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The concepts of nationality and citizenship in the XXI century's *immigration scenario*: an *agonistic* approach

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The legal concept of citizenship as it is built on liberal democratic orders, a universalized form of government, establishes nationality as the primary political link between the state and the citizen. We argue that this political composition creates a framework of antagonism between the national, as a citizen, and the foreigner, as a non-citizen, someone who does not belong to the national political community and thus threatens the cohesion between its members and between the people and the government of a nation-state. We counter-argue, however, that the new immigration triggered from the end of the colonial era to the present, has established itself as an organic phenomenon, an analytical category used by Antonio Gramsci linked to Mouffe and Laclau's theoretical perspective, in particular regarding the paradigm of radical pluralist democracy. We highlight in particular the consolidation of collective subjects such as diasporas, whose members maintain an ambiguous relationship of identification with the nationality of their home state and the state where they are, physically. Mouffe and Laclau's agonistic perspective allow us to understand the configuration of power relations that structure the social order and the type of hegemony they construct in their intersections with the work of Hannah Arendt, in the field of political philosophy, as well as historians, such as Eric Hobsbawm and Thomas Marshall, besides Carl Rogers. We intend to deconstruct to reconstruct the concepts of citizenship and nationality as placed on the political arena, as resulting of hegemonic articulations that lead to the maintenance of harmonious and non-violent social orders, as the opposite of the political dominance. The exclusion of the person, which always emerges, generates struggle, resistance, but not through an undifferentiated inclusion, but through inclusion as a particular person, who exercises the power to be what he is, in freedom, what is the root of citizenship, an instrument for emancipation.

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immigration, citizenship, nationality, agonism, democracy, hegemony, decolonization, emancipation

1 Introduction

Well, utopia consists of not understanding history as free development, of seeing the future as a solid one already mapped out, of believing in pre-established plans. [...] freedom is the immanent force of history, which destroys all pre-established schemes. [...] Utopia is authority, not spontaneity, and it is utopia as soon as it becomes careerism, as soon as it becomes chaste and believes itself to be eternal: freedom is not utopia, because it is a primordial aspiration, because the entire history of men is struggle and work to create

social institutions that guarantee maximum freedom (Gramsci, 1978, p. 50–51).

The thinking of Mouffe and Laclau will subsidize the approach to the analysis of the concept of nationality through its political function, as a link between the state and the citizen, nowadays, given the impact of immigration on national democratic orders.

Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau delivered to the political theory field *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* in 1985. It was a political period characterized by the confluence of antagonic ideologies such as the socialist and the liberal in the world. As the “decay” of the communist project gave place to the universalization of the liberal democratic paradigm of governance, Mouffe and Laclau offered a theoretical framework not only able but necessary to understand the ongoing political crisis. Their thinking has been raised in the post-Marxist tradition also identified as belonging to a poststructuralist discourse theory, centered in the Gramscian concept of hegemony.

The various concepts that inform their theory dialogue with Marxist thesis and meant to replace its essentialist and economicist approaches, among others. History is a crucial fundament to address the dimension of the reality, which is a key element on the materialistic view encompassed by Mouffe and Laclau’s theory. The deconstruction proposed by their thinking points to a utopia according to Gramsci’s remarkable thought, represented by the radical pluralistic democratic order, to be built in a continuous process in the political, locally, according to diverse national orders that are in the world, for emancipation. Mouffe and Laclau political theory are also presented in on the political (Mouffe, 2015), on populist reason (Laclau, 2013), for a left populism (Mouffe, 2019), considered as references in this current analysis.

From this theoretical perspective, we will state that citizenship as it is constituted in the legal order built in liberal democratic orders, establishes nationality as the primary political link between the state and the citizen and thus creates a framework of antagonism between the national, as a citizen, and the foreigner, as a non-citizen—someone who does not belong to the national political community and therefore threatens the cohesion between its members and between the people and the government of a nation-state.

We counter-argue that the new immigration, triggered from the end of the colonial era to the present, has established itself as an *organic phenomenon*, an analytical category used by Gramsci (2022). From this perspective, linked to Mouffe and Laclau’s (2015), we will develop an alternative analysis of the concepts of nationality and citizenship, as a necessary reflection towards overcoming the *organic crisis* linked to immigration.

We perceive immigration as an organic movement in which non-national subjects present collective *democratic demands* (Laclau, 2013) to the nation-state, as citizens. Although, their non-national status within the national community where they present such demands, places them outside, as non-citizens, previously. We point that this antagonism is typical of the *closure* of the liberal democratic political frameworks that has been universalized in the ambience of the nation-state.

Alternatively, the radical pluralist democratic featured as a normative pattern by Mouffe and Laclau (2015) does not place the non-national outside of the national community, because it is conceived as an ongoing process of constitution through the

hegemonic articulations that take place among its members positions. Accordingly, antagonism, such as between nationals and non-nationals, that leads to the conflicts that surrounds citizenship in the liberal democratic orders, can be replaced by an agonist approach, compatible with a democratic pluralistic model.

The deconstructive method applied by Mouffe and Laclau’s theoretical framework is directed to the analysis of the crisis immigration represents at the domain of the liberal state, particularly to the concepts of nationality and citizenship. As we applied the theoretical elements of Mouffe and Laclau, a democratic pluralist order is a horizon or, as we call, a Gramscian *utopia* to give impulse to our actions in reality.

The political is therefore centered on the action of free men such as non-nationals and nationals, on dispute, due its pluralist and conflictive nature. Liberal democracies distinctly respond to the conflicts that are established in society through the exclusion of different perspectives, that can be represented by non-nationals, in order to achieve consensus and cohesion, that, although we defend is impossible.

Following the selected theoretical reference, as denying the pluralism of the political, the liberal state-nation excludes the agonistic perspective of politics and favors the antagonism on conducting political relations, such as occurs on the *a priori* exclusion of the non-nation of the national community, as a citizen, placed on the position of an enemy of the nation, in the course of a project of political hegemonic domination as opposed to emancipation.

