

Prestige diplomacy, southern solidarity or “soft imperialism”? Lula’s Brazil-Africa relations (2003 onwards)

(Preliminary version)

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Abstract

From the start of the Lula Government in 2003, Brazilian diplomacy gave a privileged place to Africa and relations became intense. A strategic vision and a coherent perspective were the new basis of the Brazil-Africa relations, which became the principal focus of the so-called south-south cooperation.

Bilateral and multilateral relations were developed in a remarkable way in the areas of trade, investments, oil, mining, infrastructure, health, science and technology, diplomacy and security. Meanwhile, in Brazil, the rights of the population of African descent are being redeemed and, at the same time, it is possible to observe the growing presence of Pentecostal (evangelical) churches and of Brazilian television in Africa, as well as the expansion of the drugs trade and of new African migration towards Brazil.

For many, the relations with Africa prove the solidarity dimension of the social programme of President Lula, while others consider these only as prestige diplomacy, a waste of time and money. Finally, some just regard these relations as business diplomacy, a “soft imperialism”, which is only different from the Chinese presence in Africa by its form and intensity.

Brazil, China, and India are the new main actors of international politics in Africa. After a long period of distancing, Brazilian 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 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 strategic and economical pillars of this new-found 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 world projection.

The Lula’s 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 Brazil’s current diplomatic efforts, only second to South America. During their two mandates, President Lula and Foreign Relations Minister Celso Amorim visited several countries in the continent and established a variety of agreements with many African nations. The President made eight trips to the African region, covering twenty 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

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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.

Historical background: slavery, distancing, rapprochement

Brazilian and African 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 Brazilian plantations, 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. Part of this policy was the London's veto to Angola became part of Brazilian Empire. The end of slave trade coincided with the beginning of European colonial expansion in Africa, generating a setback in Brazil-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 Portuguese immigrants community (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 African countries 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

However, this first effort of South-South cooperation suffered a serious blow in 1964 due to the establishment of the Military regime. 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-

¹ RODRIGUES, José Honório. **Brasil e África: outro horizonte**. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1964. 2^a ed. rev. e aum.

SATO). The latter implied some level of cooperation with the Portuguese colonialist regime and South Africa's racist one.

Rapprochement initiatives started in General Emilio Medici's government (1969-1974), 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 nautical miles. At the same time, the SATO project came to a dead end.

The oil crisis in 1973 and the start of General Ernesto Geisel presidency (1974-1979) represented the deepening of the African policies. Six new Embassies were opened in the region and Brazil was the first nation to recognize led by the Angola People's Liberation Movement (MPLA), of Marxist orientation, in November 1975. Geisel and Chancellor Azeredo da Silveira's diplomacy of *Responsible Pragmatism* 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, weapons and infrastructure services, it increasingly imported oil. Braspetro, Petrobras subsidiary, initiated operations for oil drilling in Africa, Vale do Rio Doce Company acted in the mining field and Mendes Jr and Odebrecht contractors built highways, bridges, ports and hydroelectric dams. The last military President, Gen. João Figueiredo (1979-1985) was the first Brazilian President to officially visit Africa: Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Cape Verde and Algeria.

In spite growing economic difficulties and external pressures from the international system that deepened Brazil's economic vulnerability, the high profile relations amongst the two continents were sustained by José Sarney's new civil government (1985-1990). He visited Cape Verde and, later, Angola and Mozambique, which were under pressure due to South Africa's interference and civil war. He started the institutionalization of Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries. In the height of Reagan's term, in 1986, and in the context of the militarization of the South Atlantic (post-Falkland/Malvinas's war), Brazil managed to approve, in alliance with African countries, in the UN the creation of the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZPCAS). Following this initiative, in 1988 it held in Rio de Janeiro the I South Atlantic Summit, 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 mutual economic development.

