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The hegemonic *hermano*: South American collective identity and Brazilian regional strategy

Rafael Mesquita

Political Science Department, Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), Recife, Brazil

ABSTRACT

This article investigates Brazil's strategy for South America and attempts to understand why its role as a regional power should be considered a type of hegemony instead of leadership, based on the ends pursued by Brasília. Under a constructivist perspective, it analyzes the workings of several collective identity formation mechanisms in the course of South American history to assess whether consistent shared identities and interests have emerged over time. It concludes that regionalism has not yet produced sufficiently salient common identities and interests to overcome collective action problems. The setbacks of the integrationist project indicate that Brazil and its neighbors hold predominantly selfish identities and interests, their ultimate frame of reference being the individual nation-state.

RESUMEN

Este artigo investiga a estratégia brasileira para a América do Sul e busca compreender por que seu papel como um poder regional deve ser considerado um tipo de hegemonia ao invés de liderança, com base nos fins perseguidos por Brasília. Sob uma perspectiva construtivista, analisa o funcionamento de vários mecanismos de formação de identidades coletivas ao longo da histórica sul-americana para avaliar se identidades e interesses compartilhados consistentes emergiram com o tempo. Ele conclui que o regionalismo não produziu ainda identidades e interesses comuns suficientemente salientes para superar problemas de ação coletiva. Os entraves do projeto de integração indicam que o Brasil e seus vizinhos têm identidades e interesses predominantemente egoístas, sendo seu maior quadro de referência o Estado-nação individual.

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Regional powers have become an object of increasing academic attention. One of the distinguishing features of this group of countries, which normally includes Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa, Turkey, and others, is their prominent role in their regions. This characteristic, along with marked domestic inequalities and a selective contestation of the international liberal order, sets them apart from traditional middle powers (Canada, Australia, Netherlands, Nordic countries, South Korea, and others) and it is regarded as a centerpiece in their strategy towards greater influence in world affairs

(Jordaan 2003; Hurrell 2006; Soares de Lima 2010; Milani 2011; Valencia and Ruvalcaba 2012).

This article aims to analyze Brazilian regional powerhood from a constructivist perspective. It will focus particularly on the matter of identification between Brazil and its region, South America. The recent International Relations (IR) literature on Brazil's regional strategy has tended to emphasize the limits, even selectiveness, of its leadership (often characterized as a type of hegemony), underscoring the balancing strategies employed by its would-be followers and also Brasília's resulting ennui with the South Cone (Malamud and Rodriguez 2013; Sandal 2014; Flemes and Wehner 2015; Burges 2015; Mourón and Onuki 2015). A typology proposed by Destradi (2010) classifies the behaviors of regional powers and distinguishes between hegemony and leadership on the basis of the ends pursued, whether selfish or collective, respectively. We will argue that Brazil's regional preeminence has so far consisted of a type of hegemony and that it has not translated into leadership, given the fact that there is no consistent collective interest shared by all South American countries that supersedes the selfish ones. In a constructivist perspective, interests follow identities, and therefore shared goals will be more likely to emerge if a collective identity is in place. Such common identity in South America is either inexistent or very thin to overcome collective action problems, as indicated by the prevalence of selfish, utilitarian behavior in the region (Krapohl, Meissner, and Muntschick 2014; Burges 2015).

In order to validate this claim, the article is structured as follows. First, we will review the constructivist account of the relationship between identities and interests, reviewing the mechanisms through which they are formed. Second, we will consider the role regional powers play in shaping their regions and corresponding identities through their ideas and practices. Third, we will present a brief overview of Brazilian regionalism and its impact on the creation of a collective identity for South America. Fourth, we will analyze four mechanisms that are suggested by constructivism as processes to create shared identities, assessing whether they have produced selfish or collective identities and interests in South America. As a conclusion, we will comment on the implications of this research for the relationship between identities and the nation-state.

1. The formation of collective identities and interest

Constructivism provides a useful framework for conceptualizing the formation of identities, particularly because of two of its features: its concept of identity as an intersubjective and cognitive process; and the role that is assigned to ideas in the construction of reality.

Firstly, unlike the neorealist and neoliberal theories of IR, which see identity and interests as exogenously given, constructivism argues that they are endogenous and intersubjectively generated through processes of interaction, interpretation, and learning. Within this perspective, identities are relatively stable expectations and understandings about oneself which are formed as the subject takes part in these collective senses (Wendt 1992). Barnett (1999, 9) adds that identities are not personal or

psychological phenomena, but social and relational, so that “all political identities are contingent, dependent on the actor’s interaction with others and place within an institutional context”. Hopf (1998) points out that, since identities are social and perception-related, the actor is not the final arbiter of what it means to others. In his words, “the producer of the identity is not in control of what it ultimately means to others; the intersubjective structure is the final arbiter of meaning” (Hopf 1998, 175).

Secondly, it follows from that premise that the world is shaped by both material and symbolic factors. State behavior is not determined by material capacities alone. Beliefs held by it and its peers are also important. Thus, constructivism is in an intermediate position between the rationalist/objectivist vision and the idealist/reflexive one, by postulating that reality is not only socially constructed but also attached to material foundations. Constructivism is also in the midway between the individual and the structure, as it denies them both ontological precedence, arguing that agent and structure are mutually constituted. There is a duality in the structure, being both the environment in which practices take place among agents and the very product of these practices (Wendt 1987, 1992; Adler 1997; Hopf 1998; Guzzini 2000).

Since constructivism can be defined in short as a social theory of interstate relations, identities and interest are also held to be a product of social, interactive processes between states. According to Barnett (1999, 9), “national and state identities are partly formed in relationship to other nations and states [...] the identities of political actors are tied to their relationship to those outside the boundaries of the community and the territory”. In other words, identities are composed of a relational dimension which situates the actor within a certain group (in group) that is differentiated from other groups (out group) (Abdelal et al. 2006; Neumann 1996).

Highlighting this intersubjective dynamic as the genesis of identities and interest also informs us about the probable content they will acquire, in a way that challenges traditional accounts of state preferences. The neorealist and neoliberal traditions tend to see state interest as inherently selfish, with variations between those paradigms on how inalterable such behavior is deemed to be. Conversely, constructivism postulates that this selfish pursuit of national interests is not given a priori. A state might have selfish or non-selfish interests as a consequence of the identity it develops socially. The degree to which a state acquires selfish or collective interests is related to the extent to which it identifies negatively (differentiation and hostility) or positively (sameness and friendliness) with other states. States that identify positively with others will come to think of their “I” inextricably bound to a “we”, and consequently will tend to articulate their interests in terms of collective wellbeing instead of individual gain.

Wendt (1994) suggests three system-level mechanisms which contribute to the formation of state identities: (1) structural context, (2) systemic processes, and (3) strategic practice. To these, we include an additional one, (4) narratives, which is located within the state level.

Firstly, the structural context refers to the global or regional environment, which will impact on the likelihood of certain identities emerging. Highly conflictive, Hobbesian environments will favor negative identification between states. They will see one another as threats, therefore triggering security dilemmas, zero-sum mindsets, and

self-help behavior. In contrast, peaceful settings favor positive identification, which can lead to cooperation and the development of shared interests.

