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COMUNICAÇÕES

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Transnational Historical Bloc and the Architecture of Peace in South America

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the South American's transnational historical bloc formation and development towards the architecture of peace in South America. The conceptualization of peace in South America has often been characterized as being an "anomaly" in terms of inter-state conflict, due the existence of long periods of peace (here understood as the absence of direct state conflict). In order to understand such configuration of peace, it is used a neogramscian perspective of power formation in terms of cohesion and consensus, which represents the willingness of a dominant class(es) that forms the historical bloc. Thus, the internationalization of such concept it is based on the transnationalization of such dominant class(es) across, in this case, South America states and, consequently, forming a transnational historical bloc. It is argued that the transnational historical bloc has been present among South America countries and has directly influenced the process of peace in the region.

Introduction

This paper discusses peace in South America through a neogramscian perspective of regionalism, applying the concept of a transnational historical bloc, with the goal of analyzing the role of this concept in the maintenance or consolidation of peace. In this paper it is argued that regionalism provides the basis for such peace to occur, which leads to its understanding as an anomaly across peace studies. This relation between regionalism and peace is far from innovative. The very creation of the European Union was underpinned by this idea. Nevertheless, the innovation of this

paper is to question this relationship through the analysis of the role of the transnational historical bloc in South America. In this way, this paper seeks to understand the role of the transnational historical bloc in the creation/consolidation of southern American peace through regionalism.

Even though it is not possible to establish a causal nexus between peace and economic development (via regional integration), it would, at least, be prudent to say that these two concepts are mutually interdependent. The importance of this approach to peace studies is that it is normally seen as being one of the most quoted aspects of South American regionalism as being a hold back in terms of deepening integration. What is important to stress here is the fact that peace and economic development are an ever-present issue for political elites and civil society in South America[2].

1. The architecture of peace in South America

Focusing on the nature of the armed conflicts within the field of peace studies and conflict resolution, the South America region is often characterized as being an "anomaly" in terms of the occurrence of inter-state conflicts (Mares, 2001). But this fact does not mean that South America should be regarded as a peaceful region. In fact, disputes and grievances[3] normally arising from territorial disputes,[4] plus asymmetries between South American countries, explain why this region is termed a "zone of relative peace" rather than a "peaceful zone" (Holsti, 1996: 161). And so, it is marked by a "negative peace" (Galtung, 1969), characteristic that configures the singular architecture of peace in that region, that is the absence of direct armed conflicts between states. Therefore, the conditions of war, represented by Martin, could be shown in the table below,

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[2] For more on the relationship among security, democracy and economic development in South American regionalism, see for example (Diamint, 2004; Hurrell, 1998; Kaltenthaler and Mora, 2002; Steves, 2001).

[3] For further information about the major features of the Peru-Ecuador conflict, for example, see (Palmer, 1997).

[4] For further information about the origins and nature of South American disputes, see (Buzan and Wæver, 2003); and for a detailed account about sources of tension in the South America recently, see (O Estado de São Paulo, 2007).

Figure 1: Normal and Anomalous Nature of War and Peace

CONDITIONS FOR CONFLICT

		Absent	Present
War	**O** **U** **T**	1 ANOMALOUS Occurrence of war	2 NORMAL Occurrence of war
Peace	**C** **O** **M** **E**	3 NORMAL Occurrence of peace	4 ANOMALOUS Occurrence of peace

Source: (Martín, 2006: 16)

Albeit the current conjuncture in South America, as previously mentioned by Mares (2001), as being characterized as *sui generis* in terms of peace, it is certain that inter-states conflicts are not a priority in South American foreign policy. Considering this specific peace, it is important to explore the conditions of war in order to stress the fact that such region has been characterized by the presence of peace albeit its particularities proxy to conflict. In this regard, Boulding (1978) has differentiated stable peace from unstable peace. Whereas the former is based on the concept of security communities, that necessarily need a certain degree of integration among groups, the latter, on the contrary, relies on understanding why countries with latent conflicts of interests are able to coexist peacefully, concluding that there are at least four hypothesis that determine such condition (Boulding, 1978). As he pointed out,

