries), the macro theories draw our attention to the discursive side of democracy. Deliberation here refers to the argumentation and contestation that takes place within the broader public sphere composed of

multiple publics. The core function of deliberation understood as such is to thematise social and political problems 'in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes' (Habermas, 1996: 359).

By adopting a macro-deliberative approach, however, I do not mean to deny the importance of structured forums for addressing the issues at hand. The existing literature attests to numerous benefits of such forums, particularly in multicultural societies (Deveaux, 2006; Young, 2000). Among them, Deveaux's approach merits particular attention as she offers the most extensive treatment of cultural conflicts to date from the perspective of deliberative democracy. As noted before, Deveaux suggests expanding the terms of inclusion in public deliberation and notes that if the purpose of deliberation is to achieve legitimate outcomes, no stakeholders should be prevented from participating in deliberation or from attempting to influence those decisions (Deveaux, 2006: 90). Yet, while making this claim, Deveaux relies on a purely procedural account of democratic deliberation (Baumeister, 2009). She provides little guidance in terms of how to envision a deliberation with those defending illiberal cultural claims and what if anything can be done to avoid the possibility that such communication does not end up intensifying the conflict at hand between the minority and majority cultures. With regard to the last point, there is ample evidence in the existing literature that emphasises the need to go beyond a procedural account of inclusion. This is particularly true for culturally polarised settings, where dialogue across cultural divides can easily exacerbate rather than alleviate the conflict at stake (see for example Bennett, 2007).

At this point, I suggest pausing to consider what the theory of agonistic pluralism, or agonism, offers in terms of engaging with illiberal cultures and the deep disagreements they generate in multicultural societies. I am aware that at first glance, bringing deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism together may appear contradictory, since the existing literature tends to present these two approaches as mutually exclusive alternatives (see for example, Little, 2007; Mouffe, 2000b). Agonistic pluralists fiercely distance themselves from deliberative democracy which, they argue, eradicates the differences between conflicting groups in the name of achieving consensus (Mouffe, 2000a). However, as I elaborate in detail below, when viewed from up close there are important affinities between certain variants of both approaches, which make their cross-fertilisation both desirable and possible especially in contexts that are characterised by irreconcilable differences among conflicting parties, and polarised debates.

Deliberating across deep difference: Insights from agonistic pluralism

Agonistic pluralism, or simply agonism, problematises exclusion and marginalisation in pluralist societies and offers 'a range of contestational political strategies through which exclusions, marginalisations, and states of domination can be problematised, resisted, and possibly altered' (Shinko, 2008: 476). The strength of this approach lies in its aspiration to broaden the terms of inclusion and participation in pluralistic societies. Deliberative approaches, agonists argue, 'create "remainders" in the democratic arena who remain unacknowledged and denied a stake in the conversation' (Goi, 2005: 62). Agonists emphasise the need for engaging with those deliberative democrats deem unreasonable, irrational or dogmatic. When seen from an agonistic perspective, 'nothing is fundamental and nothing can be taken off the table' (Wingenbach, 2011: 21). Having said that, agonists are clearly aware that allowing perspectives with which the mainstream feels uncomfortable may entrench the existing disagreements in plural societies. This, however, does not present a problem for them. Agonists believe that, particularly in culturally plural societies, conflict can contribute to political stability rather than undermining it (Iverson, 2002: 92). As such, democratic politics should not try to eradicate conflict. In fact, any attempt to eliminate conflict

completely, agonists suggest, raises the possibility of oppression and exclusion (Little, 2007; Mouffe, 2000b). Given this, from an agonist perspective the main task of democratic politics is, as Chantal Mouffe famously puts it (2000a: 103), to transform ‘antagonism’ into ‘agonism’. In other words, democratic politics should be mediated in such a way that ‘the other’ is not perceived as an ‘enemy’, but as an ‘adversary’, that is ‘somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not call into question’ (Mouffe, 2000b: 126).

Without doubt, multicultural societies can benefit from providing the conditions under which antagonism can turn into agonism, and enemies become adversaries. But, what exactly are the conditions that enable such transformation? Mouffe herself does not provide a satisfactory answer to this question. She emphasises mainly ‘equality’ and ‘liberty’ as the necessary requirements for treating enemies as adversaries (Mouffe, 2000a: 100–103). A more compelling answer to the question of how to transform antagonism into agonism, particularly in the face of deep disagreements, is suggested by William Connolly.