The transatlantic economic cycle of adjustments

The arrival of Fernando Collor de Mello in the presidency (1990-1992) and the adoption of a neo-liberal agenda of economic policies represented a new era of distancing towards Africa. In a scenario marked by the end of the Cold War and the Mercosur establishment 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 neo-liberal 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 President Itamar Franco (1992-1994) promoted a revival of ZPCAS and, in the next year, a Summit of Chancellors from 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 Angola.

Africa's place in Brazil's international relations agenda was also kept at bay during Cardoso 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, President Cardoso 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, Pretoria signed a framework agreement with Mercosur. At the same time cooperation in the field of public policies was 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 Cardoso 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 late 1980s a growing presence of Brazilian television (mainly soap operas) in Africa can be noticed, as well as of Pentecostal churches². 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 start 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. The fight against poverty adopted concrete programs as "Fome Zero" (No hunger!) and "affirmative action policies" in order to better integrate afro-descendants in the advances of Brazilian society. One of those initiatives was the incentive for the ascension of candidates of African origin in the diplomatic staff.

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 those 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. 52% of all Brazilian technical cooperation actions is taking place in Africa.

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. Despite

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.

this obvious material interests, Brazil had forgive foreign debt of many African countries, at the same time giving new loans.

From 2003 on, there is a substantial turn in the Brazilian external policy, aiming at the establishment of alliances with partners from within the South-South range of relations and stressing the importance of the African continent to Brazil's strategy of international insertion. A clear sign of that is the high level of diplomatic investments in the continent, which has promoted several visits to the African nations, establishing a good deal of cooperation agreements, in a variety of matters - ever since Lula's first mandate he'd been to the continent 8 times, having visited 20 countries, and some of them more than once. The President has even made a declaration quite similar to a former Janio Quadros' one, by saying that "Brazil has a moral and ethic compromise with the African continent".

This turn in the Brazilian foreign policy is thus justified, in one hand, for the government's better understanding of the importance of turning to the African continent to enlarge the country's international significance in the global balance of power, as a strategy of international insertion, fulfilling its aspirations as a medium size power. On the other hand, by the African Renaissance, since Africa has been gaining a new relevance in the international scenery, led, in great part, by the valorization of the commodities exported by the African Nations and by the Chinese growing investments in the region- aimed to fulfill its huge demand for raw material implicit in the Chinese great economic expansion in the last years.

The Portuguese speaking countries and South Atlantic strategy

In this sense, it's important to recognize the potential of some of these agreements for further arrangements on the multilateral stance, such as the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPSC), the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZPCAS), the India-Brazil-South Africa Summits (IBSA) – also known as G-3 – and the Africa-South America Summits. It is important for Brazil take advantage of the potential of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPSC).

Those countries are a priority to Itamaraty³ 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 Tomé 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, Cape Verde Mozambique and Angola have received the visit of the Brazilian President, some of them more than once. In the meetings, was discussed the possibilities of investment in several areas of industry and commerce.

Both CPSC and ZPCAS were created in previous governments, and both are currently still not developed to its full potential. For instance, they offer a mechanism to unite groups of nations that, around specific and general themes, are able to promote common goals in global forums. Furthermore, it's important to notice that the CPSC and the ZPCAS have a major potential as intersection locus among the different on going integration processes in the South Atlantic region, specially favoring the exchange between Mercosul, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

An initiative that remounts to Sarney government, in 1986, ZPCAS have lately been overcoming a stagnation period and going through a revitalization process that started in the Luanda Ministerial Summit, in 2007. The main outcome of the meeting

³ The Palace of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations.

was the Luanda Plan of Action, which points out a myriad of areas in which the efforts for cooperation could be strengthened. That was followed by the creation of Work Groups for economic cooperation – which is currently coordinated by Brazil –, operations for peace keeping, environmental issues, and fight against transnational illicit activities. The next Ministerial Summit is expected to take place in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 2009.

The majority of the traditional and the recently discovered Brazilian oil reserves is off-shore (as well as in Africa). At the same time, trade with Asia is routed mainly through South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. Thus, security and sovereignty in the region is a very sensitive and strategic subject to Brazil. The US initiatives on “securitization” (militarization) of the area, like the recent recreation of the 4th Fleet in South Atlantic is a matter of concern.