2 Immigration, pluralism and emancipation: the chore conceptual elements of an agonistic perspective over nationality and citizenship

Mouffe and Laclau’s agonistic perspective (2015) of the political and the politics will allow us to understand the configuration of power relations that structure the social order and the type of hegemony they construct under the paradigm of the radical pluralistic democracy. Gramsci (2022) is a key reference on Mouffe and Laclau’s thinking, as we will mention. Conceptual elements of Foucault’s (2013) thinking presented by Mouffe and Laclau’s work are also included in the present analysis. Beyond the authors’ references, we have found intersections between their thinking and the works of Weil (2018) and Arendt (1998, 2018), in the field of political philosophy, the historian Hobsbawm (1995) and Rogers (2009, 2022), as will be explained. Based on this framework, we will construct the problem we refer to, by placing it in the political field and deconstruct to reconstruct the concepts of nationality, citizenship, pluralism and emancipation.

2.1 Immigration: a contemporary organic phenomenon

We face immigration as a contemporary *organic phenomenon* based on the concept developed by Gramsci because we perceive it as an event that is not occasional, but has been continuing for decades rooted in relations of power, understood as a starting point of research and interpretation of a problem (Gramsci, 2022, p. 40). As Gramsci states:

Organic phenomena give rise to historical-social criticism, which involves large groups, in addition to the people immediately responsible and the management staff. When studying a historical period, the great importance of this distinction is revealed. A crisis takes place and, sometimes, it lasts for decades. This exceptional duration means that irremediable contradictions in the structure have been revealed (have reached maturity) and that the political forces that act positively to preserve and defend their own structure strive to remedy it within certain limits and overcome those forces (Gramsci, 2022, p. 37).

Accordingly, we refute a voluntarist approach to immigration which reduces it to an individual practice of the immigrant, that challenges the foundations of the state-nation and its legal apparatus, by contemplating it as a political phenomenon linked to a crisis that can be explained through the theory of hegemony. The framing of immigration as an organic phenomenon allows us to move away from an individualistic liberal perspective on immigration, while expanding the field of knowledge of its real historical causes and its political dimensions, where it is located, as guided by the theoretical framework consolidated in Mouffe and Laclau (2015), which revisits and adopts Gramscian references.

Immigration is a *phenomenon* that occurs in an international domain, between national communities, where the relations of force will develop in a singular way to form a Gramscian *historical bloc* as equivalent to Mouffe and Laclau's discursive formation. *Discourse* is the "structured totality resulting from this articulatory practice" (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 178) practice, as manifested in history is a key that opens the political *scenario* where immigration is produced.

2.2 Local, temporal and political dimension of immigration: neocolonialism, neoliberal imperialism and construction of dependency relations

The end of *World War II* (1945) is a historical milestone from which the panorama of a *new world order* unfolds continuously to the present. Immigration, as we see it, has roots in this scenario. In order to address the political features that emerge, we highlight the outbreak of the *Cold War* (1947–1989). Hobsbawm (1995), p. 223 divides this period into blocks, the *First* and *Second Cold Wars*, which began in the 1970s.

During the second *Cold War* a number of events shook the economies of the *Western* countries and contributed to the emergence of neoliberalism, in addition to the political and ideological bipolarity that marked the entire period of the *Cold War*. The reheating of the arms race between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the revolutions that broke out in a large part of the *Third World* (Africa, Asia, and America) due to the political mobilization of socialist tendencies in several countries and the *Oil Crisis*, among others, are key events that give birth to reinvention of imperialism on a neoliberal basis, as a response to the new crisis of capitalism that emerged during this period. In this panorama, immigration, as an *organic phenomenon*, as we see it, sinks its roots. As Hobsbawm states: "Unfortunately, in the dark 1970s and 1980s, it became increasingly difficult to separate labor migration from the torrents of men, women and children who fled or were

uprooted by famine, political or ethnic persecution, war and civil war, so to speak. First world countries, equally committed (in theory) to helping refugees and (in practice) preventing immigration from poor countries, face serious problems of political and legal casuistry" (1995, p. 356).

The new world order evolves under the influence of these movements, of people and capital, thus shaped by the end of colonial era, replaced by neocolonialism, manifested in imperialist policies of a neoliberal kind. The demographic explosion in the *Third World*, economic globalization and the emergence of a new international division of labor are linked factors that take place in this period and shape immigration.

From a political point of view, the decline of colonial empires, the trans-nationalization of capital and the outbreak of national liberation movements are events that shift the relations of power at the international level and give dominance for the USA as the new hegemonic pole of global capitalism. The term *neocolonialism* is coined in this environment to designate the dependence maintained between former colonies and colonial powers, in the military, political, cultural and economic domains, taking the form of cooperation agreements (Vicentini, 2006, p. 210):

In the military field, such cooperation took place through the sale of weapons, the training of officers and the presence of advisors and missions. On a cultural level, the exchange meant that even literacy primers came from Europe, where young elites, future administrators of the country, also studied. As for the economy, not only did the external dependence of these countries—as exporters of raw materials and primary products—imply the maintenance of links of subordination, now modernized; at the internal level, production systems remained almost unchanged and foreign interests were preserved. The lack of technology and lack of technicians made this subordination structural. When it came to diplomacy, most young African nations had little room for maneuver due to lack of resources and external dependence. Such factors served to configure a typically neocolonial relationship.

Neocolonialism emerges in the context of globalization, a vehicle for promoting a new sharing of the world, not as colonies belonging to metropolises, but as a means for opening up national spaces for use in the accumulation of capital by the *First World*. The bonds of dependence, added to the socioeconomic problems that deepened with independence, favored African immigration to countries that were once colonies. For illustration purposes, Hobsbawm (records that in 1968), migrants from the Maghreb (Tunisia, Morocco and, above all, Algeria), former French colonies, already made up 25% of all foreigners in France (1998, p. 422).