According to Connolly, democracies can avoid the degeneration of conflict into antagonism by securing a positive ethos of engagement among diverse publics. This requires citizens of plural societies to develop ‘twin virtues’ – ‘agonistic respect’ and ‘critical responsiveness’ (Connolly, 2005: 123). Agonistic respect refers to a particular mode of democratic engagement and goes beyond a liberal understanding of tolerance in important ways. While liberal tolerance presumes the superiority of majority identity, and thus does not ask the majority to question its own position, agonistic respect requires ‘comparison and critical negotiation’ between majority and minority identities (Connolly, 1993: 382). The key here is the acknowledgement that the self, or at least its political identity, is constituted through its encounters with others. As such, agonistic respect requires the adaptation of what Connolly calls the principle of ‘critical responsiveness’. While agonistic respect creates a political space for the expression of ‘unpopular’ viewpoints, critical responsiveness prevents this space ‘from becoming a sphere within which liberalism becomes a dogma’ (Malik, 2008: 92). Critical responsiveness is not secured by a priori established codes or criteria of judgement, rather it requires ‘careful listening’ and an acceptance of the contingency of one’s own identity, beliefs and moral foundations (Connolly, 2005: 126).

Given its focus on careful listening and critical responsiveness, agonistic respect offers an important medium for expanding the terms of inclusion in public deliberation. Yet, critics of Connolly raise concerns about the compatibility of his agonistic framework with the deliberative democratic approach. Most notably, Dryzek criticises Connolly for failing to offer an account that is oriented towards producing ‘collective outcomes in problem-solving contexts’ (Dryzek, 2000: 73). Dryzek is right in emphasising the need for reaching collective outcomes as a result of public deliberation. His criticism holds for the agonists in general and for Mouffe’s account in particular; however, it does not necessarily apply to Connolly’s concept of agonistic pluralism.

In the expanded edition of his seminal book *Identity/Difference* (2002), Connolly makes an important distinction between his account of agonistic respect and agonistic democracy in general. The main difference between these two models, as he argues, lies in the way they conceptualise politics and democratic contestation. In an agonistic democratic model, Connolly argues, ‘no positive social vision is enunciated and contestation takes priority over every other aspect of politics’ (Connolly, 2002: xxv). Connolly himself does not take the extreme agonistic position that sees all political struggles as forever open and resistant to closure or negotiation. His notion of agonistic respect aims to facilitate a democratic engagement oriented towards arriving at negotiations and settlements, however temporary these may be. This makes agonistic respect particularly relevant both for the theory and practice of deliberative democracy. In what follows I seek to outline how a deliberative approach informed by the insights of agonistic pluralism might look in practice.

Deliberation based on agonistic respect: From theory to practice

Based on a critical synthesis of deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism, it is possible to outline three normative conditions for polities to aspire to (if not fully achieve) to democratise the debates over illiberal cultures.

The first condition concerns the way *inclusion* is understood and practised in debates over illiberal cultural practices. This is where the principle of agonistic respect gains particular importance. If we understand public deliberation as a ‘web of talk’, there is no doubt that ‘[t]he more people caught in that web, the better the guarantee that all possible objections to the proposed claims have been given a hearing’ (Chambers, 1996:197–198). This however does not necessarily mean that those who are affected by collective decisions should be physically present in the process of making those decisions (Dryzek, 2010). When seen from a macro-deliberative perspective, inclusion can be conceptualised in discursive terms. What is important for a discursive notion of inclusion is not so much that everyone participates in the public debate, but that all existing discourses on the issue are included within those debates. This alone, however, cannot guarantee that the debate will proceed in deliberative terms. What is also required, and becomes particularly important in the face of culturally polarised debates, is that the inclusion of discourses is guided by the principle of agonistic respect. This is to ensure that those defending unpopular views are not only seen as part of the debate, but are also treated as adversaries, rather than enemies particularly in the context of the relevant policy debates. To be clear, agonistic respect does not require the acceptance of those views that one fundamentally disagrees with, it is rather about creating space for the articulation of these views, which may lead to the transformation of those views or the development of new ‘problem definitions’ of the issue at stake.