Secondly, systemic process refers to the dynamics in the external context of state action. Wendt points out two of such processes. The first is increasing interdependence, which can occur as a result of denser interactions (e.g. trade), or as a response to the appearance of a “common other”, a shared threat. Both processes can increase awareness between states regarding their vulnerability, making it more likely that they will pursue collective strategies to address their challenges, given that as “the ability to meet corporate needs unilaterally declines, so does the incentive to hang onto the egoistic identities that generate such policies, and as the degree of common fate increases, so does the incentive to identify with other” (Wendt 1994, 389).

Transnational convergence of domestic values is a second type of systemic process, which can occur in the cultural and political domains. The convergence of values can be a byproduct of interdependence, or deliberate replication, and its practical effect is a greater homogeneity between actors. This can lead to shared identities because as “heterogeneity decreases, so does the rationale for identities that assume that *they* are fundamentally different from *us*, and the potential for positive identification increases on the grounds that ‘they’re no different from us, and if it could happen to them. . .’” (Wendt 1994, 390). It is important to stress that neither of these systemic processes are a sufficient condition for the formation of collective identities. They represent critical conjunctures in which a state’s self-understanding is called into update (Barnett 1999; Marcussen et al. 1999), but the response might actually be a strengthening of egotism.

Thirdly, collective identities might be the result of strategic interaction; that is, of repeated games between actors which over time tend to alter not only their behavior and expectations about one another, but their actual identities. In a rational choice perspective, repeated interactions do not replace egoistic interests for collective ones, but from a constructivist point of view such games can lead actors to see themselves as a “we” bound together by certain rules. Different outcomes imply changes in meaning and expectations that ultimately mean a shift in who we believe others to be.

Lastly, Barnett (1999, 12) has proposed coupling the analysis of identities with that of narratives, as national identities need to be tied to a certain “storyline concerning their origins, the critical events that define them as a people, and some broad agreement over where they should be headed”. It can only be said that a group of actors share a collective identity, and that they constitute an “imagined community”, insofar as they can be inscribed in an account that is unique and differentiates their path from that of other peoples (Anderson 1983). Such narratives are relevant for political action: firstly because they offer a repertoire of symbols, practices, and lore from which identities (and therefore interests) can be crafted; secondly, because they are in themselves the object of political dispute, as different actors compete to offer their own reading of past events and their present implications.

2. Regional powers as region shapers

A number of traits have been listed by the literature to attempt to define regional powers and to place them in relation to adjacent concepts, such as great powers, leading power, or

middle powers.¹ For this study, we will emphasize the ideational dimension: how such states perceive themselves, what role they understand they are entitled to play, and what place that leaves for their neighboring countries. As summarized by Nolte (2010), the symbolic dimension is as important as the material one in defining a rising power.

Most authors do not refer to specific objective criteria or resources (GDP, military power, etc.) to differentiate middle powers from great powers or less powerful states. Rather, they define a middle power from a constructivist point of view as a self-created identity or an ideology for the conduct of foreign policy [...] The status of middle power or regional power is a social category that depends on the recognition of this status and the corresponding power hierarchy by other states. Nevertheless, inclusion in this social category also presupposes the corresponding material resources. (Nolte 2010, 892)

Similarly, Hurrell et al. (2000) define middlepowermanship

not as a category defined by some set of objective attributes or by objective geopolitical or geoeconomic circumstances; but rather as a self-created identity or ideology [...] Middlepowermanship, on this view, becomes an embedded guiding narrative, a particular foreign policy ideology that can be traced historically. (Hurrell et al. 2000, 1)

The self-definition of a regional power necessarily implies the definition of the region in which it aims to exert leadership. Within this perspective, regions should not be considered as determined by geography alone but as the product of social practices. As Paasi (2011) suggests, regions “have not only a territorial shape (vague or more explicit boundaries) but also a symbolic shape that manifests itself in social practice that produces/reproduces the region and which is used to construct narratives of identity and to symbolize a region”. Narratives of identity are carried out by those actors bestowed with the symbolic power to determine what does and what does not characterize the region.

Within the boundaries of the nation-state, the government is the “chief narrator” capable of fixing a semantic catalog that sets the terms for the identity/alterity nexus (Guillaume 2002). On a regional level, we can expect that the most powerful states will occupy an analogous position, as material capacities tend to determine what ideas are deemed legitimate (Adler 1997; Hopf 1998). Regional powers are, in Nolte’s (2010) definition, expected to articulate a common regional identity. Nonetheless, the symbolic monopoly a state enjoys internally is hard to replicate externally, as other sovereign (and therefore formally equal) states can effectively dispute one country’s definition of the region. As a matter of fact, it might be part of the strategy of states competing for regional leadership to discredit an established power’s guiding narrative for the region and propose critical re-readings. The presence of regional institutions, integration mechanisms, or a self-restrained foreign policy on the part of the leader might serve to amplify such discourses.

3. Hegemony, leadership, and collective interests

In order to characterize Brazil as a regional power,² we will use Destradi’s (2010) typology, which identifies a range of possible strategies that states of such class may pursue. Destradi identifies three possible behaviors which vary in terms of the ends sought (whether selfish or collective) and the means deployed (material or symbolic). “Empire” is the behavior that occupies one end of the continuum and it is characterized

by the search of selfish ends through hard power means, such as coercion, imposition, and military intervention. “Hegemony” occupies the middle of the spectrum. A hegemon pursues selfish goals, though presenting them to subordinate states as collective. Consensus among subordinates is obtained via a combination of material incentives and ideational power instruments. The author subdivides hegemony into three forms: “hard”, which relies on subtle forms of coercion, threats, and sanctions to ensure dominance; “intermediary”, which “is centered around the provision of material benefits and rewards to subordinate states (as suggested by hegemonic stability theory) in order to make them acquiescent” (Destradi 2010, 919); and “soft”, in which the hegemon tries to change the values and norms guiding the subordinate states so that they would willingly comply, rendering material sanctions and incentives unnecessary. Lastly, the strategy of “leadership” differs from “hegemony” in that the regional power does not pursue selfish ends; instead, it is the leading agent in the search for a collective goal.

As this classification focuses solely on behavior, for our study, we will add a prior analytical layer to its framework, by using the constructivist explanation for the formation of collective identities and interests as a way to account for the origin and evolution of Brazil’s identity as a regional and global power, and which types of goals have been fostered by it. Following Wendt (1994), our hypothesis is that if the identity-formation mechanisms have produced more collective South American identities (and therefore common goals), Brazil’s behavior should be closer to regional leadership; alternatively, if they have yielded predominantly egotistic identities (and hence selfish goals), Brazil should exert hegemony or empire instead. The higher the costs of followership, the closer we should be to these latter cases.

4. Brazilian regionalism: a brief summary

Brazil’s history and characteristics have contributed to set it apart from its fellow American countries since its early years as a sovereign nation: it was the sole Portuguese-speaking country in a region populated by Hispanic nations. Its peculiar independence process, carried out without liberators or generals, was less traumatic than that of other American countries, which also meant that Brazil nurtured a less antagonistic relationship with Europe.