The new imperialist neoliberal order is thus created and led by former colonial powers, victorious over the communist project of *October* and raise its flag in the world with the Fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989. Social disintegration and economic impact of neoliberalism in the new independent states is manifested in the increase of social inequality due to scarce employment, salary reduction, due to tax concessions to capital, the fiscal deficit that generates cuts in social expenses, such as in education, health, for example, the displacement of workers and small producers to the tertiary sector dominated by large foreign companies that promote semi-slavery work, due to

deindustrialization, to mention some examples (Vicentini, 2006, p. 131–132).

Population data portray this historical and political context where immigration is rooted. The civil organization *Migration Policy Institute*,¹ based on confidential data collected by the United Nations (UN), reports² that the number of immigrants tripled from 1960 to 2020, from 77 million to 281 million. If we look at migratory flows, in quantitative terms, the panorama follows this upward line, with a concentration of immigrants in the so-called first world countries, departing from the *Third World*.³

Accordingly, in the USA, for example, the population of immigrants increased five-fold in this period, from 10,825,600 million to 50,632,800, which represent 5.8 and 15.3% of the immigrant population. In Canada, this contingent increased from 3,251,400 to 8,049,300 immigrants, from 15 to 21.3% of the population, in Spain, from 210,900, to 6,842,200 immigrants, varying from 0.7 to 14.6%, in France, from 3,507,200 to 8,524,900 immigrants, from 7.7 to 13.1%, in the United Kingdom, from 1,661,900 to 9,359,600 immigrants, from 3.2 to 13.8% in 2020.⁴ In an opposite movement, the report indicates that the immigrant population in former colonies decreased, for example in Nigeria, from 0.7 to 0.6% of the population, in India, by 1.3%, from 8,845,500 to 4,818,700 immigrants, and in Brazil, from 1,397,100 to 1,079,700, from 1.9 to 0.5% of the immigrant population.

Having made the above contextualization, we can then contemplate immigration, in the panorama in which it is inscribed, as a global *organic phenomenon* linked to economic forces, where neoliberalism stands out as new expression of imperialism and neocolonialism, which involve the exercise of political power, as domination. Its dimensions are economical, political admit institutional and ideological expressions to make up the unity of a

historical block, according to Gramsci's thought (*Cadernos do cárcere*, 2023, p. 239) and also affective, according to Mouffe and Laclau (2015).

2.3 The *spiritual* dimension of immigration: uprooting, domination and emancipation

To understand the all dimensions of immigration, on the process of social constitution, we resort to the concept of *déracinement*, which means uprooting people, applied by Weil (2018), p. 20, which highlights the existential bond that is broken in the course of colonial domination of peoples. For Weil, colonial practices of uprooting were linked to territorial conquest, extermination, enslavement, torture, constituting an internal element, “a moral decomposition that not only destroyed in advance any hope of effective resistance, but brutally and definitively broke the continuity of spiritual life, replacing it with a bad imitation of mediocre winners” (Weil, 2018, p. 19).

The identification of the enemy that constitutes itself as a spirit is an element that we highlight in Weil's thought (2018). Ideology, the moral element, are fundamental, according to the logic constructed by the author, for domination to be reproduced internally, like a spirit, in the relations of a people with themselves.

The *spirit of domination* (2018, p. 21), in this sense, she observes, is the true enemy, to be fought in a practice of decolonization, and not just the foreign nation. We understand that resistance should not be based on building another sphere of domination, but should be established on its own ideal, free from the logic of domination.

Rootedness, in Weil's thought (2018), as we understand it, fulfills the function of emancipation, as an ideal, of recovery of the past, since colonial practices deprived colonized peoples of their history, through cultural domination. “The loss of the past is the fall into colonial servitude” (Weil, 2018, p. 89–90) states Weil, referring to the prohibition of cultural, traditional, local expression, such as festivals, religions, the native language, what it is the identity and pride of a people, which makes them strong, joyful—although it should not be limited to that task.

When taking a look at the post-colonial reality, we argue that emancipation did not result from colonial independence, whenever the domination of colonial powers over colonial peoples was replaced by other forms of subordination, political, economic, ideological, which prevented rooting, to pay homage to Weil's brilliant thought. As Weil deciphers, “Without a doubt, national independence is a good, but when it presupposes such submission to the state that coerces it, exhaustion and hunger are so great that, under foreign rule, it is vain (Weil, 2018, p. 77).

We conclude, therefore, that immigration, in the form we identify, due to its historical, economic, political and ideological formation, reverberates colonial uprooting, as it establishes a line of continuity from the colonial era to the present. In this context, uprooting expresses an internal, spiritual, ideological dimension of immigration.

To this end, we quote Mouffe and Laclau, who conceptualize ideology as “an organic and relational whole, embodied in apparatuses and institutions, which welds around certain basic articulatory principles, the unity of a historical block” (2015, p. 101). In a complementary way, we point out that the uprooting associated with immigration, which originates in the colonial era, and extends to the present, can be explained by the Gramscian category of organic historical ideology, necessary for a certain structure etc. (Mouffe and

1 The Migration Policy Institute aims to improve Immigration and integration policies through credible research and analysis, opportunities for learning and dialogue, and the development of new ideas to address complex policy issues. Founded in 2001, it is headquartered in Washington, DC, USA, and virtually at the following virtual address: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>.

2 The non-governmental organization Migration Policy Institute carries out a tabulation of data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs—Population Division, contained in the publication: Stock of International Migrants 2020: Destination, Table 1: Stock of International Migrants in the Mid-Year by Sex and by Region, Country or Area of Destination, 1990–2020. Available at: www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock.

3 As Figliino (2016, p. 6) explains, “During the hunt for zones of influence, the decolonization process was seen as an opportunity: the Second World War weakened the colonizing countries, mainly France and England, making it expensive to maintain their colonies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Despite declaring themselves anti-communist, most of the new states did not align themselves with any of the hegemonic powers and, therefore, this new set of countries—which together made up more than half of the world—was called the “third world” (in the first world countries allied to the USA were included; in the second world, countries allied to the USSR).”