> "Hypothesis 1: A state of peace is most likely to emerge among states that are heterogeneous in the exercise of national power. Hypothesis 2: <u>A state of peace</u> is most likely to emerge among states that <u>are heterogeneous in their economic activities</u>. Hypothesis 3: A state of peace is most likely to emerge among states that are homogeneous in their societal attributes. Hypothesis 4: Even if the exercise of power, economic activities, and societal attributes favor pacific relations, some catalytic event may be required to set the process of reconciliation in motion. The most probable candidate for this role is an acute crisis between the two states" (Boulding, 1978: 12-17)[5]

The peace process in South America is highly connected with the concept of regionalism and, therefore, its consequences over politics in that region. The literature on regionalism, from the point of view of a cohesive definition of regionalism within IR theories has not been much developed and, consequently, there is no consensus regarding a solid definition. Nonetheless, the rise of regions, instead of a worldwide cohesive block, has been the subject of analysis by scholars in different areas (Bach, 2005; Das, 2004; Pomfret, 2007; Wunderlich, 2007). Yet, it is still fundamental to

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[5] Underline stressed by the author.

distinguish between regions, regionalism and regionalization. Fawcett points out that *regions* are units based on shared characteristics, which might be permanent or institutionalized; *regionalism* thus implies a harmonization of common interests in order to achieve regional cohesion in one or more areas; finally, *regionalization* is essentially a process that concentrates activities at the regional level (Fawcett, 2005: 23-27).

However, the rupture between regionalism and the so-called "new regionalism" is represented by ne w forms of socio-political relationship between states based on the notion of territory, rather than administrative and legal structures (Albrechts et al., 2003). As Scott pointed out "[New] Regionalism – understood as a paradigm – integrates notions of economic dynamism, administrative efficiency, community-empowerment, civil society, responsive governance within a spatial framework, the region." (Scottt, 2009: 4). This new-regionalism reflects also conflict resolution mechanisms, which helped member states to reach cohesion and consensus in all spheres (social, political and economic). The major questions related to regionalism in South America nowadays allude to the constraints and flaws of Mercosur and its role in the most recent agreement for the possible merger of Mercosur and the Andean Community, creating the Union of South America Nations (UNASUR), launched in 2007, in Caracas, and culminating with the signature of its constitutive treaty in May 2008, in Brasilia. This event evinces the willingness of a deepening in the relationship of the South American transnational bloc. Moreover, this can be understood as an enlarging of Mercosur's transnational historical bloc and, therefore, an effort to make the region more stable and hence a more peaceful one. That could be understood as showing elites cohesion from the South American transnational historical bloc, at the regional level, in terms of regionalism, and its importance to explain the consolidation of South American peace.

Apart from sporadic cases[6], conflict resolution in South America has most often followed negotiation and diplomacy in the settlement of disputes, which makes it useful to think of solidification of peace in regional, rather than global, terms. It is somewhat well-known the South American notion that 'South American issues must be dealt with

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[6] For example: 1825-1826, the Uruguayan War between Brazil and Uruguay; 1836-1839 Peruvian War between Chile and Argentina versus Brazil and Peru; 1841, Peruvian-Bolivian war; 1851-1852, La Plata War, between Brazil and Argentina; 1864-1870, War of the Triple Alliance between Paraguay versus Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay; 1863, Equatorian-Colombian War; 1932-1935, Chaco War, Bolivia versus Paraguay; 1982 Malvinas/Falkland War, Argentina versus Great Britain; 1995, Cenepa War, between Peru and Equator (Mares, 2001): 33).

by South American countries'. In fact, there are some advantages to studying peace and peace formation from a regional rather than a global perspective. For instance, Diehl pointed out that the creation of consensus among regional organizations' member states is better than in global organizations (Diehl, 2007). It is associated with a clear definition of the interests of member states, thus enabling proper engagement to seek alternative solutions to possible armed conflicts (Lake and Morgan, 1997). Furthermore, Pevehouse noted that, apart from the economic links – and their inherent effects – between regional organizations' members states, the democratic element widely found in South American regionalism has a fundamental role in armed conflict prevention (Pevehouse, 2005). Furthermore, it is easier to reach consensus and/or disputes resolution when less states are involved in. These manifolds aspects of regionalism and the process of peace in South America will be further developed in the next section.

