The African Policy of Lula’s Government

Brazil, China, and slowly India, are the new main actors of international politics and of the African economy. After a long period of distancing, Brazil’s society and interstate relations towards the African continent have surpassed a rhetorical stance and gained a different thrust from Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva government on. The historical ties, the country’s nature of having a significant population of afro descendants and the internal debate regarding racial equality are present in the Brazilian perspective regarding the need of a closer and more cooperative relationship towards these partners. However, the strategical and economical pillars of this newfound closeness are more important. Even though, the African continent presents alarming levels of poverty, there is no stagnation in the region, which plays a significant role in Brazil’s global international projection.

The present government diplomatic speech and practices united lead to the built of preferred alliances with partners in the South-South relations sphere. In this sense, the African continent represents one of the more relevant areas of the administration’s current diplomatic efforts, only second to South America. During their mandates, President Lula and Foreign Relations Minister Celso Amorim visited several countries in the continent and established a variety of agreements with different local nations. Considering the whole scope of the government’s first term, five trips were taken to the African region, covering seventeen nations. Although in economic terms Africa represents a relevant market, short term results are not the main goal of these trends, but long range ones.

Therefore, Brazil’s African policies can be viewed as energized in the diplomatic field, gaining particular importance whereas considering the range of the nation’s actions in the continent. However, the political, economic, cultural and social dynamics of both regions, during distinct historic moments, represented either obstacles or incentives for these relations. In addition, also, in different moments, Brazil’s initiatives were a product of a misplaced evaluation of the nation’s foreign policy priorities. These views, that stressed only economic and financial immediate interests, putting aside political and strategic long term goals, delayed the implementation and renovation of bilateral projects, as well as the creation of multilateral cooperation agreements. So, it is necessary to rethink the path of Brazil’s-Africa relations.

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Brazil’s and Africa history are closely related since Portuguese colonizers reached in the 16th century both shores of the South Atlantic Ocean. In 1538, the first group of African slaves arrived in Brazil, which symbolizes the beginning of a close relation, centered in trafficking till the 1850s, when this trend started to decline. Also, this relation was important in the global arena. During the 17th century, the South Atlantic represented the progressive center of the world economy, with Brazil sustaining Portugal’s Atlantic Empire. Afterwards, in the 18th century, it was overcome by the North Atlantic, due to the ascension of powers such as France and England.\(^1\)

Following Brazil’s independence, English pressures for ending slave traffic grew even stronger. Its end coincided with the beginning of European colonial expansion in Africa, generating a setback in Brazil’s-Africa relations and a distancing among them. At the first half of the 20th century, 90% of Brazil’s trade with the continent was concentrated exclusively in South Africa. After the Second World War, Brazilian bilateral relations with Portugal were significant for several governments, bargaining for the electoral votes of the community of Portuguese immigrants (also stimulated by Salazar through Casas de Portugal), in exchange for the nation’s support for Portuguese colonialism in United Nations forums. Moreover, Brazil avoided a positive stance towards decolonization since Dakar was a strategic area for aerial and naval communications links with Europe due to the fact that Portugal was a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In addition, Cold War views were present in Brazil’s agenda, and the country foreign policy was restricted to the Americas. The processes of African independences that started specifically during Kubitschek term were practically ignored. It took the development of Brazil’s Independent Foreign Policy (PEI) in Jânio Quadros government for Africa to gain importance to the nation’s diplomacy.

Launched in 1961 by Quadros and his Chancellor Afonso Arinos, PEI set the trend of an African policy, leading Brazil to position itself in favor of the principles of the self-determination of colonial people, in particular subjected to Portuguese rule, that were in the beginning of an armed fight. The establishment of several Cultural Agreements allowed the creation of a scholarship for African students in Brazil, such as the Studies Programme for Undergraduate Students (PEC).