4 All data is available on the Migration Policy Institute website, and is obtained using a dynamic search tool that can be used at the following website: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/international-migrants-country-destination-1960-2020>.

Laclau, 2015, p. 239): “While they are historically necessary, ideologies have a validity that is “psychological” validity: they “organize” human masses, form the terrain on which men move, become aware of their position, fight, etc. While they are arbitrary, they create nothing more than individual “movements,” controversies.”

Immigration, as we present it, therefore, is an *organic phenomenon* that is part of a historical block marked by relations of force whose fundamental moments, according to Gramscian terminology, are represented by neoliberalism and the universalization of liberal democracy as a standard of government for States-nation, as hegemonic forces that establish a historical bloc (Gramsci, 2023, p. 239). Emancipation is part of this reality, as an ideal of the peoples and to only of the individuals, particularly related to the immigrant’s struggle to achieve citizenship as non-nationals migrants within the scope of the nation-state associated with a resizing of the concept of nationality.

2.4 The political: nationality, citizenship—an agonistic perspective

2.4.1 Democracy: freedom, violence, and agonism

Supported by Mouffe and Laclau (2015), we contrast the paradigm of liberal democracy with radical pluralist democracy, as a critical direction that guides this conceptual analysis. In this universe, we highlight the notion of pluralism that we adopt, which is not constructed in the *political*, but is constitutive of it on the ontological level. Accordingly, politics is nourished by conflict, and not by a consensus pursued in the context of liberal democratic projects.

Arendt (1998) teaches us the irremediable association between politics and plurality: “politics is based on the plurality of men. (...) Politics is about coexistence between those who are different” (1998, p. 21). In the same sense, Mouffe states that “plurality is not the phenomenon to be explained, but the starting point of the analysis” (Arendt, 1998, p. 21).

Here we pause to point out that Mouffe (2015) indicates that his conception of the political differs from Arendt’s, in a way that seems irreconcilable. As Mouffe states, “[s]ome theorists, like Hannah Arendt, see the political as a space of freedom and public discussion, while others consider it a space of power, conflict and agonism” (2015, p. 8) like Mouffe.

We argue that it is possible to indicate selectively points of convergence between both authors, through the interpretation we make of some of their theoretical categories, since they follow the same matrix of perception of the political, as a *locus* where agonistic relationships, such as power relationships, develop. We also perceive that domination is incompatible with the configuration of the political, for both, since it is conceived as a *place* in which power is an object of dispute, struggle by a plurality of subjects. If for Arendt, the totalitarian state, through violence, prevents the political from being constituted, Mouffe address domination in the spectrum of antagonisms that prevent hegemonic articulations to take place. In her words (Mouffe, 2015, p. 20): “[w]hat is at stake in agonistic conflict, on the contrary, is the very configuration of power relations around which society is structured: it is a conflict between opposing hegemonic projects that can never be rationally accommodated. Although the antagonistic dimension never ceases to be present and the confrontation is real, it

develops under conditions that are regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries.”

Precisely, Arendt explains the origins of agonism in the Athenian city-state to justify a concept of power whose essence was not inscribed in a command/obedience relationship that traced the equivalence between law and order, dominance and power. Thus, Arendt illuminates the essence of democracy through an analysis of the political experiences originated in the democratic *polis* and the Roman *res publica*, since they are preserved in the “political language of the west” (Arendt, 2018, p. 138).

The *polis* provided a space where free men could relate based on their differences, affirming their autonomy as an expression of power. In the same direction, Mouffe and Laclau reiterates their understanding that the existence of legitimate channels for the expression of divergent voices, as adversaries and not enemies, is a mark of agonistic democracy and reduces the possibility of antagonism, which takes violent forms (2015, p. 20). A pluralist democracy can be achieved in those terms, by the acceptance of conflict as a constitutive feature of the political.

2.4.2 Hegemonic articulations and pluralism: building equivalence and difference

Pluralism, as an attribute to the political, is tied to the construction of a democratic order. Mouffe argues in this sense, that this perspective moves away from approaches that perceive consensus as a possibility, such as liberal democratic projects. The political relationship between autonomous subjects implies adversity, agonism, in respect for the real plurality of the political. The elimination of conflicts is a goal that goes against the pluralist constitution of it, because, in reality, eliminates the voice of the subject who supports a position that does not fit into the ideal unitary political project that consensus represents (2015, p. 28–29).

We argue, from this viewpoint, that consensus occurs through a system of equivalences, such as population, people and nation, for example, which equalizes and disqualifies attributes that define these subjects in a way that results in consensus and the establishment of a continuous process of construction of differences: the national, the foreigner, the citizen, the illegal immigrant.

The openness to the displacement of identities reveals the agonistic mark of political relations in a democratic order that reflects the pluralism of the social order. On the contrary, a system of greater rigidity of equivalence systems causes the multiplication of antagonisms and the establishment of a crisis situation.

A concept note is needed at this point. According to Mouffe and Laclau’s theoretical framework, centered on their approach to hegemony, the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference guide the process of placement of the subjects at the social arena as relations of power. As these authors point out:

Any position in a system of differences, to the extent that it is denied, can become a locus of antagonism. Thus, there is a variety of possible antagonisms in the social, many of them in opposition to each other. The important problem is that the chains of equivalence will vary radically according to the antagonism that is at stake; and that they can affect and penetrate, in a contradictory way, the identity of the subject itself. This gives rise to the following conclusion: the more unstable the social relations, the less successful any system of differences will be and the points of

antagonism will proliferate. This proliferation will make it more difficult to construct any centrality and, consequently, to establish unified chains of equivalence (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 209).

In an agonistic relationship, subjects are forged in ambiguity, not reducible to economic or class relations, nor to the moral and intellectual domain, as to national origin. The logic of difference expands the number of subject positions that participate in the democratic game. The irreducible character of the conflict, between free men, whether in the sense used by Arendt, or as a construction in the midst of hegemonic articulations, according to Mouffe's thought (2015), resizes the consensus in the political.