2. The Transnational historical bloc and South American Peace: the role of regionalism

In order to understand the role of regionalism and its relation with the transnational historical bloc to consolidate South America's peace, it is important to further elaborate about the formation of what Gramsci called historical bloc. The combination of all levels of society – i.e. political, civil and economic – forms what Gramsci called the *blocco storico* (historical bloc). Using a Marxist language, the historical bloc is formed by the interaction between the structure and the superstructure[7] (Gramsci, 1971; Gruppi, 1978; Portelli, 1977). For a historical bloc to exist there must be a dominant or hegemonic social class, e.g. political and economic elites (Cox, 1983; Leysens, 2008), in conjunction with other elements, which include the channels of influence used by this dominant social class (political party, religious group or movement, military establishment, educational system, etc.) (Sassoon, 1987).

For Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971: 12), civil society means socio-political forces that interact with each institutions in order to form their political identities; these are manifested by private institutions such as religion, schools, associations, and political

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[7] According to Gramsci, using Marx conceptualization, the structure is marked by a social formation that depends on productive forces (economics) and the superstructure relies on political and ideological forces. This relation is not static but rather organic concerning the notion of historical bloc adopted in this paper (Portelli, 1977: 15).

parties. Closely connected with the concept of civil society is the concept of political society, or the state, which is part of the superstructure, and it is at this state level that civil society struggles occur. By definition, states embrace both the use of legitimate violence (military and police forces) and bureaucracies (legal system, education, public services, the press, means of communication) (Bocock, 1986). So, for a revolutionary event to happen it is crucial that the elites of the political and civil societies organize themselves with a view to replacing the previously pre-established order. In regard of this, Robert Cox affirms that "a new bloc is formed when a subordinate class (e.g., the workers) establishes its hegemony over other subordinate groups (e.g., small farmers, marginals)" (Cox, 1983: 57).

This concept of historical bloc relies necessarily on the notion of hegemony, which simultaneously should involve all levels of society (Gruppi, 1978) as well. Hegemony thus permitted Gramsci to enlarge the concept of state, leading to a broader and a more complex formulation that would include the major support of political structures in civil society (Cox, 1983: 51). Transposing such idea to the international sphere, one could see for example formation of regional institutions.

This idea follows Cox's operationalization of Gramsci's thought into a globalized world order, where he advocates that international organizations are a mechanism of consensus and therefore hegemony formation. Here, one can clearly see the transposition of Gramsci's concept to the international arena. Recovering the understanding that the formation of a hegemonic notion is precluded by the formation of a historical bloc, at this point Cox leaves us with the possibility of the formation of historical bloc at the regional/international level (Cox, 1983: 171-173) as has been argued in this paper.

There are at least two proposals regarding the possibility of transposing the national historical bloc formation to the international relations sphere and, consequently, of forming a possible "transnational historical bloc", in this case study, throughout regionalism. The first one consists of a juxtaposition of member states' historical blocs whose international interests converge to maintain or improve both the domestic and international hegemonic *status quo*. In this case, the "transnational historical bloc" is formed by the national (domestic) historical blocs of a certain

regional organization. Bearing in mind that this latter is the combination of the dominant modes of production (structure) and the political and civil societies (superstructure), it is valid to affirm that the choice of integration serves the purposes and interests of hegemonic groups within national borders. Another possible transnational historical bloc results from the convergence between transnational relations of production (structures) interests, which, in a more integrated and globalised world, transcend state borders and are merged into regional organization commitments (legal and political norms).

In both cases, the concept of transnational historical bloc relies on a collective interest shared by the dominant classes. Even though Carnevali (Carnevali, 2005: 45) stresses the inapplicability of the Gramscian concept of historical bloc to the international arena, due to its close connection with social class, it is fundamental to mention the importance of an emergent transnational class, based on shared capitalist interests. Under this conceptualization, part of this "transnationalization" of historical blocs will follow the course of a transnational capitalist class (see Robinson and Harris, 2000; Sklair, 2001; Sklair, 2002).