As a matter of fact, independent Brazil became a European-style monarchy of continental proportions, surrounded by fragmentary Hispanic republics. This led to a self-perception by Brazil that, due to its Portuguese heritage, continental proportions, greater stability, and regime type, it was fundamentally different (i.e. superior) from its neighbors.

In the imperial period, Brazil, by conserving the dynastic principle as a source of legitimacy, decisively differentiated itself from its American neighbors, which now represented for the empire an irreconcilable ‘other’. In the metaphorical rupture between America and Europe, Brazil ideologically placed itself alongside with the European powers. The key to allow for this ideological operation was the concept of ‘civilization’. During the Empire, Brazil built its self-image from a perception of an alleged superiority in terms of civilization – which its political regime represented, by approximating it of the European monarchies. Though retrograde, slavery-dependent and distant, this ‘tropical monarchy’

felt superior to its neighbors, which were perceived by it as anarchical and savage. (Santos 2004, cited in Santos 2005, 1–2)³

The feeling was reciprocal. Latin America also regarded the gigantic empire and its close ties with the dominators from the Old Continent with suspicion (Pereyra-Doval and Romero 2013). Normatively, a crowned monarch was an alien body and an anachronism in republican America. One of the most visible signs of this aversion was that only Brazil, the USA, and Haiti were kept out of the Panama Congress, summoned in 1824 by Bolívar, who regarded Brazil as possessing a fundamentally distinct character and, worse still, having imperialist ambitions regarding the Rio de la Plata (Bethell 2009, 294–5).

This attitude began to change with the onset of the Republic, which initiated a new paradigm in Brazilian foreign policy. The American shift is well represented by the legacies of the diplomats Joaquim Nabuco and the Baron of Rio Branco. Brazil sought, early in the twentieth century, to identify positively with its American neighbors, following a strategic migration of the country's interest away from Europe and towards the USA. Practically, this was a recognition of Washington's leadership of the north of the continent, and an attempt to secure Brazil's prominence in the south.

Brazil's quest for greater regional prestige met little success. The most emblematic case (which bears resemblance to more recent scenarios) was the refusal of fellow South American countries to endorse Brazil's bid for a permanent seat at the League of Nations in the 1920s. Brazil's application was grounded on the argument that it would represent the region's interest before the world; ironically, opposition came precisely from South American countries, which did not see themselves as represented, thus revealing the significant "cognitive dissonance" between Brazil and its neighbors regarding the former's regional status (Santos 2005, 8).

In summary, Santos (2010) argues that Brazil's new role, its active American identity, was not a synonym to full identification with its peers. The Americanist approach lasted until the 1960s. Brazil's chief concern was securing privileged relations with the new global power, either for pragmatic or ideological reasons, depending on the government. Washington's indifference, allied with the growing complexity of Brazil's economy, led Brasília do adopt a more universalist paradigm starting in the 1960s (Amorim Neto 2011).

The most significant change regarding Brazil's regionalism was the creation of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur). The economic bloc was created out of the approximation of Brazil and Argentina. Their relationship had been marked by prolonged mutual suspicion and competition, not only during Brazil's imperial period but especially during their military dictatorships, with disputes in fields such as frontier rivers and nuclear research (Pereyra-Doval and Romero 2013; Galvão 2009). During the Cold War, regional integration in Latin America did not progress due to the military governments' vertical alignment with Washington, tense diplomacy, and their insistence on substitution-of-imports development models (Medeiros 2000).

Integration was made feasible thanks to changes in the structural context: the end of the bipolar era and appearance of new centers of power around the world, which gave Latin America more diplomatic choices. Internally, the end of authoritarian regimes was relevant both as a cause and condition for interstate dialog. The return of

democracy restored confidence between Brazil and Argentina, and both countries believed that the creation of a political and economic community between them would, among other benefits, strengthen democracy (Dabène 2009, 73).

The approximation process between Brazil and Argentina officially began in 1985 with the signing of the Declaration of Iguazu. For the next four years, a new act or program was signed every year, furthering the integration process and ushering in a record amount of bilateral trade. With the Buenos Aires Act, the deadline of 1994 was set for the creation of a common market. Mercosur became a significant experiment in “open regionalism” and had among its defining features an intergovernmental institutional design which would not compromise the interests of its member states, such as Brazil’s enduring foreign policy concern with preserving autonomy (Fonseca Jr. 1998; Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007).

In the past 15 years, Mercosur’s integrationist promise has been cast into doubt. Its main economies have rolled back into protectionist preferences and displays of the group’s capacity to act in coordination have become rarer. Though the bloc is still a relevant forum for regional governance, it is becoming evident that the original commercialist character of the bloc has been replaced by a more political and cooperative horizon, which is in tune with Brazil’s aspiration for increasing political clout (Medeiros, Lima, and Cabral 2015). The shift away from the original neoliberal tenets of the common market can be seen as another outcome of the rise of Left-wing governments in South America in the 2000s (Saraiva 2011).

The change in the political and ideological landscape in South America called for a reassessment of the regional integration project, as the heightened nationalisms could potentially halt or reverse this process. The Union of South American Nations (Unasur) is arguably the most relevant institution of a new batch of initiatives that seek mainly political coordination instead of commercial integration. According to Sanahuja (2012), Unasur is the result of a Brazilian geopolitical design which serves its regional leadership interest, and also accommodates the goals of fellow countries due to its promises regarding infrastructure, energetic integration, market diversification, and mutual assistance. Most notably, the group has so far played an important role in diffusing regional crises. It has been considered a harbinger of a “post-liberal” regionalism in South America, which is characterized by a re-dramatization and politization of foreign policies, the return of the state, and of agendas which incorporate developmentalism and social justice priorities (Sanahuja 2012).

In this process, Venezuela has emerged as a banner carrier which offers a competing project to Brazil’s regionalism. Instead of the sort of benign leadership that is presented by the latter, Caracas perceives integration as an instrument to deepen the “revolutionary process” against neoliberalism and imperialism, emphasizing the political, ideological, and military aspects of regionalism (Saraiva 2011). Such vision is seen on display more clearly in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alba), founded in 2004. Brazil’s more pragmatic attitude and desire not to alienate the USA has sought to moderate Venezuelan discourse on other regional institutions under Brazil’s influence, such as Unasur and Mercosur (Sanahuja 2012).

5. Has regionalism produced a South American identity?

In this section, we will evaluate whether or not the mechanisms outlined previously have led to the formation of collective identity and interests in South America. In

particular, we will assess to what extent it has been possible for Brazil to identify positively with its neighbors, which would allow us to characterize its behavior as leadership instead of hegemony.

5.1. Structural context

In comparison to other parts of the world, one of the striking features of South America is its enduring peace. This trait has been extolled by political figures and heads of state as the great lesson that the region can teach the current conflict-torn world order.⁴

This stability can be attributed to elements such as a normative consensus between South American states on a preferentially peaceful settlement of disputes and the legalist tradition.⁵ Democratization and increasing economic interdependence after the Cold War contributed significantly to crystallize a sense of shared fate between the recently-elected civil governments in the region.

