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## Culture and regional integration: paths to think about the decolonization of power in Latin America

Valéria Graziano<sup>1</sup> 

Universidad de Salamanca, Espanha

Lia Calabre<sup>2</sup> 

Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brasil

Mónica Guariglio<sup>3</sup> 

Universidad de Avellana, Argentina

At this time when the Latin American political scenario is characterized by the formation of a *second progressive wave*, marked by a new shift to the left in several countries in the region since 2019, reflection on achievements, limits and contradictions that characterized the integrationist projects adopted during the first wave (2003-2015) becomes even more fundamental, in order to contribute to the debates on the directions of regional integration in Latin America in this second decade of the 21st century.

Since the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as president in Mexico in 2018, left and center-left governments have been elected in Argentina (2019), Panama (2019), Bolivia (2020), Peru (2021), Chile (2021), Honduras (2022) and Colombia (2022). It should be noted that, in countries like Mexico and Colombia, such electoral results are unprecedented in their histories. In Brazil, electoral polls on the presidential race that will take place

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<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate in Social Sciences at Universidad de Salamanca. E-mail: [valeriagraziano@gmail.com](mailto:valeriagraziano@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> PhD in history. Professor and Researcher at Rui Barbosa Foundation and at Universidade Federal Fluminense. E-mail: [liacalabre@gmail.com](mailto:liacalabre@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy for the Arts in Development director at Universidad de Avellana and Professor of Cultural Management at the same university. E-mail: [mguariglio@undav.edu.ar](mailto:mguariglio@undav.edu.ar) / [catedraunesco@undav.edu.ar](mailto:catedraunesco@undav.edu.ar)

in the second half of 2022 indicate a possible return of Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva to the presidency. It is also worth noting, in this regional political context, the popular mobilizations that took over the streets of Chile from 2019 onwards, giving rise to the current constituent process that proposes the creation of a Plurinational State.

During the first progressive cycle, which gave rise to the so-called *pink wave* in the context of Latin American regional integration, the elected governments achieved significant economic and social achievements both at the national level and in relation to the region's insertion in the international system. Such transformations had a significant impact not only on the agendas and power structures of national states, but also on regional multilateral institutions and dynamics. During this period, spaces and institutional arrangements for the formulation and implementation of regional integration policies, programs and actions proliferated. Themes such as participatory democracy, social inclusion, and expansion of rights for historically marginalized groups have become structuring axes of public policies and regional cooperation initiatives in the most diverse areas and national and intergovernmental spheres.

In this scenario, cultural policies gained not only new institutional arrangements at national and regional levels, but also a renewed and expanded agenda, starting to incorporate issues such as cultural diversity and interculturality, creative economy, plurinationality, racism, international migration, indigenous rights, rights cultural, community-based public policies, among others.

However, considering that such governments did not manage to break with the pattern of modern colonial capitalist power that constituted the modern States in Latin America, and that the processes of political transition experienced by each of the countries were quite different, the regional articulations from the area of culture were marked by intense clashes and contradictions, resulting in limits and challenges that the

political negotiations and implementation processes of many of these projects were revealing.

Although culture and cultural diversity have been incorporated as guiding principles of regional projects in the most different areas, the non-break with the development model historically adopted in regional integration projects, based on the idea of economic progress and the infinite exploration of nature and of life, as well as the uncritical incorporation of hegemonic discourses and conceptions that permeate international cooperation, resulted in continued violence against indigenous peoples, peasants and traditional communities and, consequently, in the exclusion of different peoples, knowledge and cosmovision from integration projects. In this way, within the scope of Latin American integration, an excluding and unsustainable civilization model continued to be reproduced.

Therefore, based on interdisciplinary analyzes of regional integration initiatives in the area of culture developed by Latin American governments elected between 2003 and 2015, this thematic issue, entitled "*Culture and Regional Integration: Paths to think about the decolonization of power in Latin America* ", intends to contribute to the debates on the place of culture in the emancipatory and decolonization processes of power in the region, as well as to the reflections on possibilities of building counter-hegemonic regional integration processes, which are born from the articulation between culture, alternatives to development, autonomy and regional sovereignty.

Among the specific objectives are: (i) to analyze the experiences of regional integration in the area of culture developed from regional multilateral arrangements and organizations - with emphasis on MERCOSUR - in the period from 2003 to 2015; (ii) analyze the contributions, limits and contradictions of such experiences for the consolidation of national cultural policies and for regional cultural integration; (iii) analyze symbolic and power articulations and disputes between governmental and non-governmental actors related to regional cooperation policies and

projects developed in the field of culture and/or other areas that have incorporated culture as a transversal axis; (iv) contribute to the theoretical debates on culture as a central dimension and structuring axis for the development of public policies and initiatives of regional integration and cooperation that aim to break with the coloniality of power, as well as for the construction of alternatives to the modern colonial capitalist World-System and the hegemonic development paradigms that have historically marked the national and regional integration processes in Latin America; (v) contribute to current debates on alternatives to development and counter-hegemonic regional integration in Latin America.