Plurality, in these terms, is the basis of a democratic political project. It establishes coexistence between those who are different, in freedom, because, in order to coexist, they were already free. Without freedom, there is no democratic politics, consequently, but domination. And, therefore, politics cannot serve to achieve freedom.

We argue from these references, based on Carl Rogers' concept of *personal power* (2022), that although plurality is necessarily conflicting, because of difference, it can be surpassed if difference is accepted as an expression of freedom manifested in the political, due to the plurality that is constitutive of it.

2.4.3 Personal power and the ability to become a citizen: the encounter with singularity as a path to encounter the *other* in the political

Agonism brings to the stage of political relations the possibility of struggle between adversaries, so that difference is not suppressed by domination that creates false consensus, raised upon an identification of an enemy. Conflict, therefore, seems to be an insurmountable condition of existence in society, necessary for difference to be expressed in freedom. Mouffe and Laclau (2015) rely on the Lacanian and Freudian theories⁵ as the foundation of the motivations and limits that the subject translates and faces in society.

We intend to dialogue with this perspective. And to do so, we turn to the thinking of Rogers (2009, 2022). Based on his empirical studies as a clinical psychologist, and on philosophical foundations, especially those of Kierkegaard (2019, p. 206, 227–228), Rogers states that the conflict is surmountable through the acceptance of difference that the *other* signifies. This acceptance of difference can occur through a struggle, a conflict, between positions that clash, but do not aim to suppress one another. The acceptance of the *other* arise from the acceptance of oneself in reality.

The possibility of one expressing his singularity in public is conditioned by the acceptance of the plurality that constitutes reality by the ones that form a collectivity. Thus, politics will have as its driving force the acceptance of difference, rather than domination

through violence. Our intention by adding Rogers' theoretical input is to bring and justify a complementary perception, inspired by the thinking of Mouffe and Laclau (2015), at the point where they reflect over conflict and difference on the process of social constitution in reality.

Accordingly, what one *is* can be described as a process of being what one *is* and not what one *should be*, a process in which the person encounters his personal conflicts, between his *persona* and his essence through experience. This means that the person seeks unity and harmony in his own real feelings and reactions. As Rogers explains, the "true self is something that is quietly discovered through one's own experience, and not imposed on it" (2009, p. 129).

The person is conceived by Rogers as a living, oscillating process, which, the more *he* recognizes himself as who he really is, the more he is aware of himself, his feelings and attitudes, the more he is open to experience and perceive the reality external to him, instead of preconceived through rigid standards, internal to himself and not as it is. As Rogers explains (2009, p. 131): "he is able to assimilate the evidence in a new situation, as it is, rather than distorting it to fit the standard he already holds. As you would expect, this growing ability to be open to experience makes you much more realistic in dealing with our new people, new situations, new problems. It means that his beliefs are not rigid, that he can tolerate ambiguity. He can obtain the most conflicting evidence without it forcing him to close himself off from the situation."

With the support of Søren Kierkegaard, Rogers situates the purpose of life as "being what one really is" (2009, p. 189) and describes the individual in his real existence (2009, p. 195): "[a]n individual who exists is in a constant process of becoming... and translates everything he thinks into process terms. The same thing happens (with him) ...the same as with the writer and his style; only those who have never left anything behind, but 'stir up the waters of language', always starting over, have a style. And that is why the most common expression takes on the freshness of a new birth."

Becoming oneself is an unfinished process that, therefore, does not admit a fixed conception of a "good life," but a general *direction* that contains facets identified by Rogers (2009, p. 2010): "the search for autonomy, the discernment of objects one wants to achieve, self-direction on the way to being all your completeness. On this path, the acceptance of others due to the openness given to experience, is opposed to defending oneself and is due to trust in oneself, to the fact that one is what one is in depth." The "good life" is a process and not a state of being, a direction, not a destination, as he explains, chosen by the total organism when there is inner freedom to move in any direction, and such a direction reveals certain universality (2009, p. 213).

This view of the individual subject is also extended to collective subjects, by Rogers, following the example of the American nation. He wonders how this "nation" should present itself to other nations, if the people were open and had accepted what they truly are, instead of an idealized version of them. Evil would be identified with the opposite of becoming a person in reality, in this scenario. The denial of what one truly *is* leads to evil. From this perspective, conflict is mitigated while the difference that the *other* exposes is accepted. Violence can be equalized to evil, on the political, when it prevents one to become what he is, in reality, in his singularity, by denying his difference and, therefore, pluralism.

⁵ The authors develop their theoretical foundations based on lacanian and freudian thinking at Hegemonia e Estratégia socialista, where the concept of nodal point is highlighted. As a reference is unlisted of this concept, the clarification of the meaning of this was achieved by the studies of authors that wrote about it, such as Biglieri and Perelló (2012, p. 29), that explains that Lacan's concept of nodal point allows the fixation of meanings in the game of differences, in the course of relations between subjects, whose identity is undetermined, *a priori*, and is formed in this environment.

Therefore, we consider citizenship in its current, variable expression, and not fixed or immutable, as Mouffe and Laclau teach, when they discard essentialism as a means of determining reality. In this line, an approach to citizenship as a potential power, which is of the essence of the subject of rights, or which is apparent, and which is limited to the state, is refuted. This is because it is understood that emancipation is not written in the laws, but in the reality of power relations and because citizenship can be realized in relation to a pluralist democratic formation, in which nationalism has an emancipatory and not an authoritarian meaning.

The citizen, thus, is that social agent who intervenes at the level of the political community – which can be identified as a power, following Mouffe's approach:

Although it is a central category in a pluralist liberal democracy, citizenship can be understood in different ways, which command very different conceptions of politics. Liberalism conceives citizenship as a mere legal status and sees the citizen as an individual with rights, free from any identification with an “us.” In the democratic tradition, however, citizenship is conceived as active involvement in the political community, acting as part of “us,” according to a certain conception of general interest. It is for this reason that the promotion of a radical democratic conception of citizenship is key to the fight against post-democracy (2019, p. 104–105).