FROM COLD WAR GEOPOLITICS TO ECONOMIC RELATIONS

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However, this first effort of South-South cooperation suffered a serious blow with the 1964 coup. Once more, due to Cold War’s geopolitical stance, the issue of collective security regained importance not only regarding the Americas (the proposal of an Interamerican Defense Force) but also the South Atlantic (as envisioned in the project of the South Atlantic Treaty Organization-SATO). The latter implied some level of cooperation with the Portuguese colonialist regime and South Africa’s racist one.

Rapprochement initiatives started in Medici’s government, the most repressive one of the military regime. Brazil, the country of the “Economic Miracle”, with its income concentration and fast industrial growth, was in need of markets and raw materials, mainly oil. On the other hand, the middle range and “tropical” technology was useful in the services area and functioned as an inspiring model for African States. It was also in Brazil’s interest to gain African diplomatic support for the legitimation of the expansion of its Territorial Sea limits to 200 hundred miles. At the same time, the SATO project came to a dead end.

The oil crisis in 1973 and the beginning of Geisel administration characterized the deepening of the African policies. Six new Embassies were opened in the region and Brazil was the first nation to recognize the government led by the Popular Movement of Angolan Liberation (MPLA), of Marxist orientation, in November 1975. Geisel’s and Chancellor Azeredo da Silveira diplomacy of “Responsible Pragmatism” (Pragmatismo Responsável) was also marked by the strong condemnation of Rhodesia and South Africa racist regimes, sustained by a powerful Third Worldist stance. Whereas Brazil exported industrial goods, food, automobiles and infrastructure, it increasingly imported oil. Braspetro, Petrobras subsidiary, initiated operations for oil drilling in Africa, Vale do Rio Doce acted in the mining field and Mendes Jr and Odebrecht contractors built highways, bridges, ports and hydroelectric dams. Figueiredo was the first Brazilian President to officially visit Africa: Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Cape Verde and Algeria.

In spite of growing economic difficulties and external pressures from the international system that deepened Brazil’s vulnerability, the high profile relations amongst the two continents were sustained by Sarney’s government. He visited Cape Verde, and later, Angola and Mozambique, which were under pressure due to South Africa’s interference and civil war. In the height of Reagan’s term, in 1986, and in the context of the militarization of the South Atlantic (post-Falklands), the country managed to approve in the UN the creation of the South Atlantic Cooperation and Peace Zone (ZoPaCAS). Following this initiative, in 1988, it held in Rio de Janeiro, the I South Atlantic Conference, with the participation of nineteen African nations. Namibia’s emancipation, Apartheid criticisms and the support for a peace plan in Angola (due to the withdrawal of South-African and Cuban forces) were main pillars of this policy, linked to the search for development.

THE TRANSATLANTIC ECONOMIC CYCLE OF ADJUSTMENTS

The arrival of Fernando Collor de Mello in the presidency in the 1990s and the adoption of a neoliberal agenda of economic policies represented a new era of distancing towards Africa. In a scenario marked by Cold War’s end and Mercosur in 1991 Africa was viewed as secondary, also due to the strengthening of a diplomatic stance sustained by the principles of the idea of the First World and neoliberal globalization. The number of Brazilian diplomats in the continent
decreased rapidly: 25 in 1973, reaching 34 in 1989, and, during Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) term, only 24.

Few projects were sustained and in 1993, Itamar Franco promoted a revival of ZoPaCAS and, in the next year, a Summit of Chancellors form Portuguese Speaking Countries took place. The most important initiative, however, was the bilateral and multilateral support (through the UN) to the peace and reconstruction process of some of the continent’s nations, in particular in Angola.

Africa’s place in Brazil’s international relations agenda was also kept at bay during FHC government (1995-2002), but some important actions and few changes could be felt during his second mandate. These actions and changes would be improved in quality by Lula’s following administration. From 1995 on, the Brazilian Army actively participated in UN peacekeeping missions in Angola and other nations. In 1996, FHC visited Angola and South Africa which led to cooperation agreements in several areas and in 1998 Mandela came to Brazil. This visit indicated that the new South Africa was emerging as a relevant partner for Brazil. In 2000, both countries signed a framework agreement in Mercosur.