The challenges faced by new democracies in Argentina (1983) and in Brazil (1985) contributed to creating a sense of common vulnerability, especially in regard to the power of the armed forces [...] Both countries used to maintain reciprocal conflict hypothesis by the mid-1980s, which was seen by the newly-democratic authorities as a source of domestic and economic power for the military. In this sense, the deepening of economic, political, and military relations were perceived by the democratic leaders as a strategy to reduce military power and assert civilian control. (Battaglini 2012, 145–6).

Merke (2015) arrives at similar conclusions. Contrary to other readings (cf. Flandes and Wehner 2015), he does not see that the reaction of secondary and tertiary states in South America to Brazil's rise can be labeled as "balancing". Brasília is not perceived as a threat (see also Spektor 2010), because this regional society has such low levels of conflict that these security mindsets do not arise, making the label inappropriate. He argues that the main institution in this society is not the balance of power but the "*concertación*", which consists of "a loose form of (regional) international organization based on consensus-seeking and peaceful settlement of disputes. Its normative instrumental follows predictable lines, namely *uti possidetis*, non-aggression, nonintervention and international arbitration" (Merke 2015, 85). This *modus operandi* presupposes that the states share a diplomatic culture which make resorting to force a less acceptable idea, and its origins can be traced to: (1) the need to counterbalance the USA; (2) the quest for development (which tends to push towards nationalisms, making the integration discourse mostly rhetorical); and (3) the Iberian heritage of legalism.

5.2. Systemic processes

5.2.1. Interdependence

Mercosur has contributed significantly to increase South American economic interdependence. Nonetheless, intra-regional trade flows today are only a fraction of what they used to represent in the early days of the bloc, as extra-regional partners have become more important for all South American countries (Estevadeordal and Suominen 2010). Medeiros and Dri (2013, 43–4) argue that Brazil has not been able to "surpass the so-

called interdependence threshold, that is, to achieve real economic integration capable of creating a new register for politics beyond the nation-state”.

According data from the Brazilian Ministry of Development, Industry, and External Commerce (MDIC 2014), in 2014 Mercosur member countries received 11.1% of Brazil’s exports, trailing behind the USA (12.1%), EU (18.7%), and Asia (32.7%). Mercosur also arrives in fourth place when it comes to origins of Brazilian imports. In comparison with other leading economies in their respective regions, such as Germany, which has a trade rate of 60.59% with the EU (at 2009), it is possible to see that Brazil is relatively less dependent on Mercosur (Medeiros and Dri 2013).⁶

Brazil’s extra-regional ties outweigh regional ones, since the perspective of gains overseas is greater. As a consequence, material interests push Brazilian policies more towards the globe than South America. Krapohl, Meissner, and Muntschick (2014) analyze the conditions under which Brazil has played a leadership role in the region or, alternatively, behaved as a “regional Rambo” that acts unilaterally in the pursuit of its own benefits. They conclude that the extra-regional trade is more important than the intra-regional trade for all regional economies, but that the asymmetry between smaller states and the regional leader is so great that the latter is far less dependent on regional economic integration. The regional integration process is highly dependent on the initiative of the local power, and the latter’s interest in its success is given by the distribution of extra-regional gains. The authors conclude that when the perspective of extra-regional gains is small, the country can act as a leader (as did Brazil in creating Mercosur in the early 1990s) but, when it is greater, as a Rambo (as in 1999 when Brazil unilaterally devalued its currency, without consulting Argentina, which contributed to triggering its recession, leaving a dent on mutual trust):

Since regional powers profit less from internal gains of regional integration, their regional strategy will be constrained by their economic relations to extra-regional actors. Problems for a constant supply of regional leadership result from the fact that regional powers are likely to have privileges in their extra-regional economic relations, and that regional integration imposes the risk of losing these privileges. As the largest and most attractive economies in their regions, they are likely to attract disproportional market-seeking investments. Besides, they even may be able to negotiate bilateral trade agreements with extra-regional partners. Regional integration may reduce these privileges since it requires the opening of domestic markets to imports from regional neighbours and the harmonization of external trade policies” (Krapohl, Meissner, and Muntschick 2014, 884)

Vigevani and Cepaluni (2011) also believe that, due to Brazil’s enduring concern with autonomy, integration has not been regarded as an end in itself, but a means to ameliorate the country’s insertion face to the developed world.

The Mercosur experience suggests that the economic benefits of integration are necessary, but not sufficient for ensuring its institutionalization. The perception that one of the partners might come to obtain more advantages in the integration process is harmful to the continuity of the efforts for consolidating Mercosur. (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2011, 165)

In tune with this utilitarian reading, Lazarou and Theodoro (2015) also argue that Brazil’s regionalism is a means to an end, seeking to secure regional stability, recognition on a global level as a regional power, and to balance against US influence.

For Spektor (2010) as well, South America's worth for Brazil is instrumental, e.g. it gives Brasília a region it claims to represent in multilateral fora, vesting its propositions with additional legitimacy. The author identifies three main ideas concerning the region that have developed in the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations (MRE) after the Cold War: the region requires management as it is one of the main sources of instability; it can act as a buffer against the hazards of global capitalism; and it can be an increment to national power. The important feature that links all three views is the prevalence of strictly national interests:

[T]he Brazilian reading of regionalism after the end of the Cold War continues to emphasize less the objectives common to the neighborhood than the protection of the *national* capacity to face the challenges of globalization. Thus, in the Brazilian case, changes in the composition of international society typical of the 1990s and 2000s – and the expansion of regionalism as a legitimate and desirable way to manage the international order – have not translated into the discard of autonomist positions, but into their adaptation with the aim of keeping some room for national maneuver in the world. (Spektor 2010, 37, emphasis in original)

While economic interdependence has remained below the line, other forms of association have taken place in the region that have been significant in forging a community. If interdependence is understood as a heightened awareness between states of their mutual vulnerability and need for cooperation, then the rise of a common threat can be a catalyst for the creation of a shared identity. In South America, some common foes are impersonal and diffuse, such as international crime and underdevelopment, which contribute to the outlining of shared interests. Yet, the great personified “other” of the region remains the USA. As the most powerful state in the continent and in the world, this country has been the foremost counterpart against which the identity and interests of the southern part of the continent have been defined.

Though bilateral relations between the USA and South American countries vary significantly across governments and periods,⁷ it can be pointed out that most states show the same caution regarding Washington's attempts to broaden their power. Galvão (2009) argues that one of the factors that led to a greater institutionalization of the South American region in the 1990s was the perception that initiatives such as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) were a looming sign of economic takeover of the continent by the USA. Likewise, the Free Trade Agreement for the Americas (FTAA) was seen as forwarding US interests and menacing to the ongoing industrialization processes of the largest South American economies (Alemany 2004; Briceño Ruiz 2007; Grugel 2007). To this date, one of Mercosur's greatest demonstrations of its capacity to coordinate collective action was its “en bloc” resistance to the FTAA, which led the project to a standstill in 2004.