The second important condition of the deliberative democratic approach I suggest concerns *the presence of spaces that facilitate interaction and contestation across multiple publics*. This condition relies on the acknowledgement that the public sphere is not a homogenous entity, but composed of multiple publics, each representing different discourses over the issue at stake. In this context, a discourse can be defined as a ‘shared way of comprehending the world embedded in language’ (Dryzek, 2010: 31). Again, the presence of multiple discourses alone does not say much about the deliberative dimension of a public sphere. What is important from a deliberative perspective is whether the multiple publics of a contested issue meet and interact with each other. This interaction can be conceived in both horizontal and vertical terms. Horizontal interaction takes place among what Nancy Fraser (1997) called ‘weak publics’, because it operates in the realm of public opinion formation. As such, horizontal interaction is not oriented towards making authoritative political decisions about the issue at stake. Rather it ensures that ‘people who spend a lot of time in enclaves are exposed to competing views’ (Sunstein, 2009: 158). The vertical interaction, on the other hand, concerns the way informal debates in civil society (weak publics) interact with formal decision-making mechanisms (strong publics), and eventually influence them. In this context, participatory tools and spaces that inhabit the area between the formal and informal spheres merit particular attention. These may include not only the tools through which actors in the informal public sphere can initiate engagement with the formal sphere, such as direct protest, but also mechanisms through which the formal sphere solicits the viewpoints of those in the informal public sphere, such as commissions of inquiry, parliamentary committee hearings and public consultations on the issue at stake.

Finally, the third normative condition that arises from a synthesis of deliberative and agonistic approaches discussed above is the need for discursive interactions among multiple publics to yield some form of *concrete outcomes*. This condition relies on an understanding of deliberation as encompassing both opinion formation and decision-making. As discussed above, this requirement

is also in line with Connolly's notion of agonistic pluralism, which, as noted above, foresees the need for reaching collective outcomes, at least on a temporary basis. When seen from a macro, discursive deliberative perspective, reaching collective outcomes does not necessarily mean achieving some kind of compromise, say between liberal and illiberal discourses. As the following section will illustrate, the transformation of dominant discourses or the emergence of new discourses as a result of discursive contestations on the issue at stake can be seen as concrete outcomes as well.

The honour killing debate in Britain

One particular example that helps us to contextualise the deliberative approach suggested in this article is honour killing. As noted before, honour killing is the murder of usually young women by their male family members for allegedly cultural reasons. In recent years, these murders have led to heated public and policy debates in many migrant-receiving countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Britain (Ercan, 2015; Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2010). An important feature of these debates has been the antagonistic tone directed particularly towards the defenders of these killings. In most cases, addressing honour killing without evoking a rigid divide (and cultural polarisation) between 'them' and 'us' and stereotyping certain migrant communities as 'backward' has proved to be difficult (Ercan, 2014). Yet, although faced with similar types of challenges, different Western societies have responded to the issue of honour killing differently (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2010). Without doubt, all condemned the practice of honour killing, yet the way they did so differed significantly (Ercan, 2014). This has had important implications for the way these murders have been debated and consequently dealt with in these countries. In what follows, I focus particularly on the way honour killing has been debated in Britain, as this case illustrates some aspects of the deliberative approach I suggest in this article.

In Britain, honour killing first came on to the political agenda in 1997, when New Labour came to power after 18 years in opposition and expressed a strong interest in combating controversial cultural practices that affect women in minority communities (Dustin and Phillips, 2008). It was initially discursively linked with the forced/arranged marriage issue, which was a central policy concern for the then Labour government. Yet in 2003, after the murder of Heshu Yones by her father, honour killing became a separate policy area in Britain. In this particular case, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) labelled a murder as an honour killing for the first time and Heshu's father was the first person to be convicted of an honour killing in Britain.

Heshu was killed by her father, Abdulla Yones, 'for having a Lebanese Christian boyfriend and for being too Westernised' (*The Independent*, 30 September 2003). Abdulla Yones claimed in the court that his daughter had brought her death on herself by behaving in culturally inappropriate ways. He also noted that he was provoked by Heshu's Western dress and by a letter he received from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan which labelled Heshu a 'prostitute'. The judge accepted the grounds of provocation as mitigation and found him not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter and sentenced him to 13 years in prison rather than the expected 20 years. While sentencing Abdulla Yones, the judge described Heshu's murder as 'a tragic story arising out of irreconcilable differences between traditional Kurdish values and the values of Western society' (Brandon and Hafez, 2008: 117). This particular 'problem definition' reflected the dominant approach to honour killing at that time as adopted both by the mainstream media and key government agencies such as the MPS.

