

The Challenges for Building Regional Integration in the Global South: The Case of Brazilian Foreign Policy towards Mercosur

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‘The Challenges for Building Regional Integration in the Global South. The case of Brazilian Foreign Policy towards Mercosur’ is a mature and authorial book, written on the background of decades of research and reflection about Mercosur by Tullo Vigevani and his co-author Haroldo Ramanzini Junior. It shows deep knowledge of concepts and theories of the literature of regional integration and of Mercosur history; it is a must read for anyone interested in this topic.

Although the authors affirm that they do not intend to formulate a theory of regional integration, they advance an innovative eclectic analytical approach, with elements from historical institutionalism, and inspired by current discussions in the literatures of Brazilian Foreign Policy, Comparative Regionalism and Global International Relations. This approach dialogues with the proposal advanced by Amitav Acharya to study regionalism beyond Eurocentrism given that while ‘the EEC was basically conceived as a project to tame nationalism and constrain state sovereignty; non-Western regionalisms were inspired by exactly the opposite motivations, to advance nationalism and preserve sovereignty after centuries of colonial rule’ (Acharya 2016: 7). The concept of autonomy as an alternative to the concept of sovereignty is particularly relevant for this proposal given its centrality in the production of knowledge in Latin America about its insertion in global (geo)politics and political economy, such as the advanced by the ‘Autonomy School’, a theoretical perspective developed in the 1970s-1980s by Argentinean Juan

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Carlos Puig and Brazilian Helio Jaguaribe (Briceño-Ruiz and Simonoff 2017; Miguez 2021). As Tickner (2014: 78) summarizes, 'autonomy constitutes a mainstay of contemporary Latin American relations with the world.' In this sense, the book is a major contribution to the literature of comparative regionalism (Katzenstein 1996; Grugel and Hout 1998; De Lombaerde et al. 2010; Börzel and Risse 2016; Acharya 2016), as it explores the specificities of South America and Mercosur in dialogue with analytical approaches that are not Eurocentric, but that are not based on premises of cultural relativism or Western epistemological hegemony.

As for the Brazilian foreign policy towards Mercosur, the authors argue that it is driven by economic and political motivations as well as identity and self-perception, and that Mercosur has been a 'relative failure,' despite recognizable achievements, especially in the social area. The pursue of autonomy (in Brazilian foreign policy), among others, leads to ambiguities as it limits the possibility to consolidate regional institutions and interdependencies. This argument results from an empirically informed analysis developed along six chapters, including a Brazilian historical perspective of Latin-American regionalism (chapter 2); the production of knowledge about regional integration in Brazil (chapter 3); the role of sovereignty and the perceptions of elites in the formulation of Brazilian foreign policy (chapter 4); the activities of the Social Mercosur programme (chapter 5); Brazilian economic interests (chapter 6); and Brazilian attitudes towards the Organization of American States (OAS), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (*Comunidade dos Estados Latino-Americanos e Caribenhos* - CELAC), and the Union of South American Nations (*União de Nações Sul-Americanas* - UNASUR), situating Mercosur in the broader regional 'architecture.'

Some chapters are (authorized) reproductions of previous writings, which partially hinders the smooth flow of the book, but they are all very rich and, read in combination, provide very comprehensive analyses of Mercosur's development, achievements, and failures. Chapter 3 provides a unique discussion of the role of institutions such as the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (*Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros* - ISEB), the War College (*Escola Superior de Guerra* - ESG) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (*Comissão Econômica das Nações Unidas para América Latina e Caribe* - CEPAL), as well as individuals such as Santiago Dantas, Celso Furtado, Celso Lafer and Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, among others, in the production of knowledge about development and the role of regional integration in Brazil. Some topics could have been included or better explored, such as the discussion about Mercosur's legitimacy, the idea of geo-cultural epistemology, and the thoughts of Celso Amorim, but the book is the greatest effort done so far to understand Mercosur in its complexities and multiple facets.

The concluding chapter reinforces how the weakness of Latin American states, their low agency capacity and interests to develop regional interdependences, absence of a regional paymaster, as well as unfavourable international context given the (continued) dependent insertion in the global economy and US foreign policy, have hindered regionalism, and a more successful Mercosur. Perhaps the rather pessimist tone can be explained by the time the book was written, during Bolsonaro's government, a low point for

the role of regionalism and Mercosur in Brazilian foreign policy, but the factors pointed out are mostly structural or exogenous, so, the key question that drives the book, i.e. “Can developing countries proceed in the direction of successful regional integration?”, is still open for discussion!

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