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Power Blocs and Regional Organizations in Latin America: A Poulantzian Perspective¹

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Abstract

This article aims to present the Marxist theoretical framework based on Nicos Poulantzas's thought to analyse regionalism in Latin America. We propose that regionalism is determined by the interests of the bourgeois hegemonic fraction in the power bloc. The originality of the theoretical proposal presented lies in the thesis that regionalisms are the fruit of relations between power blocs of the member states. The article illustrates the recent processes of regionalism in Latin America that, from this theoretical proposal's point of view, can vary among the following models: open regionalism (related to the interests of comprador bourgeoisie); multidimensional regionalism (linked to internal bourgeoisie interests); and anti-imperialism (related to a national bourgeoisie project). We conclude that the dependency of these social formations, the presence of foreign capital, and the role of US imperialism should be considered in the analysis of regionalism in Latin America.

Keywords: regionalism, state, power bloc; South America.

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Introduction

In this article we seek to contribute by proposing a theoretical approach to analyse the processes of regionalism based on the use of the conceptual device derived from the Marxist theory of the state developed by Nicos Poulantzas (1978). We analyse regionalisms and their connection with the dynamics of the relationship between *the bourgeoisie*, *the popular classes*, and *states*. Our analysis originates from the idea that the bourgeoisie is not homogeneous, but rather is divided into different fractions. Interacting among themselves in the struggle for the distribution of the produced wealth and the attempts to have their interests

¹ Article translated by Rafael Alexandre Mello, researcher at the University of Brasilia (UnB).

attended by the state's economic, social, and foreign policies. These fractions, thus, dispute the best conditions for the process of accumulation and reproduction of capital. The social conflicts in capitalism involve the fractions of the dominant classes, the middle sectors, and the dominated classes (urban workers, peasants, and the marginal mass).

Our proposal analyses regional organisations' configuration by focusing on the relationship between the interests of class fractions. This approach can contribute to understanding the limits of regionalisms in capitalism, as well as the plurality of models that can be built at each historical conjuncture, especially in Latin America, among dependent social formations.

Studies on regionalism and regional integration occupy an important place in the research agenda of International Relations (IR). Their extensive debate is forged between the theories of regional integration, anchored in Funcionalism's and Liberalism's conceptions. The classical approaches began to be developed concurrently with the development of European integration (Haas 1958, 1970; Moravcsik 1993). As the most advanced process in the classical terms of the stages of regional integration described by Balassa (1961), the theories developed to explain the experience of the European Union have become important references for scholars investigating processes of regional integration in other parts of the world, especially neo-functionalism (Haas 1970) and liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1993), allowing little space for the Marxist approaches.

Here, the analysis is focused on regionalisms developed in Latin America, especially after the end of the Cold War, in the neoliberalism phase, marked by the internationalisation of production, finance, and trade, when the United States came to occupy a dominant position in international politics (Saad & Fine 2017).

Thus, we propose to contribute with an analysis that considers the implications of the interests of bourgeois fractions on the contours of the regionalisms. This approach allows for the investigation of regionalisms from a perspective that accounts for determinants arising from the relations between the state, the bourgeoisie, and the different models of regionalism. Furthermore, we regard that, if the objective is to analyse Latin American cases, it is necessary to consider US imperialism as a determinant variable, given that the political-economic and ideological interests of the United States have always had an influence on the forms of integration in this region:² whether passive subordination or conflictive subordination. We will discuss the recent processes of regionalism in our region to illustrate the application of the analytical proposal to ongoing processes in concrete reality.³ Our objective is to shed light on the theoretical debate, especially on the concealment of the relationship between the capitalist mode of production and regionalism in traditional studies.

² These distinctions are based on the moments that the dependent states' actions are entirely subordinated to the imperialist agenda - the passive subordination -, or the moments that it can make some decisions that cause punctual divergences with imperialism, looking for more space into the international arena - the conflictive subordination. For Berringer (2015a), it can be shown in the 1990's and 2000's Brazilian foreign policy.