Therefore, it is argued that South-American peace is more the result of the transnational historical bloc cohesion than from the absence of armed conflicts throughout its history. In sum, one of the main goals of this paper is to understand why South American actors have, until now, resorted to mechanisms of pacific conflict resolution rather than those of armed violence, even in contexts where it could have happened. Ultimately, the transnational capitalist class would embrace the neo-liberal order as one of its major premises, insofar as an elite-driven hegemonic project would be undertaken by certain capitalist groups whose intentions are reflected in an enlargement of their sphere of influence through a neo-liberal order.

Asses such dynamics under the transnational historical bloc concept allows us to distinct it from the transnational capitalist classes. However, there is an important handicap concerning the concept of transnational class that should be taken into account, which is its major focus on capitalist/economic classes across borders (Arrighi, 1993; Pijl, 1998; Robinson, 2005, 2006; Robinson and Harris, 2000). In order to overcome this limitation, this paper makes use of the 'transnational historical bloc' notion, which includes not only the economic capitalist classes, as already mentioned,

but also its relationship with other spheres (civil, political and economic) within and across national borders. This allows for a broader and more complete understanding of South American reality regarding its architecture of peace.

Thus, in terms of regional security we seek to problematize the specificity of peace in this region and the consequences arising from regional integration. So, might regionalism be seen as an instrument of peace?   We intend to show how the paradoxical nature of conflict in South America is the source of both economic stability and instability, causing political disputes. The importance of such relation regarding economic stability and the absence of direct conflicts between states is that it is normally seen as being one of the most quoted constraints on South American regionalism, particularly among Mercosur's member states.

Meanwhile, the path towards economic integration taken by South American countries in the 1990s has had relevant impacts over the architecture of peace regionally. One outcome is appeasement or preventing the escalation of conflict arising from domestic and/or diplomatic disputes to the level of armed conflict. According to Robinson's argument, Mercosur would be classified as a "junior" (located in the South) partner of a capitalist world system that is simultaneously defending regional and global elites' interests. This could be interpreted as being the two sides of the same coin: on the one hand, as part of a regional independence project where the intention is to allocate Mercosur a better position within the international system, and on the other hand, as part of the transnational class originally from the North and, therefore, part of the United States of America (and its allies') hegemonic project at the region.

This paper takes the extended conception of state, which includes the Gramscian perspective of civil society and the state (part of the political society) that underlies the basis of the global structure[8]. But the importance of the South American elites to the formation of Mercosur should be noted, mostly through coercive supremacy at the regional level by direct (political and economic) and indirect (ideological) power.

During its lifetime, so far, Mercosur has been an easy target for criticism of all kinds (political, institutional, economic, social, etc.) driven by specific international

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[8] Identifying social groups or hegemonic strata is beyond the scope of this study, however.

actors (states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, private sector leaders, etc.).

In sum, South American regionalism contributes to promote harmony among Mercosur's state members concerning their policies. Moreover, this attitude contributes to the absence of inter-state conflicts in the region, in other words, contributes to the solidification of South America's peace. The proximity caused the deepening of such policies at the Mercosur state members level also have been influenced by the willing of the transnational historical bloc, which formed by organic relation of the structure and the superstructure, that means an interdependent relation.

Conclusion

As it is being argued in this paper, the formation of power, through the analysis of a transnational historical bloc, in South America has played a crucial role in order to maintain and/or enhance South American peace. A neogramscian perspective had helped a better understanding of the argument regarding the role of elite's interests over power formation and the current socio-political configuration in South America. Albeit the discussion related to the national-international perspective of Gramsci's thought, it is important to retain that the argument here goes beyond the capitalist class and try to establish the structure founded over South American policies that, inherently resulted in *sui generis* form of peace. Nonetheless, the very existence of a transnational historical bloc in South America allows us to verify shared interests of power and peace processes that culminates over politics and decisions in that region (such as diplomacy, trade negotiations, regionalism, etc.). And, finally, the balance of power and the reconfigurations of the international system resulted from the enhancement of regionalism (Mercosur) brought up new forms of institutionalism that have directly affect the peace and peace process and the balance of power relations in South America.

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