Also, cooperation in the field of public policies is growing steadily since Brazil begin its fight for breaking the patents of AIDS drugs, a disease of epidemic proportions in the Southern part of Africa. When FHC started to criticize the “asymmetric globalization” in the context of the Real Plan crisis, a greater convergence in world diplomatic affairs and in multilateral forums (in particular economic ones) started to be perceived.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that since the end of the 1980s a growing presence of Brazilian television (mainly soap operas) in Africa can be noticed, as well as of evangelical churches\(^2\). In a less positive fashion, there was an increase of smuggling networks, drug and arms trafficking and money laundry from both sides. Cultural and security trends have become usual in these relations in the South Atlantic. Brazil, in addition, is also receiving refugees and immigrants from the Africa continent.

LULA AND THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL ERA OF COOPERATION

The beginning of Lula’s presidency in 2003 opened up a new chapter in Brazil’s-Africa relations, represented by the combination of a new stance towards the international order and social domestic reform. Already in his inaugural speech, the President mentioned South Africa as a significant emergent development nation amongst China, India and Russia and stressed that the African continent would be seen as a relevant pillar of Brazil’s foreign policy, which was defined as affirmative and propositive. At the same time, the fight against poverty adopted concrete programs as “Fome Zero” and “affirmative action policies” in order to better integrate afro descendants in the advances of Brazilian society. One of this initiatives was the incentive for the ascension of candidates of African origin in the diplomatic staff due to scholarships specially

\(^2\) In South Africa, only, there are over 300 temples from Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, where Brazilian preachers are even able to tell jokes in zulu, and this trend is even stronger in Portuguese speaking countries.
directed to the preparation for the selection process of Instituto Rio Branco created in March 2003.

Three months later the India, Brazil and South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA or G-3) was launched as a project for increasing South-South Cooperation. As mentioned, in 2003 Lula visited Africa four times: in November 2003 he visited San Tome and Prince, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa; in June 2004, San Tome and Prince, Gabon and Cape Verde; in April 2005, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea Bissau and Senegal; in February 2006, Algeria, Benin, Botswana and South Africa. Ten new embassies were created and the number of diplomats serving in the Africa continent was significantly increased. Moreover, Brazil also demonstrated its concrete support to peacekeeping and reconstruction processes and forgave the external debt of several countries, also helping with financial aids and other areas.

In the educational field, PEC was enlarged and started to also encompass graduate studies, supported by Brazilian scholarships and stressing the cooperation in scientific research and exchange of professors. In Africa, courses are being held and a great number of seminars are conducted in both sides of the Atlantic in order to deepen mutual knowledge. One of this efforts was the International Conference of African Scholars and Diaspora, that took place in Salvador, Bahia, in July 2006. Therefore, Africa was seen as the most important experiment of South-South cooperation, also accompanied by an increase in bilateral trade.

Whereas opposing parties accuse the government of “wasting money in a continent without future”, Brazilian enterprises are gaining spaces, strengthening their presence, mainly Petrobras. Whereas Chinese, and most recently, Indian actions are orientated by economic goals, in spite of their help in infrastructural works, and the North American presence is focused on geopolitics and security issues, Brazil’s agenda of cooperation brings new elements, added to the clear material purposes ones.

These purposes can be seen in the fight against poverty and epidemics (in particular HIV-AIDS), the presentation and creation of technologies adapted to Third World problems and the active leadership in multilateral forums defending the common goals of development and the built of multipolar and peaceful international system. The G-3 and the G-20 (created for WTO rounds of talks) are two examples of these projects that are sustaining a stronger stance of African countries in the WTO. The I Africa-South America Summit held in Abuja in Nigeria in November 2006 represents a height of these initiatives, aiding both regions in their quest for a new international projection that strongly helps the African Rebirth. Moreover, social movements of black awareness are developing, seminars are taking place, and legislations against racial discrimination are reinforce, supporting the increase of research centers for the studies of African countries.