³ Some recent works analyse regionalism processes in South America from this perspective, including Berringer (2017b), Berringer and Kowalczyk (2017), Granato (2020), Granato and Menger (2019), Ferreira (2019), and Kan (2013).

The article is organised into two additional sections. In the first section, it systematises the main theoretical concepts of Poulantzas's (1978) Marxist theory of the state that underpins the proposed analytical approach, besides some considerations about Poulantzas's interpretations of the European Economic Community (EEC). In addition, we briefly dialogue with literature that uses Poulantzas' contribution to analyse the European Union today. In the second section, we present the theoretical approach to analyse the processes of regionalism in neoliberalism, focusing on recent regional organisations in Latin America.

Poulantzas framework: State, power bloc and regionalism

In *Political Power and Social Classes*, Poulantzas (2019) proposes a theoretical framework for the capitalist type of state that is grounded on key concepts: the juridical-political structure and bureaucratism, the relative autonomy of the state, and the power bloc.

Systematically, for Poulantzas (2019), the norms and values of the capitalist state, through bourgeois law and bureaucracy, guarantee the conditions for reproduction of the capitalist economy. Through formally egalitarian law and seemingly universal institutions that form the legal-political structure of the capitalist state⁴, a double effect is achieved: *the representation of the unity of the "people-nation"* and *the isolation of social classes in atomized individuals*. The inequalities inherent in the guarantee of private property and the social relations of wage-based production are concealed by the social cohesion factor that the state, through the national collective, is in a position to represent and organise. To accomplish this, in the face of latent social conflicts, the state exercises the function of maintaining the unstable balance of commitments between classes and class fractions, which implies concessions, privileges, and the building of alliances and political fronts, as we shall see below.

Regarding the definition of social classes, Poulantzas (2019, 65) states that a social class presents itself as the effect of a set of structures of a mode of production, as well as of a social formation and its relations on the economic, political, and ideological levels. Class is not exclusively determined by economics (the position held in its role in the social relations of production), but also by the political and ideological position it assumes in the face of political conjuncture, which leads to the existence of intersections, overlaps, and social conflicts concerning state politics.

In his analysis of the exercise of political power in the capitalist state, Poulantzas (1978) criticises the simplified dualist opposition of social classes, that is, the understanding that class struggle occurs fundamentally between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. For the author, the dominant class in capitalism does not constitute a homogeneous bloc, but presents itself under different fractions. In the author's words: "a social formation is formed by an overlapping of several

⁴ It is important to highlight that we used the conception of state that Poulantzas presents in *Political Power and Social Classes* (1978), which is distinct from the idea of state-relational defended in the author's last book, *State, Power and Socialism*. We continue to understand that the state is a juridical-political structure and not a condensation of power relations.

modes of production, which implies the coexistence in the field of the class struggle of several class fractions and, therefore, possibly of several dominant classes or fractions” (Ibidem., 229).

In this sense, Poulantzas argues that the relations between the capitalist state and the fractions of the dominant class, that is, the bourgeoisie, occur within a specific political unit: the power bloc, which is a contradictory unity between different fractions of the dominant class. In this sense, the capitalist state fulfils two central functions that constitute the general unit of the bourgeoisie, namely: the maintenance of private property and the general conditions of reproduction and exploitation of the labour force. Despite these general interests, the bourgeoisie is divided into different *fractioning systems* which may vary depending on the social formation and historical period analysed.

Fundamentally, Poulantzas (2019) works with the idea of fractions from the position of capital in the phases of the accumulation process: financial, industrial, and commercial. However, these different fractioning systems, i.e., different attributes of capital, are combined in a complex way (Farias 2009, 81). Fractioning may derive, for example, from the size of capital, the origin in the accumulation process, or the relationship with foreign capital. In Table 1, we present a systematization of class fractions based on the “relationship of dependence on foreign capital,” in a way that privileges the analysis of the fractions of the bourgeoisie in a dependent social formation. Poulantzas proposed in the book *Social Classes in Capitalism Today* (1978), a typology that considers three bourgeois fractions in dependent states, characterised by their political and ideological positions in relation to imperialism and the origin of capital, namely: the national bourgeoisie, the interior/internal bourgeoisie, and the comprador/associated bourgeoisie. However, it is important to highlight those other fractioning systems are considered in the analysis.

