

Introduction

Maritime Regions and the South Atlantic

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This special issue addresses questions related to the definition and construction of regions and focuses on the case of the South Atlantic. Discussing the concept of regions and their role in international politics is of special relevance in the current context of instability and contestation of the international order and of institutions of global governance. The discussion about the role of the South Atlantic is also relevant for the Brazilian policy environment as several administrations have supported the idea of the South Atlantic as a Zone of Peace and Cooperation (*Zona de Paz e Cooperação do Atlântico Sul* – ZOPACAS) as established by a United Nations General Assembly Resolution in 1986 (A/RES/41/11). This idea has been revitalised since the development of the concept of ‘Blue Amazon’ by the Brazilian Navy (Carvalho 2005) and the announcement of the discovery of significant oil reserves in the Brazilian coast in 2007, which strengthened the discussion about the need for Brazil to protect its natural resources and state sovereignty in the South Atlantic space. Beyond Brazil’s domestic context, the ZOPACAS ministerial meeting held in Montevideo in January 2013 (which for the first time included the Ministers of Defence of the ZOPACAS member states), as well as the 30th anniversary of the initiative in 2016, helped to launch a series of debates about the importance of the Atlantic for security and economic development (Herz and Silva 2016).

Within the discipline of International Relations (IR), the question of regions as political phenomena has been explored mainly in the literature on regionalism, and mostly by scholars affiliated with academic institutions located in the global North. This special issue seeks to contribute to the debate on the political significance of regions in three main ways: by promoting an interdisciplinary approach to regional studies, by discussing the connections between regions and maritime spaces, and by emphasising contributions originating from the global South. Taken as a whole, this special issue is an attempt to ad-

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dress the South not merely as a space within which the developments contemplated in the articles take place; rather, going further, most articles reflect Southern perspectives and reveal the agency of Southern actors.

Contexto Internacional has been one of the key academic journals in which foreign and Brazil-based authors have developed analyses on regionalism, including analyses centred on the South American region, and on regional integration initiatives in Europe and other contexts. Focused on the South Atlantic space, this special issue thus combines *Contexto Internacional's* role as a venue for academic contributions on regionalism and regional integration with the importance of advancing the debate on the security and defence implications of contemporary developments taking place within the South Atlantic space, as well as a premier forum for analysing global connections of, in, and from the global South. On a historical note, this special issue also reflects the journal's pioneering role in covering issues related to the South Atlantic Ocean, dating back to two articles published in 1988, one on the role of the United States in the Atlantic (Hurrell 1988), and another on the possibilities of military co-operation in the South Atlantic (Vásquez 1988).

The contributions to this special issue address questions such as: the connections between regions and Oceans; alternative conceptualisations of a region; theoretical frameworks developed for the study of regions; to what extent the South Atlantic can be considered a region; discourses and practices related to Oceans in general, and to the South Atlantic in particular; the development of security regionalism and the role of the South Atlantic to countries such as Brazil and South Africa.

The contributions are complementary in that they approach these questions from different theoretical and empirical angles, and therefore contribute to a much-needed debate about the opportunities and shortcomings of a renewed political and academic attention to the South Atlantic. In the following sections, we briefly contextualise the contributions of the special issue to the literatures about regions, and about the South Atlantic.

Regional studies

The literature about regions is extensive and includes works on regional orders, regionalism, regionalisation, and regional integration. Studies on regions were initially developed by scholars concerned about the question of international order in the aftermath of World War II and who were searching for alternatives to nation-states and global level institutions as references of actors working for the promotion of co-operation and for the preservation of peace. Karl W. Deutsch (Deutsch et al 1957), Ernst Haas (1958) and Joseph Nye (1971) are some of the pioneers of these discussions (Börzel 2016). The questions they raised remain at the heart of the sub-fields of (regional) co-operation and integration, security studies, and political economy.

