
This book is an attempt to re-think the concept of politics beyond cultural studies and political theories on civil society. In his approach to various Latin American cultural and political phenomena, Jon Beasley-Murray re-opens a debate on key concepts of politics—hegemony, civil society and the State, among others—in order to criticize any conceptualization in which the State excludes the Negrian concept of multitude. Through neo-Spinozan notions derived from Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault, and the Bourdieusian concept of habits, Beasley-Murray proposes to undermine not only Laclau and Mouffe’s Post-Marxist concept of hegemony, but also the understanding of ideology as the master concept of the Marxist tradition. Thus, posthegemony is not simply a transitional concept that overcomes the concept of hegemony, but also an alternative mode of thinking political theory and Latin American studies. *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America (Posthegemony)* engages with the richest debates in political theory and simultaneously with the most paradigmatic events in Latin American history.

The wonderfully written five chapters of this book develop the notion of posthegemony in the following manner. In the prologue “October 10, 1492,” Beasley-Murray analyses the legitimating mechanisms of colonization by the Spaniards in the 15th Century (the so-called Requerimiento). The author argues that Requerimiento has nothing to do with the construction of hegemony but with a violent act of coercion. This preliminary remark leads to the first chapter, “Argentina 1972: Cultural Studies and Populism,” which contains a discussion of National-Populism in Argentina (1972). The author denounces the love-pact between people and the nation in its exclusion of the multitude. This chapter is not only a critique of national populism but also a critique of Laclau and Mouffe’s post-Marxist concept of hegemony. What the author denounces is the imbrication between the concept of hegemony and neo-populism. The second chapter,
“Ayacucho 1982: Civil Society Theory and Neoliberalism,” offers a description of Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato’s theory of civil society and shows its failure in the study of one of the bloodiest Maoist guerrilla movements that took place in Peru (*Sendero Luminoso*). By the same token, it also shows the structural violence inherent to neoliberalism in the Southern Cone. In the third chapter, “Escalón 1989: Deleuze and Affect,” one of the book’s best, Beasley-Murray describes the offensive of the FMLN in El Salvador as a paradox between political violence and “lines of flight.” He also develops the Deleuzian theory of affects as an attempt to de-territorialize the capture of the revolutionary movement into the state-apparatus. In the fourth chapter, “Chile 1992: Bourdieu and Habit,” the author extends the theory of affects in Deleuze through Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habit”. The chapter offers an analytical understanding of the correlations between power and bodies through the history of the traumatic Chilean transition from Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship to a neoliberal democracy. In the concluding chapter of the book, “Conclusion: Negri and Multitude,” Beasley-Murray describes Negri’s concept of multitude as an opening to rethinking politics in Latin America. This chapter could be read side by side with the Epilogue, “April 13, 2002,” where the author shows how the constituent power of the multitude breaks the “fiction” of hegemony in the paradigmatic conflict of the so-called *Caracazo* in Venezuela.

Within the field of Latin American Studies, the important question of politics has also been addressed by a set of remarkable books in English with which Beasley-Murray is implicitly as well as directly in dialogue. I refer to John Beverley’s *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (1999), Idelber Avelar’s *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), Alberto Moreiras’ *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (2001), *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (2001) edited by Iliana Rodríguez, Brett Levinson’s *The Ends of Literature* (2001), and Gareth Williams’ *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America* (2002), among others. All of the above, alongside *Posthegemony*, share a common concern about the question of politics at the intersection between “consummate globalization” and culture. Although with remarkable differences and specificities, these books attempt to
think beyond the hegemonic names of the free market and the neutralization of politics in present-day Latin America.