Table 1 - Fractions according to their relation of dependence with foreign capital

Fractions of the capitalist class	Relation established with foreign capital and the imperialism
National bourgeoisie	Commands its own base of accumulation and may assume anti-imperialist positions
Interior/internal bourgeoisie	Contradictory relations with foreign capital: dependent on it at given moments, but also requiring state action and conflictive position due to imperialism.
Comprador or associated bourgeoisie	Relations with foreign capital are of association, being dependent on imperialist interests.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The *comprador or associated bourgeoisie* has no base of accumulation of its own and is, therefore, subordinated to imperialist interests. This fraction is generally linked to commercial, export, and financial activities. Moreover, it does not support coalitions or fronts in defence of a national project, linking itself to the interests of international capital in the country. The *national bourgeoisie* has its own accumulation base and, therefore, does not have a relationship

of dependency with imperialism. In this sense, this bourgeois fraction may come to assume the construction of anti-imperialist projects allied to popular classes. The *interior or internal bourgeoisie* is an intermediary fraction that establishes contradictory relations with foreign capital, on which it is dependent, but needs, at certain moments, state protection from the competition it represents. This fraction has ideological frailty, not tending to support projects in association with the popular classes. It presents a tendency towards pendular behaviour (Martuscelli 2018, 63). That is, at times when the internal bourgeoisie constitutes itself as the hegemonic fraction in the power bloc, it is possible for them to make concessions to the popular classes through state distributive measures or the formation of political fronts.

Still on the power bloc, as mentioned above, the concept indicates “the particular contradictory unity of the politically dominant classes or fractions of classes as related to a particular form of the capitalist state” (Poulantzas 1978, 234). There is a tendency for one of these fractions of the dominant class to become *hegemonic within the power bloc*. This fraction holds a specific dominance among the other dominant fractions and in its particular relation to the capitalist state. Thus, in the field of the political practices of the dominant classes, Poulantzas states that “the concept of hegemony encompasses the particular domination of one of the dominant classes or fractions vis-à-vis the other dominant classes or fractions in a capitalist social formation” (Ibidem., 141). In this sense, the hegemonic fraction in the power bloc will seek to control the state’s economic, social, and foreign policies. Thus, the handling of a given policy by the state will tend to accompany the interests of the hegemonic fraction within the power bloc.

Having this framework in mind, we ask: **How can Marxist political theory contribute to the understanding of regionalism under the capitalist mode of production?** First of all, by considering that the interests of the hegemonic class fractions of the member states drive the regionalism process. Therefore, it is an unstable and temporary arrangement between power blocs.

If the theories of Haas (1970) and Moravcsik (1993) consider that regional integration is influenced by disputes between interest groups⁵ in the domestic arena, our intention is to contribute to the analysis of the relationship between the interests of class fractions and the processes of regionalism, with emphasis on the interests of the hegemonic fraction. It is important to highlight that the analyses that emphasise elites and interest groups derive from different approaches. Even then, these authors consider that the alliance or cooperation between these are the driving force of

⁵ The difference between interest groups and class fractions is linked to the theoretical approaches from which they are derived. While functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism end up focusing on institutional analysis, the decision-making process, and the role of elites and interest groups in shaping integration, we bring into consideration the centrality of the capitalist state and classes and class fractions. These differ from the idea of elites and interest groups because they start from different bases: the theory of elites and pluralism. Thus, we argue that the national state does not define its international insertion through a decision-making process solely linked to the state bureaucracy, nor that the definition of a state’s foreign policy agenda is influenced by ‘interest groups’. There is an influence of the interests of the dominant class, more specifically of the hegemonic fraction of the dominant class in the power bloc, on the conduct of foreign policy and, consequently, how the state seeks to influence the regionalism of which it is a member.

said regionalism. Our approach argues that the conflicts between class fractions make regionalism unstable and contingent.