South America's identity has been shaped not only by what the USA has intended to accomplish in the region, but also by what it has not done. The emergence of regional leaders is only possible as long as a greater power is not directly involved in the area (Lobell, Jesse, and Williams 2015). Hence, Brazil's leadership was an important cause of Mercosur's institutionalization and of FTAA's obstruction, but an equally significant element was the absence of competing US leadership due to their lack of interest in the region (Teixeira 2011, 194). As a matter of fact, after the 9/11 attacks, other parts of the world have received significantly more attention from the White House, which has left

room for Brazil to expand its role, as well as more diplomatic options available for other South American countries (Flemes and Wehner 2015; Schorr 2015).

Other initiatives, such as the Summit of South American Heads of State, launched in the year 2000, were also relevant in materializing the long-standing Brazilian conception of the South American region as its own sphere of action:

By explicitly articulating the concept of a South America as a distinct regional subsystem, successive Brazilian administrations after the end of the Cold War were basically recuperating a recurrent theme of Brazil's foreign policy that was present since the early days of independence: the notion that in contrast to the rest of Latin America, where Brazil would seek not to get involved and would – sometimes tacitly, sometimes explicitly – recognize US preeminence, South America was understood by Brazilian policy makers as being a Brazilian sphere of influence where US interference should be kept at arm's length since it could easily overtake Brazil as the predominant player in the region. (Teixeira 2011, 204)

5.2.2. Transnational convergence of values

One of the most relevant electoral phenomena in the past decade for the region was the rise of Left-wing governments. After a period of economic and fiscal adjustments to the neoliberal international regime in the 1990s, South American economies started to depart from the Washington Consensus and turned Left (Soares de Lima 2010, 157).

This shift can be regarded as a transnational convergence in the values of South American societies, as it displays a common dissatisfaction with the policies from the neoliberal era and a renewed confidence in developmentalism. For Pereyra-Doval and Romero (2013), shared ideology enabled a type of symbiosis between those governments in South America, of which Lula and Kirchner (followed by Dilma and Cristina) were important examples. For Vigevani and Cepaluni (2011), however, this common worldview, though significant for mutual understanding, could hardly be called a “symbiosis”, as it has not actually extrapolated rhetoric or punctual agreement in order to produce the pursuit of collective goals. The identification between these reformist politicians was not a strong cause to push regional integration forward in an irreversible manner.

The recent parliamentary and presidential elections in Venezuela and Argentina, respectively, could indicate that this Leftist wave is now rolling back as a consequence of new societal preferences.

Beyond electoral results, individuals' self-identification can also be an indicator of transnational value convergence. Has regionalism led South Americans to identify more strongly with their region and not only with their countries? The 2005–2008 World Values Survey (WVS) indicates that South Americans have a regional self-identification very similar to that of EU. citizens, though the latter tend to score higher on the more extreme values of the scale. This is perhaps indicative that weak supranational institutionalization is not at odds with a considerable regional awareness, a “we” feeling in civil society which can contribute to regionness. Though this is positive evidence in favor of a common regional identity, it is worth underscoring how the feeling of “Latinness” is more modest among Brazilians, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Answers to the question “I see myself as a citizen of [the EU/Latin America]”.⁸

Country	N	I see myself as a citizen of the European Union			
		Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Cyprus	1050	29.0	49.2	15.9	5.4
Finland	1014	24.3	49.8	21.1	4.0
Germany	2064	8.7	31.7	34.4	18.8
Hungary	1007	28.9	40.7	20.3	7.2
Italy	1012	19.3	46.6	27.2	4.9
Poland	1000	21.8	54.5	13.1	2.8
Slovenia	1037	17.3	56.2	16.3	4.1
Spain	1200	16.0	59.6	8.8	3.7
Sweden	1003	13.5	59.2	21.9	4.3
Mean	10387	19.9	49.7	19.9	6.1

Country	N	I see myself as a citizen of Latin America			
		Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Argentina	1002	17.4	52.8	20.5	2.7
Brazil	1500	17.4	46.5	29.1	5.1
Uruguay	1000	17.7	57.3	20.0	3.8
Mean	3502	17.5	52.2	23.2	3.9

Source: World Values Survey Wave 5 (2005–2008).

5.3. Strategic interaction

Repeated interactions between agents could lead to the establishment of new individual and collective identities, as they elicit new meanings and roles. Brazil’s regional and global actions under its active and assertive foreign policy of the 2000s have been attempts to update its identity as a regional leader and an emerging power (Mesquita 2014).

In his reading of Brazilian regionalism, Burges (2015) understands that Brasília capitalized in the region in the 1990s, exerting “consensual hegemony”, an “ideationally based type of order” centered on “consensus about how affairs should be ordered and managed that embeds the core interests of the predominant party in the system’s structure” (Burges 2008, 71, cited in Burges 2015, 195). Brazil was able to play this role due to a series of factors: it is the leading economy, it had many ideas on how to conduct regional matters (though not so many resources), it is geographically isolated from the center of global power, great powers were willing to leave regional management in the hands of local powers, and the other South American countries accepted this leadership.

In the 2000s, however, demands for more concrete gestures of leadership (e.g. foreign direct investment, technical assistance, etc.) began surfacing. Brazil has been less willing to offer such payoffs due to its limited resources, internal imperatives, and longstanding concern with preserving autonomy. This reticence led neighboring countries – where nationalist discourses had become prevalent – to become frustrated and systematically challenge Brazilian leadership, as exemplified by the nationalization of gas in Bolivia (2006) and Ecuador’s expulsion of Brazilian companies (2008). Payoffs, direct investment, and funding did eventually become an important part of Brazil’s regionalism, enacted through organs such as the Brazilian Development Bank (*Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social*, BNDES), the Fund for Structural Convergence of Mercosur (*Fundo para a Convergência Estrutural do Mercosul*, FOCM), and the Initiative for South American Regional Infrastructure Integration (*Iniciativa para a Integração da Infraestrutura Regional Sul-Americana*, IIRSA), though

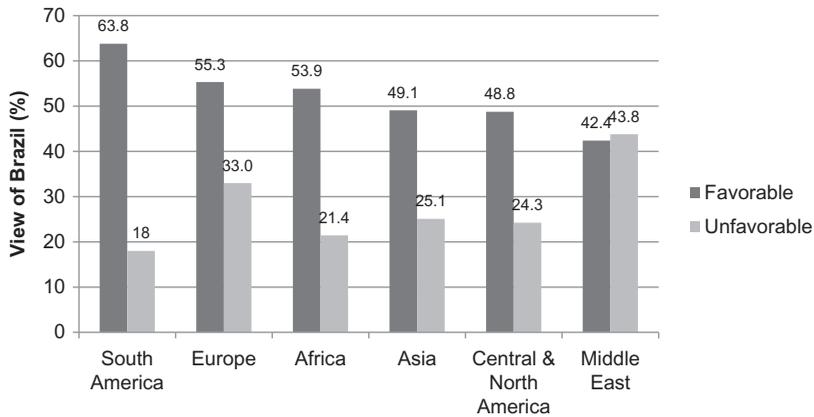


Figure 1. Percentage of individuals holding a favorable versus unfavorable view of Brazil, grouped by geographic region.

Source: Pew Research Center, Global Indicators Database (2014).

it is not consensual among authors how persuasive Brazil has been as a paymaster (Saraiva 2011; Lazarou and Theodoro 2015).