The specificity of Beasley-Murray’s theoretical thinking can be understood as an attempt to inscribe the possibility of a certain revolutionary “becoming” (Deleuze) of politics in Latin America. However, the book does not claim that an insurgent becoming is something specific to Latin America or something that cannot take place in New York, Quebec or Cairo. The multitude is everywhere and fully immanent to the structure of our present, that is to say: the here and now is the condition of possibility for an insurgent becoming against the capitalist institutions. These institutions are characterized by capturing and reducing the multiplicity to the ONE as the logic of Unity. In Latin America, the modern historicity of this logic is clearly manifested in the history of the Nation-State. In other words, the attempt to capture the multiplicity of social life reducing it to the sovereign power has been the history of Latin America from Colonial times to the Postcolonial present. In this sense, the concept of sovereignty that emerges in modern political theory is understood as the power of the body of social life. What is at stake here is the dialectic between the people (as in Rousseau’s General Will) and the sovereign as a closure of the multitude. This is one of the reasons why Beasley-Murray’s book and his posthegemonic hypothesis reject the category of hegemony. This rejection is justified by the fact that hegemony is a concept that is inherent to the modern concept of the State, and the State is ultimately the apparatus of capture of multiplicity. If we take, for instance, the genealogy of hegemony from Lenin to Gramsci and beyond, to Laclau and Mouffe, this concept unfolds in the interiority of the Unity of the sovereign power. Although the Gramscian concept of hegemony is something implied in the “reconstruction” of “posthegemony” that the book addresses, it would be easy and too abrupt to criticize this book for not engaging with Gramsci’s concept or the theory of affects in Gramsci’s notion of Ideology as “vivid ideology” —critically developed with enormous respect in Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (first published in La Pensée, 1970). Neither does the book pretend to offer a Bildungsroman or an Aufhebung of the concept of hegemony placed after the prefix “Post”, but rather proposes to get rid of it (altogether), since the concept of hegemony is no longer a concept for a politics of emancipation. In this regard, this book has to be
evaluated in terms of its capability to re-think Latin American politics from the theoretical point of view of the concept of multitude, as the key concept for such politics.

In a neo-Spinozist manner, the book reconstructs the modern historicity of Latin America showing that there is no hegemony. At first glance, this hypothesis could be quite shocking. How is it possible for a Left-wing approach to get rid of one of the most popular categories in the Latin American Marxist tradition? The Gramscian tradition began in 1947, when Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* were translated and published in Buenos Aires by Editorial Lautaro—earlier than the so-called Cultural Studies and the Indian Subaltern group dealt with it in England and the US. And one could say that in the twentieth century, Latin American politics and all its national-popular history from General Perón to Hugo Chávez was built on the shoulder of Gramscian concepts such as historical bloc, subaltern classes and, above all, the concept of hegemony as a tool to unify the multiplicity of social and political actors. Following this tradition and in the context of the defeat of the Social-State by neoliberal regimes, one could say that Laclau & Mouffe’s book *Hegemony and Social Strategy Towards a Radical Democracy* (published in 1985) is the attempt of reviving an exhausted Marxist concept of hegemony. They claim that ‘cultural’ struggle cannot be abandoned and, therefore, the category of hegemony needs to “create a chain of equivalence among the various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination.” According to Laclau & Mouffe, the new Left, which is the post-Marxist one, needs a hegemonic project to face the struggle for ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition.’ That is why the understanding of hegemony deals with collective identities and problematizes them in a non-essentialist way. The Lacanian concept of the empty signifier and Lefort’s idea of democracy as an empty place in which all cultural differences can inscribe their demands for recognition allows the hegemonic project to be the most radical and pluralist concept of democracy and civil society. Laclau & Mouffe provided the theory of democracy with a horizon in which a multiplicity of social actors is recognized by the articulation of a hegemonic project, the project of a radical and pluralistic democracy.