Also originated from a Brazilian initiative – the foundation of the Portuguese Language International Institute (IILP) - the CPSC was one of the most important pillars of Brazil’s African policy ever since its creation, in 1996. That mechanism was very utilized by Lula government to deepen its relations with the African continent, impelled by cultural and historical bonds. In 2008 Brazilian government established an African University in Northeast of the country, in the city of Redenção, the first to liberate the slaves in late 19th Century. Half the students will be Africans and the fields of specialization will be defined by the African countries.

The president has visited some of the member countries more than once, usually accompanied by groups of businessmen that are encouraged to invest in the continent. For instance, these visits have worked as a great impulse for several important initiatives, such as the creation of Brazilian technical teaching centers, through Senai’s cooperation (Service or National Industry), the disposal of electronic urns for the Guinea-Bissau poll (postponed due to a military coup) and the establishment of an antiretroviral medicine industry aimed at the combat of the HIV epidemics, mainly in the African continent.

The IBSA Dialog Forum and Africa-South America Summit

The reconsideration of Brazil’s status as an emerging power amongst the developing countries, a goal that were neglected during Cardoso government, also becomes evident in the current diplomacy towards multilateral diplomatic initiatives. That can be clearly noticed in Brazil’s efforts to create and develop IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa Dialog Forum) and ASA (Africa-South America Summit); initiatives that are starting concrete actions in many fields, are very fruitful in the sense of strengthening South-South cooperation.

IBSA trilateral Forum, also known as G-3, was created aiming the coordination and cooperation among the three emerging countries – India, Brazil and South Africa – in the international and trilateral scope, based on their economic, political and cultural synergies, as well as in their common interests and ambitions towards the international order - specially related to the Doha Round, in the WTO scope, to the United Nation reforms and to the construction of a New Economic Order. And even though it is often criticized, it is attracting much attention, not only by the simple fact that its leaders keep annual meetings.

Work groups are also very active in develop actions on health, science & technology, security, trade and transport, investment and a diplomacy focus on the political potential of the group in contribute to build a multipolar world and to improve a multilateral order. In the IIIth IBSA Forum, held in New Delhi, in October 2008, the main leaders of the three countries reaffirmed their political will in the scope of South-

South cooperation, reinterring their need to act together in a context of international crisis and criticizing the Northern countries for their abusive financial system and disregard to the developing countries. In that sense, IBSA also presents itself as a very relevant mechanism of approximation with South Africa - which have always been its main economic partner in the continent – as well as with the other African nations.

On the other hand, the I Africa–South America Summit (ASA), that was held in Nigeria, in 2006, was another initiative proposed by Lula government, representing a great opportunity to improve the relations with Africa in a South-South basis. The Summit resulted in the Abuja Declaration, ASA’s main document, in which the signatory countries recognize the need to intensify cooperation within the group as an alternative pressure force face the unequal economic international order. The Summit also created an executive organ, ASACOF, whose activities will be coordinated by Nigeria, in the African side, and Brazil in the South American side – the two countries that have been leading the efforts towards the new multilateral mechanism and that presided the I Summit. Like IBSA, it embraces a wide range of themes, from cooperation in multilateral forums to strategic partnerships in a variety of fields - such as governance, rural development, trade and investment, infrastructure, amongst others. Its second summit will take place in Venezuela in May 2009.

Multilateral Forums

Taking into account this international scenery, it has also been relevant the relations between Brazil and the African continent in global forums, noticeably in the scope of the UN and of the G-20. In these occasions Lula has been clearly stating, ever since the beginning of its government, its disposition to unite with the developing world to generate changes in the international order. In the economical stance, its main common claim is the end of agricultural subsidies and protectionist barriers from the Northern countries, criticizing the asymmetric globalization; whereas in the political stance the main union factor is the matter of the UN reform, specially considering Brazil and South Africa’s ambitions to gain a chair in the Security Council.