THE RECENT ACTIONS OF LULA’S GOVERNMENT IN AFRICA.

After decades of stagnation, the African economy begins to give signs of improvement. In the last decade, the continent has not only lived a constant acceleration of its economic growing, but also watched new opportunities of trade and investments. The African states have been engaged in the promotion of an economic development supported by their own political actions: The African Union (AU), The Southern African development Community (SADC), The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and The New Partnership for African
Development (NEPAD) are fresh signs of the will to overcome historical problems. And still, the Africans define the goals, undertaking all difficulties inherent in projects of this size.

In this context, is important for Brazil take advantage of the potential of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPSC). Few countries were prioritized in the Itamaraty as member of CPSC, bringing together a population of 240 million people in four of the five continents. Portugal, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tome and Príncipe, Mozambique and Angola try, through the Brazilian cooperation, to reach improvements in security, business, health and education areas. Since the first year of Lula administration São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique and Angola have received the visit of the Brazilian President. In the meetings, was discussed the possibilities of investment in several areas of industry and commerce.

Together with President Lula traveled a group of 128 entrepreneurs interested in the expansion of exports. Were bargained cement and medicines industries, railroads construction, coal exploitation, cell phones exports, buses assembly, and sale of machines to collect rubbish, among others. The estimate of exchange was more than US$ 1 billion. In this context, Brazil has developed with the countries of the CPSC programs of bilateral cooperation. Among the more meaningful, are the opening of Brazilian technical teaching centers in Timor East and Angola and the disposal of electronic urns for the Guinea-Bissau poll, that was delayed due to a military coup last September in the country. In addition, was agreed upon the setting up of an anti-retroviral medicine industry, enthusing the Community’s members.

Is important to emphasize that Brazil, as the president of CPSC, is a driving force in the diplomatic managements that contribute to democratic retake in São Tome and Príncipe. Was settled cooperation with the National Agency of Oil to help the country to develop its regulation and bidding of the oil exploitation. The relationships with Angola, traditional partner in several areas, have expanded. With Mozambique has strengthened ties and settled cooperation in the agricultural sector, such as other areas. With all the countries of the Community, was discussed the cooperation in programs of agricultural development, of fight against AIDS and poverty. The Brazilian President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, on a visit in the head office of CPSC in Lisbon, emphasizes the special responsibility of the Community to revert the poverty situation and to mobilize the International Community about these problems.

The South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZPCAS) represents, as well, a huge potential for Brazilian diplomacy on the construction of multilateral accords, able to gather groups of nations that have similar concerns and can rely on each other and further common concerns at global forums. Both CPSC and ZPCAS could be an intersection zone among integration processes in the south Atlantic region, encouraging exchanges among Mercosur, SADC and ECOWAS. Brazilian government has meaningfully favored a rising number of Brazilian companies, mainly the services exporters, which have been aimed at African continent to accomplish projects. For instance, the fact of Companhia Vale do Rio Doce had been the winner of the competition for the exploitation of the carboniferous complex of Moatize, northern of Mozambique, strengthening relationships with Brazil.

The strength of the relationships with the African continent has showed an important implication of the Brazilian international political. In a brief outlook the strategy have criticism, considering that should seems paradoxical a developing country as Brazil foments its diplomatic efforts with poor and not very influential partners in the geopolitical context. Furthermore, these partners together are not very important for the Brazilian Balance of Payments. However, is
necessary to notice the internationalization movements of some economics and political trends (accelerated because of the globalization deepening).

Brazil begins to become an exporter of capital and technology, and a traditional (and competitive now) exporter of raw materials, service and manufacture. The phenomena observed in Brazil is also observed in others developing economies, such as India, South Africa and China. South Africa is one of the territories appropriate to investments of Brazilian companies, even though inconstant forms of government, armed conflicts and other violence forms, sanitary problems and huge poverty are stigmas of the continent. At the same time, is one of the few natural boundaries still opened for the trading expansion in sectors as petroleum, gas and mining, and stage of a global competition to have access to raw materials, more and more scarce and demanded.