The posthegemonic hypothesis rejects the understanding of culture as a privileged concept of politics and its engagement with any logic of the sovereign state. In terms of politics of knowledge, posthegemony can be thought of as the beginning of an exodus
from the concepts of the national or postnational concepts of ideology. This exodus aims at emancipating the multitude of the dialectical capture of the sovereign and the people, who are trapped for instance in the classical and new theories of civil society as the chapters of the book display. In other words, posthegemony challenges the historical ground of the Nation-State as an entity that no longer functions for a politics of emancipation. In this regard, what the posthegemonic hypothesis finds is the possibility to avoid the concept of ideology to liberate the epistemological and political distinctions between emotions, affects and habits. This extraordinary theoretical approach to Latin American history allows to sustain that “we have always lived in posthegemonic times: social order was never in fact secured through ideology” (ix). This statement works not only against the concept of hegemony in Cultural Studies, the theories of civil society and Laclau & Mouffe’s post-Marxist concept of hegemony, but also to undermine the very structure of modern political representation. This is precisely why in the posthegemonic hypothesis the multitude is un-representable in the logic of the nation-state. The “good” multitude, as the author suggests, does not fight for recognition but for a revolutionary becoming and the exodus from the apparatus of capture. For example, in the reconstruction of the Salvadoran guerrilla history, Beasley-Murray says that “rather than recuperating it as part of civil society, or seeing its struggle as predicated on some hegemonic project, I emphasize the consequences of clandestinity and so un-representability, and armed force and so terror, to show how the FMLN occupied an affective line of flight” (133). The affective line of flight is not ideological in the sense of representation and therefore it cannot play the game of hegemony as the game of recognition and representation of civic demands. The affective line is also something different from the understanding of politics in terms of the Hegelian negativity. There is no negation of the social order, no negation of the capitalist structure by a unitary political subject because if the order were negated in a dialectical way, it would leave the multitude outside of the binary synthesis of the political representation of civil society. In this sense the affective line of flight is affirmative rather than negative, and this means that the un-representability is the affirmation of an exodus.

In contemporary debates, this is one of the most important topics in political theory. For instance, the politics of an affirmative exodus is precisely what Laclau
criticized in his “Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?” from 2001, speaking of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s *Empire*:

[T]he notion of "anthropological exodus" is hardly more than an abusive metaphor. The role attributed to migration is already extremely problematic. It is true that the authors recognize that misery and exploitation could be determinant of the will of people to move across frontiers, but this element of negativity is immediately subordinated to an affirmative will to migrate, which ultimately creates the possibility of an emancipatory subject. (9)

Laclau does not believe in the idea of nomadic flows. However, like the neo-Spinozist’ theoretical approach of Negri and Hardt, he also rejects negativity, or more precisely he rejects the concept of the Hegelian contradiction, through the Freudian idea of overdetermination in favour of recognizing a multiplicity of social antagonism. But Laclau rejects the nomadic or the affective line of flight as an affirmative concept, since it is unable to think the articulation of politics. In this regard, we could ask the same question about the posthegemonic hypothesis proposed by Beasley-Murray: Can posthegemony articulate the multiplicity of social antagonism? And going back to the example of the Salvadoran guerrilla, if the affective line of flight of the FMLN is an exodus; how is it possible to think the articulation of politics in a posthegemonic line of flight? With these questions I do not mean that the posthegemonic hypothesis can be associated to the romantic vision of liberal politics that rejects the State in favour of the Market —although they have a lot in common. Nonetheless, we can still argue that the cost of renouncing the category of negativity renders us unable to think the very concept of emancipation, and this is a problem in Laclau and the affirmative concept of the multitude.

For instance, the Spinozist distinction between sad passion and joyful passion as affirmative categories of politics leave unthought the very ground of human emancipation because in those affections there is no negation. What is at stake here is the Deleuzian rejection of the Hegelian concept of negativity as Beasley-Murray states quoting Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*: “Deleuze argues that flight is not negative, for ‘revolution never proceeds by way of the negative;’ it is active, productive, and creative, as ‘the movement of deterritorialization creates of necessity and by itself a new earth’”
Thus, the posthegemonic hypothesis not only displaces the concept of hegemony but also the negativity in order to embrace the conceptual and material distinction between biopolitics and biopower. In Beasley-Murray’s view these concepts constitute a relationship between a revolutionary becoming (biopolitics) and the structures of social domination (biopower). In biopolitics—a sort of positive and creative concept—posthegemony locates the concept of affirmative multitude as the possibility for rethinking Latin American political emancipation. By doing so, one could argue that biopolitics and biopower are not just equal concepts to what Spinoza’s philosophy distinguishes between *potentia* (biopolitics) and *potestas* (biopower) but the positive path for a politics of emancipation. In this sense, posthegemony is engaged with a theory of affects and habits as the possibility to see in the multitude the new political subject of our present.