Since 2003, the British government, particularly under New Labour, initiated various participatory processes ranging from small-scale round-table discussions to large-scale nation-wide public consultations in order to address what came to be labelled in policy terms 'honour-based

violence'.¹ These processes sought to reach a wide range of actors including government agencies, members of ethnic communities, women's organisations and the broader public to identify and address the issues related to honour killing. The issue was also subject to considerable parliamentary debates in both the House of Commons and House of Lords, particularly after the murder of Heshu Yones. These debates were informed by a series of government inquiries and consultations on honour killings, such as those led by a House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee in 2007 and the Home Office in 2009. From a macro-deliberative perspective, this debate can be seen as a diffuse and collective meaning-making process in which various actors with different 'problem definitions' participated. These included, particularly, the defendants and supporters of these murders whose viewpoints were usually disseminated through the media, government institutions (such as the courts, MPS, Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO) and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)) and women's organisations (such as Southall Black Sisters (SBS), the Newham Asian Women's Project, the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organization, Karma Nirvana and Imkaan).

In order to portray the ways in which these actors talked about honour killings, I carried out a qualitative analysis of a variety of sources including documents produced by government agencies (such as police reports, legal judgements, national plans and strategies, reports from government inquiries into honour killings and written consultation responses), documents produced by civil society organisations and advocacy groups (such as strategy papers and campaign information from various women's organisations) and transcripts of parliamentary debates on honour killing and selected media coverage. I analysed these documents by employing a frame analysis (Bacchi, 2009), and paying particular attention to the ways the problem of honour killing was represented.² This analysis revealed two major discourses on honour killing: a culture-based discourse and a gender-based one. Over time, the contestation across these two discourses has generated a third discourse – the 'hybrid' discourse on honour killing – emphasising both the culture and gender-related dimensions of these murders.

To illustrate what was deliberative about these discursive contestations, and how the principle of agonistic respect played out within this process, I first present the key discourses on honour killing that were particularly manifest in the broader public sphere in Britain. I then highlight the way these discourses were included in formal policy debates, such as parliamentary debates.³ In doing so, I ask whether these discourses were included in respective policy debates in accordance with the principle of 'agonistic respect' and whether this made any difference in terms of policy outcomes.

Discursive contestation over the meaning of honour killing

As noted before, the honour-killing debate in Britain evolved with the contestation of two particular discourses: the culture-based and the gender-based. The *culture-based* discourse represented the dominant way of understanding honour killing, particularly after the murder of Heshu Yones by her father in 2003. This discourse defined honour killing as a culturally specific form of murder imposed by tradition and the community's moral values. This view was adopted mainly by government institutions (such as police departments and courts as noted above) and by the adherents of honour killing, obviously for different reasons. The media was particularly instrumental in bringing the culture-based discourses of the latter to the fore. For example, after the murder of Heshu, the media reported that dozens of Kurdish people had appeared in front of the court to show solidarity with Heshu's father on the day he was sentenced (*The Times Online*, 17 June 2007). Such reports reinforced the meaning of honour killing as a culturally specific type of murder that occurs only in minority cultures (Ercan, 2014).

An alternative way of understanding honour killing was offered by those who employed a *gender-based* discourse concerning these murders. This discourse suggested mainstreaming such killings under the broader framework of violence against women (VAW). In Britain, gender-based discourses were employed mainly by women's organisations who persistently noted that honour killing is clearly gendered as honour is nothing but 'the desire on the part of male leaders within these patriarchal social groups to retain their political and cultural authority by reinforcing established gender roles and expectations' (Gill, 2009: 477).

These two contesting discourses of honour killing were present not only in the greater public sphere, but also in formal decision-making spheres, and most notably in parliamentary debates both in the House of Commons and House of Lords. What was noteworthy about these debates was the way they included and engaged with culture-based discourses on honour killing particularly as advanced by supporters of these murders. Rather than dismissing these discourses as irrelevant, the British parliamentary debates, particularly those that occurred in the House of Lords, exhibit examples of discursive engagement with the illiberal cultural claims of the defenders of these murders, underpinned by the principle of agonistic respect.

The purpose of such discursive engagements was obviously not to validate these murders or to find common ground between adherents and opponents of honour killing. They were directed towards understanding the illiberal worldviews associated with honour killings. They also featured explicit attempts at drawing parallels between honour killing and other similar practices in mainstream society (see for example, HL Debate, 2005b: c.1432), thus enabling the type of critical responsiveness that Connolly has formulated in his theory of agonistic pluralism. In the context of the parliamentary debates on honour killings, Lord Giddens, for example, noted '[w]e should not think of honour killings as being linked to non-western civilisations, cultures "out there" that are alien to our own western culture... [Britain] is by no means free of the impulsions and imperatives which underline honour killings more generally' (HL Debate, 2005a: c.1421). The framing of honour killing as such helped to relieve the tension between 'us' and 'them' and thus transformed the debate from antagonism to agonism. It also paved the way for mainstreaming honour killing under the VAW framework, a significant outcome, to which I will return later.