By instance, in September 2008, in a meeting of the UN General Assembly, President Lula argued the potential importance of biofuels production as a developmental opportunity for the African nations as well as condemned the commercial barriers that have been preventing the continent’s agricultural development, reiterating that the African issue is one of the top priorities in Brazil’s foreign policy. Whereas in the last G-20 Summit, held in London, in April 2009, Brazil and South Africa presented similar views on the currently financial crisis, stressing that a global response is required to mitigate its impact and prevent its contagion to emerging markets and developing countries, in particular Africa. In part their united voices were successful, accomplishing a pledge of \$100 billion in aid for developing countries and the promise of increasing voice to developing countries in economic decision-making.

Trade and Investment

Considering the commercial relations between Brazil and Africa, there has been a clear trade expansion since the first year of Lula government. In fact, in 2003 this flow corresponded to an amount of only US\$ 2,4 billions, whereas in 2006, at the end of Lula’s first term, the flow increased to US\$7,5 billions, with the underlined participation of Brazil’s greatest economic partners in the African continent: Angola, South Africa and Nigeria – which represented then 48% of the Brazilian exports to the continent. In 2008 that flow increased on average 36,4% from 2006, reaching the amount of US\$

10,2 billions. In 2008 the commercial flow with the African continent was five times bigger than it had been in 2002, at the end of Cardoso's second term.

The Brazilian companies also have played a very significant role throughout Lula government, in order to strengthen the ties with the African nations, being substantially favored by the presidential diplomacy in that sense. A good sign of that is the increasing of entrepreneurial missions during Lula government, having resulted in the growing number of Brazilian companies - especially those that export services that have been driven to the consecution of projects in the African continent. Amongst these initiatives by the Brazilian business community, it's worthy to stress the active presence of Companhia Vale do Rio Doce, of Petrobras and of Odebrecht.

Vale, world's second-largest mining company, has earned the rights to exploit the coal complex of Moatize, located Northern of Mozambique. It have launched, in the beginning of 2009, a \$1.3 billion coal mining project for the complex, intending to build a plant that expected produce 11 million tones of coal a year, to be exported to Brazil, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In total, the project is expected to generate 8.5 million tonnes of metallurgical coal, which is used for the production of steel. It will also produce 2.5 million tonnes of thermal coal, which is used for electricity generation, every year. To accomplish such a project, Vale will also count with the works of other 20 Brazilian companies, enlarging the dimension of the project for bilateral relations.

It is estimated that this initiative will turn Mozambique into the continent's second-largest coal producer, only behind South Africa. Besides generating on average 3 thousand jobs for the local community in the building stage and more 1,5 thousand when it starts to operate, it could also improve the country's situation in the international trade, since Mozambique is traditionally an agricultural country.

Nevertheless, this is not Vale's only investment in Africa. In March 2009, Vale has announced the creation of a joint venture with the African Rainbow Minerals Limited (ARM) aimed at enlarging the strategic options for growth in the African copper belt. In addition, the company is also present in Angola, in Guinea, and in South Africa (where it has its main office in Africa), having opened a new office in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in October 2008.

On the other hand, Petrobras, world leader in off-shore oil drilling technology, has been present in Africa ever since the 1970s. In Angola, the company's oldest branch in Africa, it counts on six active blocs for exploitation and production, intending to punch eleven new wells until 2011. In Nigeria, where it is active since 1998, several investments were made in 2008 to enlarge the company's participation in the country – since it is one of the world's largest oil producers. Furthermore, it's remarkable that throughout the Lula government, Petrobras has expanded its actions and investments to four other countries: Tanzania (2004), Libya (2005), Mozambique (2006), and Senegal (2007). It's also relevant to mention that the agreement Petrobras has with Empresa Nacional de Hidrocarbonetos (ENH), Mozambique state company, also contemplates research and production of biofuels – initiative that has been fully encouraged by the Brazilian government in its promotion of the “revolution of biofuels”.