The author qualifies the subjectivation of the citizen by including belonging to or integration into a national people, or a population—a “us” that is endowed with its own general interest. Her allusion to post-democracy refers to the present time, which she calls advanced capitalism, in which neoliberal hegemony predominates and a counter-hegemonic struggle emerges to resignify the “public in terms of the rescue of a civic republicanism” (Mouffe, 2019, p. 105).

Her radical democratic conception of citizenship as a “grammar of conduct” (Mouffe, 2019, p. 106) can be the place for the construction of a “people” in which they act as social agents who are citizens, governed by ethical-political principles of freedom and equality extended to a vast sphere of social relations. The conceptual orientation for citizenship in this work, therefore, dialogues with such premises.

2.5 The social constitutional process: the locus of the subjects within power relations

According to our theoretical framework, social subjectivation are not established *a priori* but occurs in practices of hegemonic articulation in the continuous process of structuring society. The political bond, therefore, occurs in the midst of hegemonic relations, as an instrument of institution of the political.

Mouffe and Laclau's hegemonic subject does not fit within social classes (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat), according to the classical Marxist tradition and its Gramscian version, as structuring power relations. Although, there is no dismantling of the class structure of societies, even though hegemonic subjects are defined in a non-essentialist way. Mouffe and Laclau argue that “the plenitude of class identities of classical Marxism had to be replaced by hegemonic

identities constituted through non-dialectical mediations” (2015, p. 38).

In respect to the concept of ideology adopted by Mouffe and Laclau, it is close to the Gramscian notion and with this a new concept of hegemony or hegemonic articulation is established, based on a different approach to the subject: non-essentialist, indeterminate *a priori*. As they explain (2015, p. 39), the notion of subject before subjectivation establishes the centrality of the category “identification” and allows, in this sense, to conceive hegemonic transitions that are entirely dependent on political articulations and not on entities constructed outside the political field—such as “class interests.” In fact, political-hegemonic articulations retroactively create the interests they intend to represent.

Hegemonic articulation is a central concept in Mouffe and Laclau's theoretical framework. *Articulation* is defined as “any practice that establishes a relationship between elements in such a way that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 178). *Discourse* is the “structured totality resulting from this articulatory practice,” the *moments* are the “differential positions that appear articulated in a discourse” and the *element* is “any difference not articulated in discourse (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 178).

We can conclude that in a totality articulated in a *discourse*, every *element* is situated as a *moment*, which occupied a differential position and was transformed as an identity in this relationship, even though this is always an incomplete project. However, there is a discursive unity, without which the articulations could not be understood as hegemonic.

A *discursive formation* is structured, in this theoretical environment, by its *regularity in dispersion*, a concept formulated by Michel Foucault, integrated in Mouffe and Laclau's theory (2015, p. 183), for whom *dispersion* is the principle of unity because it is governed “by the complex conditions of existence of dispersed statements” (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 178).

It follows that *discourse* is formed by several dispersed subject positions and not by a founding subject and that the structure of discursive formation is not purely linguistic, but situated in institutions, rituals and practices (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 183).

This is a crucial point in the theory of hegemonic formation of these authors, who establish a distinction between their theoretical perspective and that of Gramsci and Althusser, who, despite also affirming the material character of ideologies, that is, that they have a life beyond abstract systems of ideas, and are manifested in institutions, rituals and practices, place them in an *a priori* unity and not in dispersion, which requires a unifying subject, such as a class, in Gramsci, ideological, or a mechanism of ideological reproduction, in Althusser. Both are essentialist positions, according to Mouffe and Laclau, for whom discursive articulation is not preceded by a plan of constitution, but is formed in regular dispersion, as explained above.

Althusser's concept of *overdetermination* is also relevant to understanding the dimensions of the process of becoming a subject in a discursive formation, built in the field of the symbolic, outside of which it has no meaning, as they explain (2015, p. 169). The *overdetermination* of ethical and moral values, symbolic instances, such as the economic and cultural domain, is not equivalent to an ordinary fusion, but to a fusion that creates a plurality of meanings. By this logic, there is no essence for society and social agents, but only a non-fixed regularity that creates a certain social order because there

is no way to fix an ultimate literal meaning from which the symbolic would be a secondary derivative (2015, p. 169). Every identity is *overdetermined*, from this perspective, incomplete, open and politically negotiable (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 177) which is due to the presence of *others* who, in the course of relationships, modify and are modified us. The “presence of one in the other prevents the suturing of the identity of any of them” (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 177), which is formed in a relationship of articulation put into practice.

The practice of articulation, by this logic, materializes in the construction of *nodal points* that partially fix meaning, which arises from the opening of the social, which results from the permanent overflow of all discourse, due to the infinity of the field of discursivity (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 188). Disarticulation, therefore, cannot be completed through reduced meanings, but through their multiplicity.

In this environment, which is the social terrain, the “subject category is penetrated by the same ambiguous, incomplete and polysemic character that overdetermination signals for every discursive identity” (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 198). The incompleteness of the subject's identity is an anti-essentialist concept that opposes paradigmatic apprehensions alluding to its transcendental, human, immutable unity.

For the authors, identity is not fixed in economic, political, cultural, feminine, masculine expressions or versions, as differential units, since identities are not sutured, but formed in regular dispersion and are overdetermined, not consolidating in a separate position, which makes totalization unfeasible, and makes hegemonic articulation possible (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 198). The logic of difference, thus, favors hegemonic articulation, because it does not reduce the *other*, canceling it, but possibly modifying it without making it equal to me, dominating him.

On the contrary, a well-developed system of differences that eliminates all floating signifiers does not enable hegemonic articulation, but favors the installation of relations of subordination and power. Difference is signified as an antagonism. In the midst of antagonism, the presence of the *other* prevents one from being himself, as one does not constitute oneself. The concept of antagonism developed by the authors (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 198), must be distinguished from the conditions in which it is developed, equally distinguishing itself from a real, material opposition and from a contradiction of ideas, of agonistic conflict.