In his writings of the 1970s, Nicos Poulantzas (1974), when debating with Ernest Mandel (1967), fashioned a few comments and interpretations on the European Economic Community (EEC), seeking to understand how the European bourgeoisies were linked and subordinated to American capital. From this, Poulantzas (1974) analysed the new form of dependency among the metropolises in imperialism after the II World War, based on the internationalisation of production, arguing for the emergence of a new bourgeois fraction: the interior/internal bourgeoisie. With this, the author examined that, despite the existence of international institutions such as the EEC, capitalism continued to organise itself on a national basis, as it is the state that organises the reception of foreign investments within the national social formation.

According to him, this process had not led to the constitution of a European bourgeoisie (or an alliance/cooperation between classes). In fact, it would have been the constitution of interior/internal bourgeoisies in Europe — dependent on and at the same time competing with American capital. We can add that competition also prevails among the European bourgeoisies. There is no imbrication between bourgeoisies that could indicate the end of interstate conflicts. Moreover, there is a process of intra-European dependence, with German and French capital predominating over the rest.

Poulantzas (1974) then contributed to thinking about the relationship between state, foreign capital, and supranationalism, considering a new form of dependence of European metropolises to the United States. Using Poulantzas's theoretical instrumental, we propose an approach to regionalism that considers the power bloc interests and their relationship with the dominated classes. In this analysis it is also necessary to consider the role of foreign capital and imperialist interests that act in and under dependent social formations. **Therefore, regionalisms, in our understanding, would be, in a way, temporary arrangements because it does not supply the national state role.**

The contemporary literature on regionalism and European capitalism (Bieler 2000; Bieler and Morton 2001; Van Apeldoorn 2001; 2009; Nousios, Overbeek and Tsolakis 2012; Auvray & Durand 2019) began with Pijl's thesis (1998), from which the so-called "Amsterdam School" was formed (Jessop and Overbeek 2019). It argues for the formation of the transatlantic class, between American and European capital, from the Marshall Plan and the creation of the Coal and Steel Community, then, the European Economic Community. According to them, these bourgeoisies unified around a Lockean liberal heartland, that is, formed an alliance around the neoliberal agenda that would configure the frameworks of European integration. Pijl (1998) also called attention to the different dimensions of contemporary capitalism and how the fight against environmental destruction was being the motto of different social actors such as the Green Parties and the New Right. That is, there is anti-capitalism in conservative sectors and not only in left-wing organisations.

Auvray and Durand (2019) argue that there is a dominance of American finance capital within European social formations that imposes a struggle between local classes and class fractions against this dependence. Bieler (2000) argues that the existence of transnational corporations alters the political dimension that tends not to be restricted to the domestic/national environment, but includes the pressure and action of large corporations on various states.

It is also worth mentioning that we oppose the thesis of the existence of a transnational capitalist class, such as the one defended by Robinson (2017), according to whom in the current phase of imperialism the classes and class fractions have disappeared and a kind of world bourgeoisie has been formed, organised by a transnational state in formation that encompasses the imperialist states and international organisations such as the OECD, WB and IMF. At this point, despite the advances in the European Union in the 21st century, such as the creation of the Euro Zone, the existence of the European Commission and the Parliament, we do not believe that nation-states have been supplanted by a supranational European state. There is a coexistence with overlaps, but that does not change the central function of capitalist states in Germany, France, Spain, etc. Thus, we follow Poulantzas' initial thesis that nation-states continue to play the role of maintaining the fact of cohesion and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, while organising the internalization of foreign capital within the national social formation, giving rise to new class fractions, such as the internal bourgeoisies.