Burges (2015) suggests a linearity between different phases of hegemony: first “consensual hegemony”, which is less costly and focused on ideas; followed by “cooperative hegemony”, when payoffs become necessary for ensuring support. This is indicative that collective identities and interests are absent in the horizon of South American countries. The need for such incentives shows that states act out of a utilitarian strategy rather than a perception of common identities and goals.

This has led some authors to point out that Brazil will tend to pursue its main interest in the world level instead of the regional one, as a banner carrier for the Global South and as the most Western BRICS member (Malamud and Rodriguez 2013; Steiner, Medeiros, and Lima 2014). Nonetheless, it is important to remember Brazilian prestige is still manifestly greater in South America than in the heterogeneous Global South, as shown in the surveys carried out by the Pew Research Center (2014, see Figure 1 of this article) and Latinobarómetro (2010, see Figures 2 and 3).

5.4. Narratives

The creation of a single national identity within the borders of a sovereign state demands a common cultural repertoire, a shared history that makes it possible for a people to identify as a community and to set their experience apart from that of other nations (Hall 2006). On a regional level, the creation of a common identity would require the existence of an analogous cultural stock, which could be referenced by different interlocutors to set the symbolic boundaries of that region.

The question then is Brazil’s effectiveness in coherently articulating common experiences, historic figures, events, and cultural traits of a region called “South America” into a discourse that provides a credible account of its nature, current state, and desirable future. As argued by Meunier and Medeiros (2013, 680), Brazil’s recognition as a

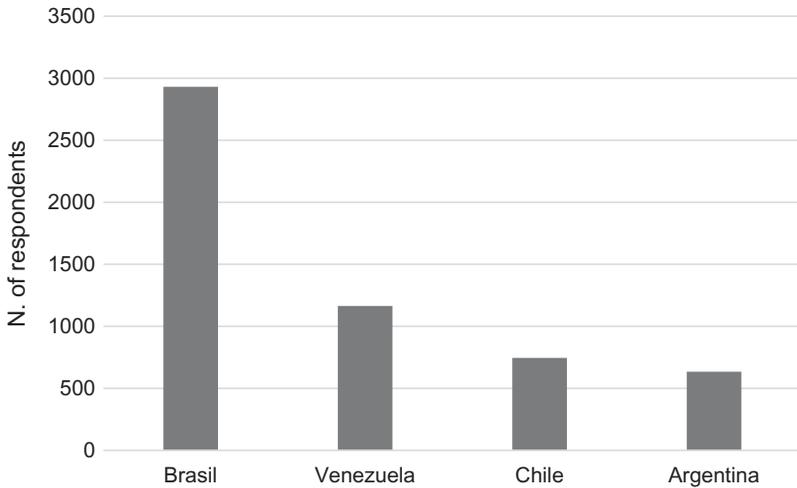


Figure 2. Answers to the question “Which is the country in Latin America that has more leadership in the region?”.

Note: Data for Figures 2 and 3 come from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. As the goal was to assess the neighborhood’s image of Brazil, data from Brazil were not considered.

Source: Latinobarómetro (2010).

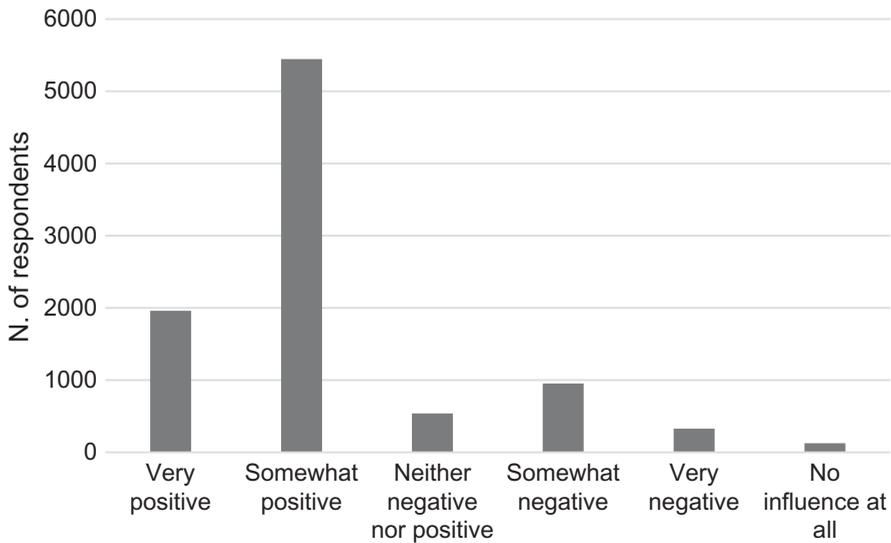


Figure 3. Answers to the question “What role would you say Brazil plays in the region?”.

Source: Latinobarómetro (2010).

regional leader does not rest on its capacity to provide tradeoffs alone, but to “foster the idea of a South America united and directed towards common goals”.

This is an ingenious task, considering that Brazil’s outlining of South America as its area of natural interest deliberately excludes Mexico (a competing major player) and the

rest of Central America and the Caribbean (Galvão 2009; Malamud and Rodriguez 2013).⁹ By removing such nations (and consequently their symbolic weight in defining the region), Brazil mitigates the centrality of some traits these countries share, which are core to the Latin American narrative: the Hispanic heritage, deep ancestral civilizations, and belligerent independence processes. Such features cannot be paramount in a region represented by a country characterized by its Portuguese influence, racial mixture and cultural syncretism, and undramatic nation-building.

Beyond those three elements, which tend to be located in the immemorial or glorious past of Latin American countries, some commonalities still liken their socio-historic processes: late industrialization, early urbanization, and social inequality (Rouquié 1987).

Another defining component of their identity is the US “other”. The differentiation between a “Latin” from another “America” was a European project, which, by placing an emphasis on the “Latinness” of the Catholic nations of the south, tried to link them to Europe via the concepts of culture and civilization (Rouquié 1987; Retamal and Saavedra 2011).

It can be said that Latin America as a region is defined by a thick narrative comprising the aforementioned chapters concerning its history, culture, race, and external relations. For narrower South America, however, some of these elements hold and some have to be dropped, not only because now the “in group” is reduced, but also due to the legitimacy of the narrator.

The imperialist USA that defines the Latin American self is certainly present in the South American construction. Nonetheless, there are limits to such othering narratives when articulated by a country like Brazil, itself an uneasy “Cusp state” that sits in the edge of what is held to be “normal” in the region (Robins and Herzog 2014). Galvão (2009) believes that it is possible to speak of a common South American identity based on shared traits and preferences of the region’s states. However, he identifies that from a symbolic point of view there is a gulf separating Brazil from the rest of the region. Early Latin American republics defined themselves against three “others”: the Iberian Peninsula, North America, and the Portuguese-Brazilian Empire. From Rio Branco on, this estrangement has been mitigated; yet, there is still a calculated distancing between Brazil and its peers, which is reflected in the notion of “*hermandad*” often employed by Hispano-American nations.