While most of these early works took as their origin the idea of regions as geographically contiguous spaces and studied actors, processes, institutions, patterns of change and continuity, and the causes and consequences of (regional) phenomena, more recent studies have explored in more depth the very conceptualisation of regions, and how they emerge and are created, as well as the ways in which their borders are defined and per-

ceived. Building on Deutsch, constructivist scholars such as Emanuel Adler argue that regions are socially constructed through processes related to the construction of (regional) identities, and hence impact the power relations among states and other actors involved in these processes (Adler 1997, 2005, 2008; Adler and Barnett 1998, Adler and Crawford 2002). Adler focuses on (social) practices, but at the same time emphasises the importance of discourses for the analysis of regions. Such a perspective attempts thus to bridge the literature about regions with the linguistic turn in IR theory – particularly with the work of scholars such as Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003), and Iver Neumann (2002, 2003), who also highlight the role of powerful states in the construction of regions.

This branch of the literature focusing on the emergence and creation of regions is particularly relevant to the questions addressed in this special issue. In the specific case of the South Atlantic, it is important to note that there is an overlap between initiatives such as ZOPACAS and other initiatives that have been put forward by Brazil, such as the strengthening of UNASUR, and the development of the Africa-South America Summit (*Cúpula África-América do Sul - ASA*), which includes all of ZOPACAS member-states in addition to non-South Atlantic states located in the African continent and in South America. Brazil's active participation in all of these different initiatives involving the South Atlantic space raises the complex issue of Brazil's status, or perceived status, as a regional leader, as well as the political, military and economic implications of this condition (Malamud 2012).

Regions and Oceans

Oceans have been addressed in the discipline of International Relations mostly by international security scholars, but the South Atlantic has hardly been studied. Most of the research connecting regions and oceans focuses on the North Atlantic (e.g. Neumann 1994; Adler 2008), on the Mediterranean (e.g. Guney 2008; Adler and Crawford 2002), or on the Asia-Pacific (e.g. Acharya 2003). One of the main contributions of this special issue is therefore to expand the discussion taking place in regional security studies to the South Atlantic. The first two contributions of this issue start by exploring the importance of Oceans for international politics, including the more traditional aspects of military and maritime power.

In this sense, Antônio Ruy de Almeida Silva discusses how states benefit from making use of maritime resources. Silva's analysis situates the importance of the oceans for international politics from ancient times until the contemporary period. Drawing on historical examples and on key references in the literature, the author presents an innovative argument involving the idea of the 'enabling power of the oceans'. This illustrates the importance of oceans both as a source of natural resources and for transportation, as well as a space where states project military power.

André Panno Beirão also calls for renewed attention to oceans and the necessity to think about maritime spaces and their global dimensions. His contribution addresses an underexplored theme associated with maritime affairs, namely, the involvement of UN peace operations in maritime spaces. In the article, the author shows how UN peace oper-

ations gradually incorporated into certain missions' tasks which were performed in maritime spaces and which thus required incorporating military forces with naval training and equipment. This is a particularly important discussion considering the growing complexity of UN peace operations, and has special significance within the Brazilian context, since the Brazilian Navy has taken on the operational leadership of the Maritime Task Force of the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

The South Atlantic as a maritime region?

In explicit and implicit ways, most of the articles in this issue share a vision of regions as socially constructed spaces rather than preconceived regional frameworks (Söderbaum 2013: 11). The remaining contributions dialogue with the concepts of security communities, communities of (security) practices, regional security complexes, and security governance, while presenting very different assessments as to what extent these concepts are useful, and to what extent the South Atlantic matches their demands empirically. The articles also discuss the role of nation-states in these processes of social construction, especially the case of Brazil. They contemplate different actors and strategies related to the construction of a specific region, revealing not only a logic of complementarity, but also of contestation. As discussed by Fredrik Söderbaum: 'The socially constructed nature of regions implies that they are politically contested and there are nearly always a multitude of strategies and ideas about a particular region which merge, mingle and clash' (2013: 12).

Beatriz Rodrigues Bessa Mattos, Francisco Eduardo Lemos de Matos and Kai Michael Kenkel make use of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's (2003) concept of regional security complex to analyse the Brazilian strategies towards the South Atlantic space. The authors emphasise efforts related to advancing South-South defense co-operation with African countries of the Atlantic coast, such as the revitalisation of ZOPACAS, and the creation of the 'Blue Amazon' concept. In their conclusion, the authors argue that Buzan and Wæver's concept of an emerging security community in the Southern Cone of South America should be updated to account for ongoing efforts by Brazilian actors to promote the formation of a regional security complex that unites South America and African states of the Atlantic coast. Yet, they make the caveat that this is an ongoing process and that the security community that is being built is still a very loose one.