Lula did the seventh visit to the continent as soon as introduced him second term. The Brazilian President visited Burkina Faso, Congo Republic, South Africa and Angola, going together with entrepreneurs of energy, building, aviation and finances areas. The schedule, include the signature of bilateral and multilateral agreements, also included the participation in the Second Summit of the Dialog Forum India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA). The travel to Burkina Faso, that returns the visit to Brazil of the President Blaise Compaoré, in 2003, aimed to sign an instrument of cooperation in the production of cotton, an agreement on technical cooperation in educational area and a protocol of cooperation in health areas such as traditional medicine and banks of milk. On that occasion, has also been discussed the signing of agreement on biofuels with the sub-regional organization Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa.

The activities of Lula in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, also included a seminar on development and democracy in Africa and the opening of the exhibit of Brazilian cinema, as well as a business event. In Republic of Congo, in return to the visit of the President Denis Sassou Ngueso to Brazil in 2005, the countries signs agreements on the cultivation of dendê and on the modernization of the Sugar Ethanol sector. In the health area, discussed about the fight against malaria and AIDS/HIV. Concluded this outline, the Brazilian president had already passed by 19 of the 53 African countries, some of them more than once. Since the beginning of Lula’s government the exports rises more than three times. In 2003, Brazil exported US$ 2.4 millions; in 2006 was US$7.5 millions. In 2007 the data until September showed a growth of 15% over the previous year.

Nevertheless, the biggest investment was in diplomatic terms. In 2007, while took part, in South Africa, in the Second Summit of IBAS (the first Summit was held in Brasilia, in September 2006), the Brazilian diplomacy intensified the cooperation and the trilateral political articulation. The UN Security Council reform and the Doha Round was some of the issues in discussion. The negotiations round in the World Trade Organization (WTO) is priority for the three countries, since they comprise the G-20 and, together, fight for opening the agricultural market of developed countries for production from the developing nations.

Brazil, India and South Africa also set up ambitious goals for the increase of the trilateral trade. In June 2006, during the fourth meeting of the Trilateral Commission, in New Delhi, the Minister of External Relations of Brazil, Celso Amorim, propose US$ 15 millions until 2010. Still in 2007, Brazil, India and South Africa intended to reach US$ 10 billions in commercial exchanges. During the meeting, Celso Amorim also defended the strengthen of the activities for the creation of a free commerce zone among Mercosul, India and Southern Africa Customs union (SACU), group that bring together South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and Swaziland.
In any way, the IBAS’ constitution has already played an important role drawing the attention of the North to the intent of the South countries to have its voice heard about the main global issues and, to some extent, influenced the G-8 to invite them for their internal debates.

The IBAS, in this sense, has played a role of project its members in the international scene, alerting the international community that these countries are willing and able to break off the covering of its regional contexts and collaborate decisively with the progress of the multi-polar order. Finally, the Forum opened a political space for the international action of South Africa and Brazil.

The possibilities of commercial exchange were, also, one of the subject matters in the bilateral meeting of President Luís inácio Lula da Silva and the South African President Thabo Mbeki. In the political sphere both governments signs instruments in the social, energetic, educational, cultural, health and tributary administration areas. In South Africa, the Brazilian president still participated in a Business Council, Academic Seminar, Parliamentary Forum, and Women Forum. The end of this visit occurred in Angola, where Lula together with the Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos signed agreements on the areas of prevention of malaria, training and education. In Luanda, the Brazilian president was honored in the National Assembly and opened a meeting with representatives of more than 30 Brazilian companies installed in Angola.