Power bloc and regionalism in Latin America

The previous section presented Poulantzas' key concepts used for the analysis, that is, where *we start from*. In this section, we analyse regionalisms inserted in the current phase of imperialism: neoliberalism. Moreover, our analysis is dedicated to Latin American regionalisms, i.e., developed between dependent social formations.

Before doing so, it is important to remember that the idea of regionalism in Latin America dates back to the 19th century. Related to this, in addition to research on regionalism in the academic field of International Relations, Briceño Ruiz (2012) purports the existence of a *Latin American integrationist thought*. It is important to remark that, during the 19th century, independence struggles in Hispanic America were based on a "regional idea of autonomy" that was developed by Simon Bolivar (Puntigliano 2011; Briceño Ruiz 2012). This conception of a "Latin American unity" was first presented in *Carta de Jamaica*, written by Bolívar, in 1806 (Ferreira 2016; Bernal-Meza 2005). Lubbock (2022) argues that we cannot understand Latin American regionalism as a phenomenon existing only after the World War II. For the author, this idea came from the regional imaginaries of post-independence Latin American leaders, such as Bolívar and Martí.

Already during the 20th century, contributions of authors who have focused on the issues of economic development and regional trade, such as the intellectuals linked to the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), are also worth noting, that can include autonomist

thought, such as Puig (1980). ECLAC's contribution exercised considerable influence in the formulation of economic policy in the region during the last half of the 20th century, and in regionalism, as is the case of the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA) in 1960 (Ferreira 2016). Already in the early 1990s, ECLAC refocused its analysis on development for regional integration and trade and financial liberalization, by affirming that regional integration should be guided by the opening up of markets in order to obtain non-spurious competitiveness (*desarrollo hacia afuera*). This model became known as *open regionalism* (CEPAL 1994; Ferreira 2016).

As was said before, we focused on Latin American regionalism experiences under neoliberalism. For this, we consider that regionalism constitute the relationship between national states and power blocs. Thus, the processes of regionalism in the capitalist mode of production, if understood as determined by the interests of the hegemonic bourgeois fraction in the power bloc, are contingent arrangements, momentary or seasonal alliances, given that conflicts between the bourgeoisies and its fractions are always latent.

The work of Brazilian intellectuals has advanced in the operationalisation of concepts developed by Nicos Poulantzas or analysis of Brazilian politics. Boito (2018), Farias (2009), and Martuscelli (2018), among other scholars, have developed research on the relationship between the power bloc and economic policy. Berringer's (2015a) studies contributed to the perspective of establishing a relationship between the dynamics of the power bloc and the direction of foreign policy. It started from the understanding that:

The political position of a state in the international structure is linked to the relationship between that state, the power bloc, and their relationship with other power blocs and, above all, with imperialist states. Therefore, the relationship between the hegemonic fraction and foreign capital determines the position of the state on the international stage at a given historical conjuncture (Berringer 2015b, 14).

Therefore, Marxist foreign policy analysis should, aside from understanding the set of alliances, coalitions, and the role of the state in international organisations, seek to unveil the interests of classes and class fractions that determine the position that the state will occupy in the international political scene: whether this be passive subordination to imperialism or configure the adoption of conflictive contours and postures, whether it be expansionist or isolationist or anti-imperialist. In this context, foreign policy is the fruit of the effects of external constraints (crises, wars, etc.), but it is also intimately imbricated with domestic policies (economic and social). Foreign policy, therefore, encompasses not only security and defence policies as realists affirm, but includes the entire set of policies around trade, cooperation and alliances, as well as coalitions and forms of regional integration (Berringer 2015a).

It should also be said that, although they yield no power to directly influence foreign policy, depending on the bourgeois fraction in the power bloc that holds hegemony, the popular classes

may have room for movements that produce pertinent effects in the foreign policy decision-making process. In Brazil, for example, during the Workers' Party (PT) administrations (2003-2016), there was greater mobilization of popular sectors that organised in terms of foreign policy. Through the relative autonomy of the state and at particular conjunctures, it is possible that the international action of the state represents — even if marginally — the interests of sectors of the popular classes. This would occur to avoid possible political crises, thus maintaining the unstable balance of commitments (Berringer 2017a).