From this perspective, we understand that antagonism predominates in the relationship between the immigrant and the nation-state. Despite the immigrant existence and integration to the national community, their social identity is rejected because it is not equivalent to the national one, which prevents them from joining and participating in democratic life.

The constitution of a political bond results from the hegemonic articulations that develop between subject positions or *locus* in a social order whose formation is incomplete. Therefore, we understand that law, materialized in its institutions, rituals and practices, can be the expression of a hegemonic subject position, the nation-state, and reveal a system of equivalences, between the citizen and the national, which is equivalent to a population and a people.

From another perspective, and due to immigration, this equivalence can install an antagonism in a given society, in relation to the non-national, whose difference is denied, which does not

promote hegemonic articulations, but rather domination through the denial of their existence, which leads to establishment of an *organic crisis*, Gramscian concept as described above. Through Gramsci's thought, we link immigration as an *organic phenomenon* to the *organic crisis* that has established itself within national communities in the present.

Based on all the above theoretical foundations, we will discuss our vision on the object of this conceptual analysis, directed towards the concepts of nationality as a political link between the citizen and the nation-state, currently, in the face of immigration.

3 Discussion

3.1 The *locus* of the national and the non-national in a pluralistic democratic political order

National populations have been transformed by immigration over the last few decades, event associated with decolonization, neocolonialism and neoliberal imperialism, resulting in challenges to the liberal model of democracy implemented by the nation-state, idealized as a homogeneous and non-plural political unit.

Such a political environment does not accommodate immigration, in the sense that it is pictured as an antagonistic force to the liberal democratic order. The perspective of pluralist democracy that we embrace, according to Mouffe and Laclau (2015), allows us to deepen the understanding of the *organic crisis* established within the scope of the nation-state, due to immigration. From this normative horizon, that we look up to, the immigrant as a non-national and the public power are involved in an agonistic relationship at the political, instead of playing a role of the enemy of the nation.

We take radical pluralist democracy not as a project, but as a reference for the real formation of the political, a normative direction, explanatory of the relationships that develop on this level, from which nationality and citizenship are instrumentalized as means of domination or hegemonic articulation for the construction of a democratic order.

Based on Laclau (2013, p. 134), the totalization of the people can be institutionalist or populist. In the former, the limits of the discursive formation coincide with those of the community; in the latter, a boundary of exclusion divides society into camps, when the “people” is less than the totality of the community members, it is a partial component that aspires to be conceived as the only legitimate totality.

Hegemony occurs through the construction of popular identity based on democratic demands that are specific to it, as he explains. The author differentiates democratic demands, typical of an institutionalist formation, from popular demands, which characterize a populist formation. Citizenship is not constructed by the equivalence between the people and popular identity, but by their differentiation. It is through this line of thought that the demands of immigrants should be considered, with a view to outlining the relationship between nationality and citizenship for immigrants at any the country.

Therefore, the *locus* of the nationals and the non-nationals are defined distinctly in each national community according to the discursive formation that is taking place. The understanding of the *organic crisis* immigration involves historic continuities, institutional and non-institutional practices.

From that picture, we presently stress that the peoples are to be considered as they are in reality. The opposite is to affirm the existence of an idealized homogeneous people, to be reintegrated through expelling the non-nationals, the *other*, what is in the root of the *organic crises* immigrants are called to raise.

For practices of hegemonic articulation to take place, as Mouffe and Laclau argue, two conditions must be met, the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the borders that separate them (2015, p. 219). Unlike antagonistic forces, agonistic forces reflect the conflict present in relationships between different subject positions or *locus* without canceling them, like the former, in order to create a network of equivalences, as consensus represents.

The *locus of denial*, defines Mouffe and Laclau, according to the internal parameters of each formation (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 219) refuses plurality by the annulment of difference and the creation of equivalences, in the course of a hegemonic articulation of a dominating nature.

By this logic, we conclude that the borders that are fixed between the purely national and the non-national or foreign, create antagonism and prevent the agonistic articulation that would enable a hegemonic articulation between the immigrant and national subjects. Antagonism denies the very existence of the subject, which expresses a difference, a border, which is not controllable by political power and is thus made invisible.

Consequently, the immigrant occupies an ambiguous position in liberal democratic orders, considering the material and symbolic planes, because physically he exists, but is not recognized as a political subject, as a citizen. This ambiguity results from the place of denial imposed on him as a political subject.

Agonistic conflict is replaced by essentialist forms of identity and absolute moral values, instead of giving space to the formation, in society, of hegemonic political practices that reflect the real and non-ideal relationships between the subject positions that inhabit the political. Plurality is not accepted as a reality that characterizes the social still, now a days.

In the institutional environment of nation-states, nationality, conceived as an essentialist notion, such as an identity, a subject filled with feelings, frequently, is the primordial guiding thread capable of founding the individual's social identity, in order to give him life, as a political subject, as a citizen. In this equation, the place of the national is correlated with the people, the nation, the population, as collective subjects.

We argue that a relationship of struggle has been established in this environment between the immigrant as a non-national and the nation-state in order to become what he is, as a *citizen to become*. We associate this struggle with the transformations in historical and political reality, which shape the present time, from the perspective of the subjects who interact in the public environment of national units represented by national states.

3.2 The formation of the people: unity in dispersion and real plurality

[W]hat happens if there is a cry for justice that is expressed not in the sense of having lost an unequal fight, albeit a clean one, but in the sense of having been excluded from the beginning?" (Cavell, 1990, p. xxxviii apud Critchley, 2016, p. 23).

We intend to trace the contours of the concept of people and population as distinct collective subjects and correlates of the nation. According to our theoretical orientation, they are discursive units resulting from hegemonic articulations that make up a historical block: "a relatively unified social and political space through the institution of *nodal points* and the constitution of identities that tend to be relational" (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 216).