The spaces for discursive interaction and contestation

As noted above, the presence of multiple discourses on honour killing is no guarantee of the deliberative treatment of the issue at stake. What is equally important is that democracies provide spaces where engagement across contested discourses can occur. In the British case, there were several participatory processes that served as a space for discursive interaction and contestation among multiple publics. As noted before, the British government, particularly under New Labour, initiated a variety of participatory processes to address the issues related to honour killing. Most notably, in 2007 the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee launched an inquiry into issues around violence against women, which involved a series of consultations with key personnel and survivors, visits to women's organisations and refugees, oral evidence from expert witnesses and survivors and an online consultation process that ran for six weeks from January 2008 (Home Affairs Committee, 2008). Similarly, in 2009, the Home Office launched another nation-wide consultation on violence against women and girls – including honour killing. The purpose of this consultation was to 'create a national debate engaging all parts of society in the task of eliminating violence against women and girls', including honour killing (Home Office, 2009).

Another key site for discursive interaction among contested framings of honour killing was the Women's National Council (WNC). The WNC, which was established in 1969 to provide independent advice to the state in policy matters concerning women, represented more than 450

partners including women and women's organisations in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In the context of the honour-killing debate, the WNC initiated various deliberative forums and played a significant role especially in terms of bringing out the voice of minority women on issues related to honour-based violence and enabling them to shape the debates that concern gendered cultural practices (WNC, 2006). Given its institutional location and semi-formal nature, the WNC was also instrumental in transmitting the issues in relation to honour killing from the informal public sphere to formal decision-making spheres.⁴

When seen from the deliberative perspective suggested in this article, participatory processes, initiated either by government or semi-formal institutions such as the WNC, offer crucial steps towards a deliberative treatment of issues surrounding honour killing. Arguably, one important shortcoming of these processes was that they have not made explicit attempts to reach out to actual defenders of honour killing, such as the group of Kurdish men who appeared in front of the court to show solidarity with Heshu's father. Yet the discourses of such groups were still present in the respective debates – they were brought to the fore mainly by the media. This is an important point, as what matters for the discursive deliberative approach suggested here is that relevant discourses, rather than individuals or groups, find representation in respective public and policy debates.

The outcome of discursive contestations on honour killing

As noted above, a deliberative democratic model of engagement differs from an extreme agonistic model through its orientation towards reaching collective outcomes however provisional these may be. Without doubt, we cannot expect such outcomes 'to fully meet the claims of all competing discourses' (Dryzek, 2010: 35). In the case of Britain, the discursive contestations over honour killing resulted in important changes in the way such murders were framed, understood and prosecuted. While in 2003 when honour killing first became a policy area in Britain, it was understood predominantly as a culturally specific type of murder that occurs only in minority cultures, in recent years the gender-based definition of these murders has gained a society-wide resonance (Ercan, 2014). This is not to say that culture-based discourses have completely disappeared from the British public sphere; they are still present, particularly in the media. However, the key government documents, such as the strategy papers laid out by the ACPO (2008) or the CPS (2008), display a shift from a culture-based to a gender-based discourse of honour killing whereby honour killing is defined in terms of violence that 'cuts across all cultures, nationalities, faith groups and communities' (ACPO, 2008: 5).

In terms of outcomes, apart from gender-based discourses gaining more resonance, in Britain the discursive contestations over honour killing also resulted in the emergence of a hybrid discourse. This discourse defines honour killing as an issue that sits at the intersection of culture and gender as a form of violence against women that occurs predominantly in traditional immigrant communities. An important characteristic of the hybrid discourse is that it seeks to avoid essentialising culture and cultural communities. Although this discourse depicts culture as a motivating factor behind honour-based violence, it does not define it in essentialist terms as a fixed and immutable entity. The emphasis here is that the same practice can be interpreted differently by different members of the same culture. The most recent 'honour-based violence strategy' of the police services in Britain reflects precisely this point. It defines honour killing as a violence that is 'used to control behaviour within families to protect *perceived* cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour' (ACPO 2008: 5, my emphasis). This 'problem definition', as noted by several scholars, offers a promising starting point for addressing honour killing effectively (see, for example, Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2010), as it takes both gender and culture related aspects of honour killing into consideration. Furthermore, the emphasis on the perceived

nature of culture in the context of the hybrid discourses on honour killing helps to counteract the tendency towards stigmatising the whole cultural community as inclined to criminal practices. Yet when policy makers address issues such as honour killings, such discourses are usually not immediately available for adoption. The hybrid discourses of honour killing seem to emerge only in societies where there is sufficient discursive interaction among the contested problem representations of these murders (Ercan, 2014, 2015).