We now look forward to the relationship between the local bourgeoisies and their states, as well as the relations they establish among themselves and how it shapes the contours of regionalisms. We understand that it is necessary to consider the effects that changes in the historical conjunctures within states (the power bloc) and in the international political scene produce in forms of regional organisations. In other words, regionalism only develops when there is convergence between the interests of the bourgeoisie of the states involved in relation to external issues and/or national and regional programs, or when this convergence occurs between the states with the most political and economic sway in the region, as Brazil and Argentina in South America. These convergences can take place within the framework of the protection of foreign capital, around coinciding political platforms such as the pursuit of development — industrialisation, investment, and foreign markets, attempts to negotiate foreign debts, the creation of development banks, common defense and security projects, etc.

Therefore, regionalisms cannot be considered watertight processes, even in the face of advances in their instruments of institutionalisation. In this sense, the creation of supranational structures should not be considered the only a defining element of their stability and effectiveness. This is because, in the capitalist mode of production, it is not possible to suppose such interconnectedness between the local bourgeoisies that makes it possible to cease the competition and conflicts between them. In this sense, we sustain that regionalism is *a contradictory unity among the power blocs in a given region*⁶.

The hypothesis defended is that the positions of the bourgeoisie hegemonic fraction within the power blocs of the member states, especially those with greater political, economic, and ideological strength in the region, influence the contours of regionalisms. In the example of Mercosur, an emphasis could be placed on analysing the power blocs in Brazil and Argentina. Thus, changes in the power blocs of member states have an impact on the adopted model of regionalism in each historical context. Furthermore, when we analyse regionalism as a contingent arrangement in capitalism, it is important to consider the variation in the degree of instability and contingency of regionalism between imperialist states and regionalism between dependent states. Due to this fact, we argue that just as a dependent state's foreign policy is influenced by the hegemonic fraction in

⁶ Although we are using the same idea of power bloc (a contradictory unity between class fractions in relation with the state structure), it is important to point out that regionalism could not run to a "regional power bloc", and it will not become a supranational state that replaces national states, due to the fact that we consider i) regionalism as a contingent arrangement in capitalism and ii) the capitalist state structure is fundamental for the maintenance of the capitalist mode of production.

the power bloc and by **the relationship that this fraction establishes with foreign capital and imperialism**, these factors also influence the course of regionalism.

In Table 2 below, we summarise the relations between the power blocs and regionalism from the cleavages of class fractions in dependent social formations that we presented in Table 1.

Table 2 - Power bloc and regionalism

Hegemonic fraction in the power bloc (dependent states)	Role of the popular classes vis-à-vis integration	Regionalism model defended by bourgeois fraction	Examples of Regionalism
Comprador/associated bourgeoisie	Opposition	Open regionalism	FTAA, Nafta, Pacific Alliance, Andean Community
Interior/internal bourgeoisie	Political front	Multidimensional regionalism	Mercosur (2003-2012), Unasur, Celac
National bourgeoisie	Political alliance	Anti-imperialist integration. Greater political commitments.	Alba, Petrocaribe

Source: Elaborated by the authors

According to what we presented in Table 2, in the moments when the bourgeoisie associated with international capital is hegemonic within the power blocs, as during the 1990s in Latin America, there is a tendency towards the adoption of *open regionalism*. This form of regionalism consists of a strategy based on the articulation between trade liberalisation and integration, aimed at inserting local economies into the world economy (CEPAL 2000) through free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Pacific Alliance, and the bilateral treaties between the United States, Peru, Colombia, and Chile. Another important example that has not been consolidated is the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), a proposal for liberalising hemispheric trade, proposal shelved at the 2005 Summit of the Americas in Argentina.