Medeiros and Dri (2013, 47) also see this oddity as limiting to Brazil’s leadership potential:

Brazil’s relative cultural and ideational eccentricity regarding Latin Americanism limits the effects of its discourse. Bolívar had a cautious vision of the Brazilian Empire that contradicts the employment of his ideas by the Brazilian diplomacy. This functional obstacle nourishes Brazil’s non-Hispanic argument, motivating its exclusion and creating a unique position for the country in the continent. This position reduces the discourse’s impact and scope, because both the speaker and listener share a lack of conviction on a common identity.

Brazil’s sprawling economy and superior material capabilities also delegitimize some of the classical leadership arguments for the developing world. It cannot be a first among equals in a region in which the majority of countries are poorer and less relevant in world politics.

Though this structural heterogeneity is seen as a positive asset for Brazil's insertion in a world order which is also characterized by asymmetries (Lafer 2009; Arbilla 2009),¹⁰ it limits the sort of leadership discourse the country is entitled to utter.

As an emerging power of the South, Brazil can be expected to articulate a broader, world-level narrative. The experience of colonialism, social inequalities, and a nationalistic resentment of an unfair US-led international order relate the Brazilian cry for a more multilateral world to that of the Global South writ large. Yet, it is important to underscore that the similarity between the narratives of an emerging power and that of the poorest strata of international society is only superficial (Sanahuja 2013).

Regionally, charges against "Brazilian imperialism" have surfaced in smaller countries that believe they endure unequal relations¹¹ and domestically within certain segments of Brazilian society (for instance, condemning the intervention on Haiti on grounds of the non-intervention principle, see Feliu and Miranda 2011). Reactions like this indicate that Brazil's narrative for defining the region and its leadership plan must avoid stressing questions of oppression and indignation against the powerful.¹²

Spektor's (2010) account of the South American narrative does not attribute great depth to it. In fact, he affirms that Brazil chose this label over "Latin America" in the 1990s as a "marketing strategy" so as not to scare foreign investors who were concerned with the Mexican crisis and the trustworthiness of "Latin" markets. Hence, he does not believe that Brazilian diplomacy holds South America to be a normatively unique group of the international community.

In contrast with this unassuming attitude, Bolivarianism as a narrative proposes to encompass all Latin America and draws heavily on the shared experiences of the Hispanic countries in the region, lifting up common mythical heroes and nemeses in order to articulate an interpretation of the region's past, present, and destiny. Thus, Chávez and his successor, Maduro, can be considered ideational entrepreneurs that have had more success in capitalizing on a particular view of the Latin identity narrative for their regionalist projects, if compared to the Brazilian case (Schorr 2015). It is noteworthy that even in Brazil, among Left-leaning observers, one finds opinions that Caracas offers a more compelling vision on how to carry out a South American integration project that ensures autonomy from the north (Bomfim 2012):

Brazil does not see the region as a distinctive normative center in international society. The country's regional initiatives do not speak nor promote a 'South American style' of participation in international relations, as China tries to do with the 'Asian style' or the 'Asia-Pacific style' [...]. The Brazilian regional policy also does not stress an exclusivist culture or set of values, as it occurs with the Bolivarian project of Hugo Chávez's Venezuela [...]. In that sense, there does not seem to be, in Brazil, a perception of shared community or of a common ethos to sustain the regionalist movement. (Spektor 2010, 39–40)

Such radical discourses might be inaccessible to Itamaraty. In that sense, it is interesting to highlight that in Brazil one finds alternative interpretations regarding Latin America's identity as exclusivist, and which tend to emphasize its Western attachment¹³ (Veríssimo 1902 cited in Prado 2001, 140; Merquior 1990; Galvão 2009). Likewise, even when compared to the rest of the Global South, Brazil shows an enduring Western belonging (Fonseca Jr 1998; Steiner, Medeiros, and Lima 2014).

As a prophet is not without honor but in his own home, Brazil's identification with the West can potentially make it a more appealing ideational entrepreneur in the world stage rather than in South America (Sandal 2014), should the region, in the future, become progressively more defined by exclusivist ethnic and cultural discourses. Alternatively, if it is the case that identity narratives regarding South America can be classified in the ethnic-exclusivist versus civic-values spectrum (Croucher 2004), it remains to be seen whether Brazil can (and is willing to) provide a compelling account of the latter, which can draw even those countries which distance themselves from the anti-liberal trend (e.g. Chile).¹⁴ Brazil's universalist tradition, greater acceptance in South America, and desire not to alienate the Western powers could point towards the civic narrative option.

6. Conclusion

This paper sought to understand Brazil's role as a regional leader (or as a hegemon) from a constructivist perspective. It argued that intersubjective processes between states contribute to the formation of identities and interests, which can be individualistic or collective. The creation of identities takes place within states and also in a regional level, and regional powers can play an important role in defining a common identity for their region. By using Destradi's (2010) typology, we analyzed whether Brazil's behavior could be classified as hegemony or leadership, based on the type of identity and interests that have developed within its borders and across the region.

By investigating the identity-formation mechanisms of structural context, systemic processes, strategic interaction, and narratives, it was possible to arrive at the following conclusions. South America's structural context is characterized by low conflict and the institution of "*concertación*", all of which make it more likely that states will identify positively with each other and define their interest and identities in non-Hobbesian terms. The systemic processes have produced varied results. On the one hand, economic interdependence grew out of regional integration, but not sufficiently to make the process irreversible, as proven by the fact that extra-regional relations are more important today for Brazil and other South American economies, or to create a normative reference for participating countries beyond the nation-state. As a consequence, all countries continue to have selfish identities and interests, including Brazil, which, as the greatest regional economy, causes setbacks on the integration project. On the other hand, the USA was an effective "common other", as its expansionist aims triggered coordinated reaction by Mercosur countries; this being one of the best expressions of a "we" feeling in the region to date. Washington has also contributed to Brazilian leadership due to its low interest in the region, especially after the 9/11 attacks. Concerning the convergence of values, the rise of Left-wing governments in the 2000s is an indicator of common aspirations of domestic societies. Nonetheless, the ideological solidarity among heads of state has not been powerful enough to translate into a common identity or goals, also due to the nationalist corollary of this shift. Regional self-identification is comparable to that achieved in EU countries.

Concerning strategic interaction, Brazil capitalized in the 1990s on a low cost ideational preeminence, but, as it failed to provide the payoffs required to secure more concrete followership, its would-be followers have defected. The persistent need for payoffs is indicative that gains are still perceived through the lenses of zero-sum

games and therefore no collective identity has emerged, or at least none stable enough to hold across varied political scenarios. In that setting, only hegemony, not leadership, would be possible.

Lastly, Brazil's construction of a South American region required the exclusion of some Latin American countries. This removal and also some of Brazil's own idiosyncrasies rendered a number of elements of the Latin American identity narrative inaccessible to the South American identity. Brasília's account of the regional fate is comparatively thinner, and, unlike Bolivarianism, it cannot draw from the commonalities of the Hispanic-American saga, due to its oddity, or on antagonistic, anti-imperialist discourse, due to its own supremacy.

