



CALL FOR PROPOSALS – DEADLINE JULY 15TH 2025

THE DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: DELIBERATION, POLARIZATION, IDENTITY, MEDIA, GLOBAL BALANCES

2nd PhD and early-career scholars transdisciplinary seminar

October 9th - 10th 2025

“Guglielmo Marconi” University
Via Plinio 44, Rome - Italy

Conflict constitutes a crucial and inevitable dimension of common life, requiring procedural and normative regulation and shared discursive practices. Public discourse has long been regarded as a fundamental instrument for democratic management of political conflict, dating back to Antiquity. Consider, for instance, the so-called *isegoría* – the equal right to speech enjoyed by members of the Athenian *ecclesia* – which represented the cornerstone of political deliberation. Furthermore, the significance of rhetoric and the widespread presence of professionals (sophists and rhetoricians) who taught argumentative techniques to effectively support one's opinions further attest to the central role of dialogical exchange in the socio-political structures of classical Greece.

Over the centuries, the issue of conflict has been at the center of philosophical and political thought, and conflict has been conceptualized through different and sometimes incompatible paradigms. On the one hand, Kelsen's idea of *compromise* identifies parliamentary dialectics as a means to mediate between opposing interests, ensuring stability while preserving plurality. On the other, Carl Schmitt defines conflict as the very essence of politics – rooted in the distinction between *friend* and *enemy* – thus implying the exclusion of those outside the political community from conflict and leaving no room for dialogical discourse.



Given the extreme pluralism that characterizes contemporary societies, it is unsurprising that political theorists increasingly seek to understand how conflict can be channeled into practices that legitimate collective decision-making. A prominent example of this tendency is found in Jürgen Habermas' model of *deliberative democracy*, which emphasizes rational and inclusive public discourse as a means to build consensus. His theory outlines the necessary conditions for an *ideal speech situation* (absence of coercion, equality among participants, transparency, and rationality of arguments). However, despite its influence, this perspective has certain limitations. First, it risks making sacred the consensus reached, thereby overlooking the essential role of dissent and the plurality of viewpoints. Moreover, as a normative model, it remains a largely *regulative utopia* since the ideal conditions it presupposes are rarely encountered in reality.

Since conflict between opposing worldviews is a structural feature of democratic societies, it would be desirable to theorize models that do not seek to neutralize it through procedures aimed at securing consensus but instead regulate it in ways that allow it to fulfill a constructive and generative function. This approach resonates with more recent theoretical frameworks, such as those proposed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. For the Argentine philosopher, politics consists of a discursive process of constructing collective identities, which emerge through an oppositional dynamic. In this sense, the quintessential political act is the discursive process through which the primary political subject – the people – is constituted. The people, in turn, define themselves in opposition to the élite through a discursive operation that lends coherence and significance to a multiplicity of social demands. Building on and reworking these ideas, Chantal Mouffe develops the theory of *agonism*, which argues that conflict should not be eliminated but rather transformed into a regulated confrontation. Agonism thus stands in contrast to Schmitt's logic of absolute antagonism. Instead, it advocates for a model in which differences are acknowledged and managed within a democratic framework that safeguards dissent. Nevertheless, such proposals present significant criticalities, as they are embedded within a non-liberal institutional framework. By advancing a radical democratic paradigm, they risk generating more problems than they resolve. However, they should be credited with addressing the complexity of contemporary reality and engaging with the increasing polarization that defines modern societies – of which the rise of populism is the most evident symptom.

Furthermore, in today's societies, the relationship between conflict and discourse has assumed an unprecedented centrality, as digital platforms – through their algorithmic mechanisms based on *filter bubbles* and *echo chambers* – tend to reinforce users' preexisting beliefs rather than fostering genuine debate. This dynamic exacerbates polarization in public discourse, creating a fertile ground for the rhetorical strategies of populist leaders, who leverage these platforms to establish a direct and unmediated relationship with their electorate. Such a context fosters the radicalization of antagonism and the incessant reproduction of Laclauian-style dualistic dynamics.

It is thus evident that while conflict should not be exacerbated, neither should it be eliminated from common life. The attempt to eradicate it is not only illusory but also dangerous, as it risks leading to its resurgence in more acute and destabilizing forms – something evident in the current international landscape. The re-emergence of military conflicts at the heart of Europe has shattered the hope of a *perpetual peace* ensured by economic interdependence, exposing the limitations of such a governance model.