The struggle against the FTAA also substantiated the creation of anti-imperialist arrangements in Latin America, such as the proposal of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – People's Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP). For the construction of such arrangements, it is necessary that alliances be created between the national bourgeoisie (mostly state-owned) and the popular classes, and that there be convergence among them. This was the case for the Cuban, Venezuelan, and Bolivian governments at the time⁷. The Cuban and Venezuelan states proposed an integration that would oppose the proposal of the United States and that would create one

⁷ In this case, it would be a national state bourgeoisie in these social formations. Saes (2007) pointed out this hypothesis about Venezuela.

instrument within principles of economic complementarity, solidarity among peoples and economic aid for development.

In this case, an alliance of popular class sectors that build the process of anti-imperialist integration can be observed, as is the case in the creation of the Council of Social Movements in the organisational structure of Alba-TCP and the Articulation of Social Movements towards ALBA. Thus, in this experience, diplomacy of the people was formed, which allows for the joint actions and alliances between organised sectors of the popular classes (Ferreira 2020)

However, in moments when the interior bourgeoisie becomes hegemonic in the power bloc, there is a tendency for an appreciation of multidimensional regionalism. In the case of Mercosur, according to Granato (2015), this is the model of integration that the bloc adopted in 2003 when it assumed inclusive integration: a model of economic and social development that would promote diversification of production and trade, together with policies of broad social inclusion, with income distribution and the deepening of democracies (Coutinho *et al.* 2007; Granato 2015).

Based on the understanding that regionalisms are contingent conformations, i.e., that they undergo changes depending on the correlation between the power blocs of the states involved, we sustain that the best definition for the model that Mercosur and other integration processes under way in Latin/South America in the 2000s would be “multidimensional regionalism.” There is a broadening of the themes/agendas addressed by these regional arrangements, encompassing the dimension of political integration and inserting other actors, beyond state bureaucracy. Moreover, this concept of multidimensional regionalism, understood as a model that a process of integration may assume, depending on the historical conjuncture and the movement of bourgeois fractions, allows for a more workable analysis than the concept of “post-hegemonic regionalism” (Riggirozzi 2012) that some intellectuals have developed to characterise regionalism in Latin America during what they call the “pink tide.”⁸

Mercosur assumed this model after 2003, because it has, as an integration bloc, it went through different formats since its founding and the changes in its arrangement have been linked to the dynamics of the bourgeois fractions in the power blocs of the member states — mainly the Argentinian and the Brazilian states (Granato 2020). Thus, we reiterate that it is not possible to develop a watertight characterisation that places a process of regional integration into a single model. *It is necessary to take into consideration the shape that the regional organisation takes at a given historical conjuncture as a function of the relations between the power blocs of the member-states, especially those with greater political and economic weight in the region.*

⁸ Since we start from the conception regionalism as contingent, in our understanding the terms post-liberal or post-neoliberal reify the concept of integration, as if open regionalism and the liberalising frameworks of the regionalisms in Latin/South America had been transcended. With the crisis of neo-developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina, the origin of our hypothesis is apparent, for the Argentinian and Brazilian states have focused once again on the model of open regionalism in Mercosur or on the proposal of the Forum for the Progress and Development of South America (PROSUR).

We can, therefore, affirm that Mercosur became multidimensional once the interior bourgeoisies became the hegemonic fraction in the power blocs of the Brazilian and Argentinian states. This is because it is possible, at the domestic level, to reconcile the increase in earnings of this bourgeois fraction with social and distributive policies for the working classes; and, at the regional level (in the specific case of Mercosur), there is the possibility of expanding the spectrum of the bloc beyond the eminently commercial dimension. An example of this is the Mercosur Social Institute (2007) and the Mercosur Social Summit (created in 2006). This dimension bears the pendular behaviour of the interior/internal bourgeoisie (Martuscelli 2018) in two directions: i) the ambivalent position in relation to imperialism, that is, at certain moments it does not oppose the deepening of the social dimension of Mercosur and, at others, it supports a “minimal Mercosur” and ii) the political behaviour of the bourgeois fraction in relation to the dominated classes, when, at times of economic growth, it makes material and (we dare to say) also political concessions to the popular classes. In this case, the inclusion of the popular classes in multidimensional regionalism is seen in their participation in the Mercosur Social Summit, in the Working Group on Labour, and in the demands for greater political commitments as well as for maintenance and expansion of employment in the region. On the other hand, the participation of social movements and organisations was limited. Lubbock (2022) argues that this inclusion occurred superficially, as it did not involve non-state actors in the policy-making process, reducing the progress of regional social policy.