Sabrina Evangelista Medeiros and William de Sousa Moreira address how countries set up co-operative initiatives to manage their responsibilities towards their immediate maritime spaces and the role of the Navies in these processes. Their article is centered on the case of the South Atlantic, and the authors provide an interesting insight into an initiative that has been so far underexplored in the literature: the Co-ordination for the South Atlantic Maritime Area (*Coordenador da Área Marítima do Atlântico Sul* – CAMAS), which has specific duties and responsibilities regarding maritime traffic control within the South Atlantic space. In their contribution, the authors analyse the monitoring activities of regional and sub-national institutions in the South Atlantic space, and argue that these practices have been generating an important maritime co-operative system that can be defined as a particular model of community of security practices.

Pedro Seabra departs from a more skeptical tone about co-operation in the South Atlantic and the role of Brazil in it; his contribution highlights the limitations of South Atlantic security regionalism. The author argues that existing conceptualisations of security regions, such as the ones developed by Adler or Buzan, are not suitable for the study of the South Atlantic. He then develops a looser framework based on four criteria, namely, (i) the level of intra-regional conflict, (ii) the regional institutions, (iii) the security agendas of member-states, and (iv) the region's autonomy from external powers. He addresses the limitations associated with the implementation of ZOPACAS and discusses the roles played by the Africa-South America Summit and by outside powers, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, in the South Atlantic space. In his conclusion, Seabra signals the importance of giving more voice to African perceptions of South Atlantic security and of considering the role played by the private sector, particularly defence industry conglomerates, as well as the links between security efforts and technical co-operation initiatives that are played out in the South Atlantic space.

Mônica Herz, Layla Dawood and Victor Coutinho Lage address the efforts of Brazilian elites in constructing a South Atlantic region, and how this reinforces the goal of building a nuclear-propelled submarine. The authors also address the limitations of locating an actual region-building process in the South Atlantic, and prefer to refer to the South Atlantic as an 'area' rather than a region. While the article is centered on the Brazilian case, the analysis presented is useful to understand recent strategies by other emerging powers of the global South, such as China and India, which are also investing in their submarine capacity. In addition, the article addresses important issues related, for example, to technology transfer and to nuclear policy – topics that are particularly relevant to contemporary discussions about foreign and defence policy, and their relationship with maritime issues and maritime spaces. The authors show how the project of a nuclear propelled submarine dating back to the 1970s has been given new meaning by Brazilian elites and decision makers (particularly within the Navy) in a democratic context. The Brazilian case offers lessons related to the advantages and challenges that countries of the global South face when they choose to expand their power projection towards maritime spaces.

François Vreÿ also expands on the discussion about the South Atlantic to other emergent countries, connecting it with the BRICS countries and addressing the role of South Africa in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. He shows how maritime issues have gained importance within the foreign policy and defence strategies of emerging countries, especially the BRICS – which have been particularly active in performing and extending their military and diplomatic power towards their maritime spaces as a way of increasing their international standing and obtaining recognition by the international community. Vreÿ points out both the potentials and the limitations of South Africa as it seeks to perform its maritime responsibilities including the co-operation with Brazil and its African neighbors. He discusses the potential for joint action between ZOPACAS and other initiatives that co-exist in the South Atlantic space, such as IBSAMAR, the Benguela Current Convention, the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

Concluding remarks

This special issue addresses a series of questions related to the renewed attention to maritime spaces and the possibilities of conceptualising them as regions. Recent developments in the South Atlantic such as the rise of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and the disputes regarding control over oil reserves in the Falklands/Malvinas have contributed to the consolidation of a research agenda about these questions. As already hinted in this introduction, the contributions vary in their normative and analytical considerations, apart from their empirical analyses, and must be read, therefore, as a complementary set of articles which, as a whole, hopefully succeed in raising the importance of further research about maritime spaces, different ways of discussing them, and the political processes related to the attempts to construct a region in the South Atlantic. Although the focus of most of the articles is directed to the role played by Brazilian actors and by Brazilian supported institutions, the different contributions illustrate the importance of looking beyond the role played by Brazil in order to understand the variety of narratives and constructions, from insider and outsider actors, associated with the South Atlantic space.

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