In *Posthegemony*, the multitude is the only political possibility that may undermine the biopower that works directly on bodies. The insurgent becoming is a matter of affection, a constituent biopolitical power (*potentia*), and the habits, constituted biopower (*potestas*), is a matter of inertia that ensures social order. The first one can create and invent a new plane of immanence, different from the capitalist structure, in which the invention and creativity of the multitude could flourish. But, as Beasley-Murray warns us, things could go wrong for the multitude, and the second concept could dominate the whole global existence of our present. In other words, the notion of multitude as “anthropological exodus” could also turn into a new neo-populism in which the subject of politics is caught in the webs of the global postnational and postindustrial deterritorializing production of life (biopower), and the flexible accumulation of capital.

If we do not misunderstand the distinction that Beasley-Murray makes between affect and emotion, we realize that emotion becomes a feeling in which power builds the sovereignty of the ONE and captures the multitude into the State. However, regarding this capture, what one could problematize is that the logic of the One—which is the modern Nation-State—is today (in the age of transnational capitalism) undermined by the global tendencies of multinational capitalism. National capitalism, as an inertial habit of the State, no longer dominates, reducing the multiplicity of subjectivities into the logic of sovereign Unity. As Beasley-Murray points out, “The state is an ‘apparatus of capture’
that transforms affect into emotion, multiplicity into unity, intensity into the extension of territorial Empire. This is the state’s ‘incorporated, structural violence’” (168). Nonetheless, today capitalist domination operates by liberating the multiplicity and capturing it in the logic of the market. The pure form of the market is not a unity and it does not work as an apparatus of capture but as a ‘war machine’ against the state. Here what we could ask in a provocative manner is the following: Wasn’t neoliberalism in Latin America precisely a war machine against the state? Wasn’t neoliberalist market terrorism the war machine against the left-wing political parties? Isn’t the hegemonic US transnational capitalism the war machine against Latin American national industry? These are important questions for the neo-Spinozan left-wing in which Posthegemony inscribes itself. In this sense, what the theory of the multitude cannot easily resolve is the fact that late capitalism can deterриториализе radical processes of subjectivization, and re-territorialize them into a perfect process of commodification. The clearest example of this is the appropriation of the General Intellect (one of the most powerful political economy categories in Negri, Lazzarato, and Virno, among other theoreticians of the multitude) by transnational post-Fordist corporations. This is perhaps exactly what the author of Posthegemony wants to warn us about when he says that things for the multitude can go wrong and the affirmative politics of creativity and invention can be captured in the immanence of the transnational flow of capital. In this sense, we agree with Beasley-Murray’s cautious approach to the politics of emancipation when he says, “[w]e reject the postulation of a civil society standing up to the state as well as hegemony theory’s insistence on populist re-articulations. Yet to see resistance or insurgency as immanent affect escaping stately claims to transcendent sovereignty is but a partial improvement” (emphasis added 172).

In fact, affirmative resistance and insurgency can be unleashed by the very multiplicity of capital in the way of culture or in the way of permanent revolution of the structure of labour. One could say alongside Alain Badiou, perhaps, that what is lacking in the theory of affect of the posthegemonic hypothesis is also lacking in Ernesto Laclau’s hegemonic theory of the empty signifier. Both these theories are inscribed in the axiom of contemporary conviction, which is the axiom that “there are only bodies and languages”. This is what Badiou calls democratic materialism. What Badiou in Logics of
Worlds (2006) proposes in order to escape contemporary political nihilism is the following axiom: “there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths” (4). The question of truth is not a hegemonic one and, perhaps, it is precisely the question that any theoretical thought cannot give up in order to think a posthegemonic world.