By presenting the link between the interests of class fractions and the dynamics of regionalism, we seek to contribute to the analysis that the national state does not determine its international insertion through a decision-making process solely based on state bureaucracy, nor is the determination of a state’s foreign policy agenda influenced by “interest groups” or elite alliance. The interests of the dominant class, more specifically the hegemonic fraction of the dominant class in the power bloc, bear influence on the direction of foreign policy and, consequently, on how the state seeks to influence the regionalism of which it is a member. In short, depending on the historical conjuncture and the convergence between the interests of the bourgeois fractions of the power blocs, there is the possibility of fomenting different models of regionalism, as well as of changing the dynamics of already existing regional blocs.

An important addendum: in the specific case of Latin America and others dependent social formations, a central element to be investigated regards defining the implications of the presence of foreign capital *and imperialism on regionalism* (Bandeira 2003). The FTAA, for example, was an integration proposal that, if consolidated, would deepen the presence of American capital and bring a series of new consequences for the dynamics of the continent’s economies. This is expressed in the implications of NAFTA on the Mexican economy (see Morgenfeld 2013).

Latin America and the Caribbean have been an important destination for Chinese investments in recent decades, through mergers and acquisitions and through investment in new projects (greenfield). ECLAC’s report on Foreign Direct Investment (2021) shows that between 2005 and 2020, 8.9% of the total amount of mergers and acquisitions by companies from China

and Hong Kong and 8.1% of the amount of project announcements. Therefore, in the 21st century, the analysis of the presence of Chinese capital has become central to the analysis of Latin and South American regionalism, such as the research conducted by Cidade (2016).⁹ In this article, this variable was not analysed in depth, demonstrating the analytical potential for future research.

Conclusion

This article sought to contribute to regionalism studies based on the analysis of the interests of classes and class fractions of member states and the different models of regionalisms. Unlike the classical approaches that have focused on the institutional models of regional integration, we do not believe that it is possible to speak of regionalism in the capitalist mode of production as a process that transcends the nation-state, or as a perennial and stable process.

Thus, our hypothesis is that the positions of the bourgeois fractions within the power blocs of the member states, especially those with the greatest political, economic, and ideological strength in the region, influence the models of the integration processes. Thus, we argue that the hegemonic class fraction in the power bloc influences the model of regionalism adopted and may oscillate between the hegemony of the comprador/associated bourgeoisie and open regionalism; the hegemony of the internal bourgeoisie and multidimensional regionalism; and the hegemony of the national bourgeoisie and anti-imperialism. Therefore, regionalism is *a contradictory unity between the power blocs of a region at a given historical conjuncture*.

Dependency is a central variable in the condition of regionalism's greater intermittence and instability among dependent social formations. The interests of the bourgeois fractions within the power blocs are impacted by the action of foreign capital and imperialism. We believe, therefore, that the proposed theoretical approach may contribute to future analyses of regionalisms among dependent social formations.

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⁹ See Cidade, Lucas Rovaris. **A (re)ascensão chinesa e a intensificação das relações sino-sul-americanas**: consequências ao processo de regionalização da América do Sul. Thesis (Masters in International Relations) UFSC, 2016. Available at: <https://repositorio.ufsc.br/handle/123456789/172786> Accessed on: 11 Dec. 2020.

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