Conclusion

In this article I explored the possibilities of offering a democratic response to illiberal cultural practices and the polarised debates such practices generate in contemporary multicultural societies. In doing so, I drew on the insights suggested by two allegedly opposed notions of democracy: deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism. I have shown the compatibility of these two approaches and argued that Connolly's theory of agonistic pluralism, and particularly his notion of 'agonistic respect', offers a key conceptual medium to broaden the terms of inclusion in public deliberation and transform the polarised debates into pluralised conversations where all positions enjoy equal hearing. I argued that if not underpinned by the principle of agonistic respect, especially in culturally polarised settings, the deliberative ideal of inclusion remains largely a procedural matter and, as such, entails the risk of exacerbating rather than alleviating the conflict at stake.

Based on a critical synthesis of deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism, I emphasised three normative criteria for democracies to aspire to if they are to transform culturally polarised debates into pluralised democratic conversations, and tackle the problem of illiberal cultures in a democratic and culturally sensitive manner. These entail: i) inclusion based on the principle of agonistic respect; ii) the presence of spaces that enable interaction and contestation among contesting interpretations of illiberal cultural practices; and iii) the generation of concrete outcomes, or policies, based on discursive contestation among multiple publics. These are obviously normative conditions that democracies can aspire to but never fully achieve. Their normative character, however, does not make these conditions less important; on the contrary, these conditions serve as a benchmark against which the democratic quality of actual policy debates over illiberal cultural practices can be evaluated and improved.

To contextualise the deliberative democratic approach suggested in this article, I focused on the case of honour killing in Britain. This case shows that it may be misleading to take illiberal claims as an indicator of irreconcilable differences between minority and majority cultures and regard them as unsuitable for deliberative solutions. Such a starting point may easily prevent a deeper understanding of the disagreements at hand and remove the possibility of meaningful deliberation across difference. Deliberation may fail, not because of the ontological essence of such disagreements but from a lack of agonistic respect towards illiberal cultures. In the case of honour killing, the purpose of discursive engagement underpinned by agonistic respect is obviously not to reach a compromise with the advocates of these murders, but to reveal the plurality of positions that exist within each culture, and facilitate a better understanding of the reasons behind such practices.

The example of the British honour-killing debate illustrates that when underpinned by the principle of agonistic respect, discursive engagement over illiberal practices can help to transform antagonism into agonism, and reveal unexpected affinities between minority and majority cultures. In practice, this means breaking the 'us' versus 'them' divide and focusing on intra-cultural differences as well as intercultural similarities between majority and minority cultures. This in turn enables the emergence of new and more nuanced solutions to the problem at hand, as exemplified here with the emergence of hybrid discourses on honour killing in Britain.

The article sought to illustrate the transformative potential of the deliberative approach at the level of discourses. In the case of the British honour killing debate, this concerned mainly the transformation of dominant culture-based discourses (especially as adopted by government agencies) into gender-based discourses of these murders. Future research might focus on the transformative potential of discursive engagement over illiberal practices at an individual level by exploring whether and to what extent public deliberation underpinned by the principle of agonistic respect transforms the perspectives of particularly the defenders of such practices.

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Notes

1. In British policy debates, 'honour-based violence' is used as an umbrella term to cover three controversial practices: forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and honour killing.
2. For a detailed discussion of this empirical approach in the context of the honour killing debate, see also Ercan, 2014, 2015.
3. This approach is consistent with the macro-deliberative approach, which emphasises the need to identify existing discourses surrounding a contested issue and their engagement with each other, rather than the individual contributions of all the various actors.
4. In 2010, the Labour Government lost the election after being in power for 13 years and the Conservative Party came to power in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Soon after coming to power, the Coalition Government initiated a review of all non-departmental public bodies as part of its programme of cuts in public expenditure. As a result of this review, on 31 December 2010, the WNC was closed down.

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