Angola, the second major producer of African oil, was the scenario of an intense debate around what President Lula defined as “revolution of biofuels”. According to Brazilian president, both countries – Angola as an oil power and Brazil as self-sufficient in the production of oil – could participate together in the next energy revolution, the revolution of biofuels. The “Brazilian Energy Revolution”, as announced by President Lula, has the Brazilian potential for production as a way out of the substitution of non-renewable energy for renewable energy. It is noticeable the space that has been given to the issue by the Brazilian government, which has being approximated to countries aiming the development of this energy path.

In November 2007, Brazil and China announced that they would distribute free for all the African continent images from the Sino-Brazilian Earth Resources (CEBRS). The announcement, done by the Brazilian delegation in Cape Town, during the fourth meeting of the Group on Earth observation (GEO), had intended to contribute to increasing the capacity of the governments and organizations in Africa in use of satellite images to monitor natural disasters, deforestations, drought, and desertification, threats to agricultural production and to food security and sirs to public health. In addition to providing high quality images, Brazil has also committed to the provision of software for processing images and other tools of interpretation, as well as the training of African users. The full operation of the distribution system of data CBERS to Africa is planned for this year.

The relationships between Brazil and Africa, in the second Lula’s government, tend toward an unprecedented deepening. In December 2007, Brazil has been chosen by the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (CCP) of the United Nations to coordinate the work of the organ on Guinea-Bissau. In the coordination on the CCP work in Guinea-Bissau, Brazil will intensify its contribution to the country, that is already evidenced because of the bilateral cooperation, such as of the CPLP and of the IBAS’ found. In March 2008, in face the flood which affected Mozambique and Zambia, Brazil has continued to initiatives of humanitarian help to the African nations, donating three tones of basic medicines for each of the two countries. Guinea-Bissau and Angola, also affected for the floods, received Brazilian help.
Even though isn’t possible to appoint exactly the impacts caused by this conjuncture favorable to the rapprochement between the African Continent and Brazil, is real that Africa has a privileged position in the strategic international integration developed by the foreign policy of Lula government. Brazil apparently aims to be a responsible and active actor in the international system and, historically, the Itamaraty has been the institution that, for excellence, thinks the national interest in long term. Attribute more weight to regions still little explored and to developing countries, and doesn’t neglecting the relationships already settled with more traditional partners, not only reassert the more comprehensive definition of the national interests and of the inclusion of Brazil in the world economy, but also contribute to legitimate the Brazilian Diplomacy.

Conclusion

If all this is political discourse and economic interest or an association between two peripheries in the pursuit of socio-economic development only time will tell. The Africans governments, for their part, must overcome the conduct of assistance and help, created during the Cold War and made more severe during the “lost decade”, and intensify its integrations processes, under the challenging impact of the globalization. Overcoming the colonial legacy, mainly the fragmentation of the countries, observed in the configuration of small and unviable states, is an urgent necessity. At the same time, they have to deepen their ties of cooperation in a independent foreign perspective, reversing the marginalization of the continent.

Brazil, on the other hand, is a mestizo country, not a "racial democracy" (a false conservative concept) or a multicultural nation (a kind of post-modern European/North American concept). Miscegenation doesn’t mean whitening, but mixture, something that has to do with a culture that ignores certain differences and feel tremendous attraction for others. We are composing a culture itself, where the African element has a decisive contribution and that must be recognized, and the social inequalities, that penalize especially blacks, must be eliminated. And yet among too many injustices, we have an enormous tolerance that should be a model to a world of intolerance.

Much beyond the commercial aspect, Brazil could be an important partner for the African continent, provided that could overcome some internal political, economic and social obstacles. Africa, in turn, is also good for Brazil, not only in economic aspects, but also political and cultural. As a developing nation on the Third World, there is always the Prime World temptation of Brazilian elites. In addition to receiving students Africans, Brazil should send students and tourists for Africa, what would contribute to the development of our identity. Finally, the tension between a transoceanic cooperation focused on the North Atlantic (deriving the history of capitalism) and another dedicated to the South Atlantic (based on South American integration, in association with Africa and in South-South cooperation) is a fundamental contradiction. In this context, the Brazil-Africa relations are crucial for themselves overcome.

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