Developed as an initiative of the *UNESCO Chair on Cultural Diversity, Creativity and Cultural Policies* at the *National University of Avellaneda* (Argentina), the material has contributions from researchers who dedicate themselves to the subject within and outside academia, some of whom have actively participated in projects and cultural integration experiences during the analyzed period.

In "***The place of culture in South American regional integration: an analysis of Mercosur Cultural in the context of post-liberal regionalism***", Valéria Graziano (*University of Salamanca*) and Mónica Guariglio (*National University of Avellaneda*) analyze the impacts of political changes in the region during the first decade of the 21st century for South American cultural integration, from the experiences that marked MERCOSUR Cultural. When approaching theoretical issues related to regionalism, cultural policies and Latin American decolonial thinking, the authors emphasize the centrality of culture for the construction of a counter-hegemonic, autonomous and emancipatory Latin American integration project.

In the following article, entitled ***Culture in Mercosur: analysis of the developments of the Social Mercosur Social Summits at the Meeting of Ministers of Culture (2006-2015)***, Maria Camila Ortiz, Tereza Spyer Dulci and Yaskara Weit Urruth (*Federal University for Latin American*

*Integration*) discuss how the proposals made within the scope of the Social Summits of Mercosur (CSM) for the area of culture were incorporated by the Meeting of Ministers of Culture (RMC), proposing a debate on the role of cultural policies to face the problem of the democratic deficit within the bloc.

In ***Culture on the CELAC's agenda from a Decolonizing Theoretical Perspective***, Carolina Albuquerque Silva (*University of Brasilia*) reflects on the so-called post-liberal or post-hegemonic regionalism in South America based on the cultural agenda adopted by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), emphasizing the need to include, in the theoretical debate and in the practical construction, the epistemological and cultural axes to overcome the colonality of power in regional integration projects.

Then, in the article entitled ***Circulation of people and cultural heritage in Mercosur as dimensions for the consolidation of a regional community***, Giulia Barão (*University of Brasilia*) and Marysol Rodríguez (*University of Salamanca*) discuss the relationship between the circulation of people and the promotion and protection of cultural heritage in MERCOSUR, as understood by the authors as fundamental axes for the exercise of citizenship and for the consolidation of a regional community.

Returning to the concept of the politicization of the ethnic, Félix Pablo Friggeri (*Federal University for Latin American Integration*) defends, in ***The politicization of the ethnic: Abya Yala indigenous cultures as the basis for overcoming capitalism***, that cultures formed in the praxis of the struggle for life, especially the indigenous peoples of region, constitute the basis for the construction of alternatives projects to colonial capitalism, inspiring the imagination of a counter-hegemonic integration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In ***Wealth and challenges of cultural public policies: the Cultura Viva Program and the Dialogues with Latin America***, Lia Calabre (*Fluminense Federal University*) revisits, based on documentary research, the first ten years of Cultura Viva (2004-2014), in order to analyze the

processes of dialogue, “contamination” and interaction of the Program's ideas with other public policies for culture in Latin America.

This thematic issue is complemented with interviews with governmental and non-governmental actors who participated directly in regional cultural integration initiatives during the analyzed period. In “***The role of cultural policies in the regional 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive governments’ regional integration project:: scope, limits and horizon***”, researcher Raihana Falleiros (*University of Buenos Aires*) interviews the sociologist and former Minister of Culture of Brazil Juca Ferreira (2008-2010; 2015-2016), with the objective of evaluating the performance of the country during the Latin American progressive cycle with regard to the place of culture in the regional political, economic and social agendas.

The second interview, “***Latin American Network of Community Theater: reflections on Community Living Culture and counter-hegemonic regional integration in Latin America***”, conducted by researchers Eduardo Ullian (*University of São Paulo*) and Valéria Graziano (*University of Salamanca*), addresses the emerging experiences of the Latin American movement *Community Living Culture*, based on the relations between cultural policies, regional integration and social emancipation. To this end, they interview three managers of cultural spaces that are part of *the Latin American Network of Community Theater*: Edith Scher, founder and director of the *Matemurga* community theater group, in the Villa Crespo neighborhood, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Luis Vasquez (Tin Tin), coordinator of *Teatro Trono*, located in El Alto, La Paz, Bolivia; and Adriano Mauriz, founding member of the *Pombas Urbanas* group, which operates in Cidade Tiradentes, São Paulo, Brazil.

In dialogue with the reflections presented in the articles and interviews, we end this thematic issue with the “***Conference by David Choquehuanca Céspedes in the First Conversation of the Postgraduate Course and University Extension on Migration, Territory and Human Rights in times of uncertainty: a look from complex systems, July 1,***

**2020**”, whose presentation and transcript was prepared by Rodrigo Ávila Huidobro (*National University of Avellaneda*).

We hope, in this way, to contribute to the deepening of the debate on the centrality of culture for the construction of an autonomous, counter-hegemonic and emancipatory Latin American regional integration, making it possible to imagine other possible worlds for the peoples of *Abya Yala*. Enjoy the reading!

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