Therefore, we can conclude that South American countries can positively identify with each other due to their peaceful and consensus-seeking structural context. In critical circumstances, such as before the threat of US economic takeover, or fearful for the stability of newly-restored civil governments, the perception of mutual vulnerability increases in South America and coordinated action is more likely to emerge. Those instants illustrate enduring regional concerns: autonomy, development, and democracy. Though these can be said to be shared goals, their pursuit is not always a collective enterprise. Hence, apart from those conjunctures of heightened comradeship, the accuracy of zero-sum game interpretations of Brazilian leadership and South American followership indicates that regional identities and interests are consistently selfish and not collective. Brazil's unilateral moves in the face of extra-regional gains, as well as the neighbors' demand for payoffs and obstructing strategies deployed, indicate that Brasília's behavior could be best classified as an intermediary hegemony, in Destradi's classification.

In addition, it is worth stressing that, though this is a theoretically sound classification of Brazil's behavior, it doesn't mean that the country has secured a hegemonic position. Brasília's material supremacy qualifies it for this status, but, as shown, this hegemony is selective or limited in its effects (Mourón and Onuki 2015). Also, the severe political and economic instabilities that have stricken both Brazil and Venezuela recently, and the accompanying waning of regional activism, are important reminders of the limits of regional powerhood in the developing world: domestic stability is a necessary condition for external influence (Alden and Le Pere 2009).

In conclusion, it is relevant to point out that the creation of collective identities in a region presupposes that, to some extent, societies come to define themselves in terms beyond the national alone. One of the laboratories in which such experience is in motion is Europe, and even there supranational self-identification falls behind the national one, and the resurgence of nationalism is also present, though coming from the other end of the ideological spectrum (Fligstein and Polyakova 2011). In South America, the nation-state is still the lasting reference of all goals deemed proper to pursue. "Contrary to Europe, regionalism has not contributed to change Brazil's international identity. The country interacts fluently with its neighbors but has no intention of fusing with them" (Malamud and Rodriguez 2013, 178):

As it often happens in regionalism processes, citizens' identity is still national, especially in Brazil. The international society concept fits better with this reality than the idea of a world society. Although it is increasingly interdependent on other actors in economic terms, the Nation-State is still the main arena for social relations and for the building of political community. (Medeiros and Dri 2013, 48-9)

Notes

1. See Jordaan (2003), Hurrell (2006), Nolte (2010), Soares de Lima (2010), Milani (2011), and Valencia and Ruvalcaba (2012).
2. Destradi (2010) considers regional powers as countries that: (1) belong to the region in question; (2) have superior material capabilities in comparison to the rest of the region; and (3) exert some kind of influence in the region. This is evidently the case for Brazil in South America.
3. This and other translations throughout the article are the author's.
4. "I don't think there are many countries that can boast that they have 10 neighbors and haven't had a war in the last 140 years" (Amorim 2010). "In an international context marked by the escalation of conflicts and of all sorts of fundamentalisms, our region gives an example of democratic coexistence" (Lula Da Silva 2004).
5. "[N]o other region of the world has as many bilateral and multilateral documents, treaties and charters imposing obligations for the peaceful settlement of disputes" (Holsti 1996, 156, cited in Battaglini 2012, 141).
6. Nonetheless, it is important to underscore that while extra-regional partners are importers of Brazilian commodities, Mercosur countries are strategic markets for its industrialized products. Also, economic asymmetries are much higher between Brazil and the rest of Mercosur than between Germany and the rest of the EU, which accounts for the different degree of dependence.
7. Brazil, for instance, has had its peaks and valleys of approximation with the USA, though in the long run it is possible to detect a tendency to steer away from Washington's influence *pari passu* with Brasília's material capabilities (Amorim Neto 2011).
8. The most suitable data for the current research problem would be a longitudinal survey from Mercosur's inception to date concerning people's identification with "South America". Though WVS has waves since 1981, the questionnaire has changed over time, so that the data cannot be used to monitor regional identities across time. Latinobarómetro questionnaires, likewise, have changed in the past years. The W.V.S. Wave 5 was therefore the best option, as it allowed a comparison between South American and European countries. For Table 1, we have only considered European countries that were EU members as of the application of the survey (2005). Though this wave had a question "I see myself as a citizen of Mercosur", which would perhaps be closer to our research problem, it was only applied to Uruguayans (interestingly, although this country is home to the bloc's administrative headquarters, people tended to disagree (32.9%) and strongly disagree (8.5%) with this statement more than with the one mentioning Latin America). For representativeness' sake, we choose instead to consider the answer given by residents in Mercosur countries to the question "I see myself as a citizen of Latin America", even though the term "South America" is absent.
9. It is, nonetheless, important to highlight that some of Brazil's most expressive attempts of regional leadership have taken place in the Latin American/Caribbean setting, e.g. the leadership of the Minustah since 2004.
10. During Lula's office, his participation at both the World Economic Forum at Davos and the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre was held as an emblem of Brazil's unique position, straddling between rich and poor.
11. In the aforementioned 2010 Latinobarómetro survey, Paraguayans and Bolivians were more prone to evaluate Brazil's regional role as somewhat negative (12% and 13%) or very negative (7% and 5%, respectively), above the regional average of 10% and 4%.
12. This avoidance does not mean aversion. Mesquita and Medeiros (2015) show that Brazil's diplomatic discourse carries an autonomist component, though this is not its central feature.
13. How Latin America is defined is an ambiguous matter, particularly considering its attachment to the West. Rouquié (1987, 21) calls Latin America "the Third World of the West, or the West of the Third World"; Huntington (1993) considers Latin America a

distinct (albeit similar) civilization to the West; and Merquior (1990) sees it as “another West”, only more complex. The latter’s argument is worth reproducing at length: “The myth of a non-Western Latin America, in particular, seems to be more the work of a denial strategy fed by resentment – the refusal to be something which we have strived to obtain and, however, always fail to reach, namely, a place and parcel of the modern, liberal and democratic world. In sum, a universe identified with the West. It seems that we have lost the train of history and, consequently, react scorning modernity. Love it or leave it. We are not the antithesis of the West and even less an alternative to its culture [...] our tenacious and specific way to desire modernity simply reflects our attachment to the West. In fact, we are a modification and original and vast modulation of Western culture. But that Iberia has always been: a very peculiar case of the West, but in no way an aberration” (Merquior 1990, 86).

14. Regarding the more liberal-minded countries, the Pacific Alliance created by Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico (an extra-regional player) in 2014 could be interpreted as a challenge to the state-driven approaches that became widespread in the region.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Rafael Mesquita is a Political Science/International Relations Doctorate student at UFPE (Recife – PE, Brazil), Master in Political Science/International Relations and Journalist by the same university. He is a member of the Center of Comparative Politics and International Relations – NEPI/CNPq/UFPE. He holds a grant from Capes. He is also graduated in Business Administration by UPE and has undertaken part of this undergraduate studies at the *Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris* (Sciences Po). He recently published as a co-author for *The Impact of Summitry on the Governance of Mercosur* in Gordon Mace et al. *Summits and Regional Governance* New York: Routledge, 2016. His current research topics include emerging powers, regional leadership and Brazilian Foreign Policy.

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