This is a concept derived from Gramsci's thought, in which the historical block is a unit that expands the social space to explain power relations and identifies a diversity of subjects and historical circumstances that constitute and determine them, considering the structure of classes that permeate the social. The *ethical subject*, and not just the economic one, determines political relations, for Gramsci, it is the cement of the historical block.

For Mouffe and Laclau, the historical block is constituted on the antagonistic terrain, that is, of diversity, plurality and for this reason, they call it hegemonic formation. Therefore, to understand the constitution of the population and the people as collective entities, we refute the idea that these subjects can be defined through the identification of an essentialist content to be rescued, or maintained, fixed and finished that constitutes them definitively.

The indeterminacy of the people and the population or their determination in the democratic struggle as an agonistic struggle, in dispersion, as explained above, occurs in a plurality of political spaces and through popular struggles. With this, the difference between Mouffe and Laclau's theory and Gramsci's theory is marked, that subjects are constituted in hegemonic articulations and not at the level of fundamental classes (political space constituted *a priori*) and that there are several hegemonic poles and not a hegemonic centrality.

If the people and the population are not subjects defined *a priori* nor necessarily reducible to a nation, a channel is opened to understand them through their discursive formation and, consequently, classify conflicts as adversities or agonisms and not as antagonisms that occur between immigrants and national citizens today, in the course of immigration.

From this perspective, by reproducing a system of equivalence between people and population related to the nation, the nation-state suppresses the social plurality that encompasses a diversity of peoples unified in a collective entity, represented by the national population and in this way creates a system of antagonisms that, in turn, leads to social instability.

It is the denial of difference and a subversion of content so that the nation-state expands as a paradigmatic pole in power relations, through the imposition of a unifying collective subject, as if it were closed and equivalent to each other, like the population, the people and the nation.

This antagonism establishes the *organic crisis* of a political paradigm and is established in all social dimensions because it rejects the difference of the *other*, which the immigrant represents, but only when it is not useful to the neoliberal project. According to our analysis, the nation-state occupies the position of neoliberal economic agent in policies that deny the subject positions occupied by immigrants. For instance, in a study case of Brazil, the nation-state draws lines of equivalence with the idealized locus of the national, which is racialized white and wealthy, what leads to the exclusion of

Brazilians and foreigners that do not fit in this *prescriptive place*,⁶ a *locus* of citizenship.

The immigrant establishes himself as a hegemonic agent in various social dimensions that shape the political. For example, let us look at the impact of remittances of financial resources by immigrants to their home countries, on the economic and social development of these states, which makes them economic agents alongside public authorities. In foreign countries where they produce wealth, part of which is retained as a national product; however, they are often not recognized as citizens.

The policies of the liberal state in the face of Immigration establish the political link between the state and society, in the course of a relationship of hegemonic domination, where citizenship, as a legal *status*, an expression of this link, derives from being a member of the national population, correlated to a people or nation determined in this power relationship.

We point out that this model feeds antagonisms selectively, arising from and coherent with the subject position that the nation-state occupies in the hegemonic articulations in which it participates. Let us see, another example taken from Brazilian law, the favoring of the recognition of citizenship for immigrant workers well paid by the capital of private economic agents, as well as those who are financially capable of investing in the country, through the acquisition of properties or companies. In these cases, the political link sufficient for the immigrant to become a citizen is no longer nationality. We assume that it is participation in the country's economic development, an interest that characterizes the subject position that the nation-state currently occupies.

From a perspective of building a radical pluralist democracy, counter-hegemonic to the neoliberal historical block, the construction of a people starts from an opposition to the ideal of a hegemonic collective subject identified as a people today. In an anti-essentialist approach, the people occupy a position of collective subject, such as diasporas. The relationship of equivalence necessary for the formation of a people must not suppress differences to form an identity, but the opposite. Mouffe and Laclau explain this construction logic (Mouffe and Laclau, 2015, p. 102):

It is only to the extent that democratic differences are opposed to forces or discourses that deny them all, that these differences can be replaced by one another. This is precisely why the creation of a collective will, through a chain of equivalence, demands the designation of an adversary. This movement is necessary to draw the political border separating

“us” from “them,” which is decisive in the construction of a “people.”

In this relationship between *us* and *them* there is a political border, which should not be eliminated, but articulated in a heterogeneous system of equivalences in order to create the political unity of which the people are part, as collective subjects that make up a national population.

The construction of a democratic people is a counter-hegemonic articulation because we understand that the equivalence between people and nation as consolidated in the nation-state is a liberal hegemonic practice that reduces the social order to a collective of people equal in terms of nationality, which fulfills the function of a common identity element of this collective subject.

This model, as immigration demonstrates, does not promote political unity, but fragmentation due to the antagonism implicit in the relationship between nationals and foreigners or friends and enemies. Therefore, building a people as a collective and public subject that sustains national union is fundamental for building a radical pluralist democracy, including the possibility of a people as a political subject bringing together several peoples.

Citizenship, in this equation, gains a significance, different from that attributed to it by the liberal democratic state and can reflect the human nature as defined by Gramsci as the “set of historically determined social relations, that is, a historical fact verifiable, within certain limits, with the methods of philology and criticism (Gramsci, 1975, p. 1484–1485 apud Tortorella, 1997, p. 98). We conclude, in this sense, that the deconstruction of the concepts of people, population and nation from the framework of radical pluralist democracy and its construction as a hegemonic articulation for emancipation is as a direction towards citizenship.

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⁶ The *Prescriptive Place* is based on the etymological definition of the word prescribe as “medical prescription, the prescription given to be followed without question. The doctor gives the prescription assuming the subject’s well-being” (Lara Junior et al., 2017, p. 10). There is an association between the prescriptive place and the hegemonic articulations that construct the subject’s place in the social order. The prescriptive place precedes the subject and can serve domination to the extent that it does not allow free subjectivation. There is a fixation of a model, standard or normalization, which enables hegemonic construction through antagonism, the establishment of borders as already narrated from Mouffe and Laclau (2015).

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