Striking the right balance between consensus (essential for ensuring the basic conditions of public coexistence) and conflict (understood in its vital and generative dimension within discursive practices compatible with a liberal-democratic institutional framework) is not an easy task. The famous Heraclitean fragment "*Pólemos* is the father of all things" continues to resonate in the complexity of the present, highlighting the ambivalence of conflict: it does not merely herald crises but also opens up opportunities to redefine collective identities, to renegotiate the social contract, and to explore new forms of governance.



■ TARGET – RESEARCH TOPICS

"Guglielmo Marconi" University's PhD candidates in Law and Political Science, under the patronage of the Department of Economics, Management, Law and Political Sciences, and in collaboration with the Department of Humanities of the University of Foggia, invite PhD and early-career scholars to submit contributions exploring the multiple conflicting dimensions crossing political discourse from a transdisciplinary and diachronic perspective. Abstracts from the following fields of study are particularly welcome: political theory and philosophy, classical and modern philology, aesthetics and philosophy of language, discourse analysis (linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics), sociology, media studies, history, legal and economic studies.

Research topics include:

- **Dialectic and Rhetoric of Conflict in Ancient Political Discourse**

(analysis of the discursive strategies through which political conflict was expressed, managed and resolved in the ancient societies)

- **Ideological-Political Languages of Conflict**

(exploration of discursive strategies used to construct the image of the enemy, to fuel divisions and to spread propaganda across different historical periods and political-social contexts)

- **Media and Digital Amplification of Political Conflict**

(examination of the dynamics through which political conflict is disseminated and intensified via traditional media, digital platforms and AI)

- **New Discursive Configurations of Political Conflict**

(analysis of contemporary transformations in political discourse, particularly in relation to populism, polarization and disintermediation)

- **Political Conflict and Public Opinion**

(investigation of the relationship between political conflict and public opinion, with a focus on the role of communication in shaping consensus and dissent)

- **Aesthetic Languages of Political Conflict**

(study of the symbolic forms through which political conflict is represented and conveyed, including images, cultural artifacts and artistic expressions)

- **Legal Languages of Political Conflict**

(examination of the ways through which political discourse is translated into legal norms aimed at regulating conflict)

- **Geopolitical Languages of Conflict**

(analysis of political and strategic discourses that shape international relations, inter-state tensions and global conflicts)

- **Economic languages of political conflict**

(analysis of the economic arguments used in political discourse to legitimize or challenge inequality, to advocate for resource redistribution, and to create antagonisms between social classes, productive sectors or geographical areas)

In light of these areas, the Seminar aims to explore the following questions: How does conflict shape – and how is it, in turn, shaped by – political discourse? What are its implications for democracy, social cohesion, and governance strategies? Most importantly, may we identify discursive practices, theoretical-political models, legislative tools, and diplomatic solutions capable of addressing the pressing challenges of the present?



■ GUIDELINE FOR SUBMISSIONS AND DEADLINES

Abstracts (max. 500 words, excluding the bibliography) must be submitted **no later than July 15th, 2025**, to seminariotransdisciplinare.phd@gmail.com. They should include: full name, title, five keywords, and bibliography (max. 10 titles). Authors must also indicate their disciplinary field and institutional affiliation. The submission deadline will not be extended. Abstracts should be sent in Word format (.doc or .docx).

Notification of acceptance or rejection shall be sent by **July 30th, 2025**.

The deadline for full paper submission (min. 3.500 – max. 4.000 words) is fixed on **January 15th, 2026**. Later submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances. Author guidelines will be provided in due course. The criteria for evaluation followed by the Scientific Committee will be: relevance of the proposal to the Seminar theme, originality and academic standard. Accepted papers will be published as proceedings in the form of an edited volume.

■ SEMINAR VENUE AND LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

The Seminar will take place on **October 9th to 10th, 2025**, in Rome, at the main building of the “Guglielmo Marconi” University, Via Plinio, 44 – 00193, Rome. Presentation at the Seminar will be 10-15 minutes long.

■ REGISTRATION FEE

Participation is subject to the payment of a registration fee of 90 euros for the authors of selected abstracts and 50 euros for attendees. The fee includes lunches and coffee breaks scheduled in the program, as well as the social dinner taking place on the evening of **October 9th**.

Travel and lodging expenses will be on the participants’ charge. The Organizing Committee will point out accommodations nearby the Seminar venue.

For any further information, please contact the Organizing Committee at seminariotransdisciplinare.phd@gmail.com.

■ ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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This initiative is part of the “Guglielmo Marconi” University PhD program in Law and Political Sciences.

For information about the previous edition of the Seminar for PhD and early-career scholars:
<https://www.unimarconi.it/events/seminario-per-una-morfologia-dei-concetti-del-lessico-democratico/>