In Angola, for instance, the political cooperation, mainly through the CPSC, has been enormously favoring the commercial bilateral relations and the Brazilian investments in the country. During Lula government, the credit lines have been extended towards Angola in order to allow the conclusion of the Capanda Hydroelectric Plant – which was built by the Brazilian company Odebrecht -, as well as to encourage the exports of cars and the hiring of new projects in the fields of infra-structure, sanitation and agriculture. Having presented economic growth of approximately 16%, on average 10% of Angola's GNP (US\$ 91 billions) correspond to Brazilian companies,

especially from the service sector, besides credit lines approved by National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) to finance the buying of Brazilian equipment for infrastructure and developmental enterprises in the country.

To have a better idea of the major growth in the commercial partnership with Angola it's important to attempt to the fact that, in 2003, the flow of Brazilian exports to the country was of mere US\$ 235 millions, whereas in 2008 that flow has been elevated to US\$ 1,9 billions – even exceeding the amount of exports to South Africa and to Nigeria, which used to be Brazil's main economic partners in the continent. In 2008, the main Brazilian companies active in Angola, besides Odebrecht, were Petrobras, Costa Negócios e Tecnologia and Volvo from Brazil – all of them having exported to the country over US\$50 million.

In November 2007, Brazil and China announced that they would distribute free for all the African continent images from the Sino-Brazilian Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS). 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 risks 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.

Brazil-South Africa partnership

It is also important to stress the role that South Africa has been playing in Brazil's policy towards African nations. A traditional economic partner in Africa, the country concentrated 90% of Brazil's trade in the continent at the half of the 20th century. Besides the political rapprochement after the break down of the *Apartheid* regime, its economic growth and its rising position as an emerging regional power has contributed to a substantial increase of connections with the country. As Africa's larger economy - not only for its size, but also for being the main access to the distribution of goods to the rest of the continent - the country represents a great potential market for Brazilian exports and a privileged connection to the continent. Following South Africa's economic growth in the recent years (on average 5% in 2008), the demand for Brazilian products has been increasing and, consequently, Brazilian exports have grown in 32,27% from 2004 to 2005, reaching the amount of US\$ 1,37 billions.

Plus, in 2008 that flow was expanded even more, reaching US\$ 1,7 billion, being 28% bigger than in 2005. It's quite noticeable the composition of these exports, taking into account that only 12,7% were basic products while 4,8% were semi manufactured goods and 82,4% corresponded to manufactured goods, what reinforces the Brazilian tendency of becoming an exporter of capital and technology. Some of the most promising market sectors are machinery, equipments, medical supplies, plastics, electronics, IT and food (specially meat), as indicated in Brazil's business mission, in 2006, led by the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (Apex). On the other hand, Brazil also benefits from the dynamic mineral production in South Africa, importing a wide range of mineral goods from the country - which is considered the world's largest producer of platinum, chromium and gold – among other products, having imported a total of US\$ 772 millions of South African products.

The economic relations between the two countries are also fundamental in the IBSA context, which has contributed to strengthen the trilateral commercial ties, taking into account that it reached an amount of US\$10 billions in 2007, on its way to

accomplish the goal of US\$15 billions by the year of 2010. In that sense, the G-3 has been representing a great opportunity to explore synergies among its members, increasing the investment as well as the trade flow. By instance, in April 2009, in Lesotho, on the occasion of Lula's most recent trip to the African continent, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU)'s member states – which are Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland – have signed the Preferential Trade Agreement with Mercosur.

The treaty had already been signed by the Mercosur member states during its latest summit, in Brazil, in December 2008 and it constitutes one of the few extra-regional commercial agreements signed by the South American economic bloc. The main purpose of the agreement is to facilitate the access to markets from both regional groups in order to increase the commercial flows as well as the investment flows for both sides. The agreement has also a very fundamental strategic role as a practical basis for future negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement between the blocs and, furthermore, it could even serve as a basis to a future trilateral FTA between IBSA members

Nevertheless, without disregard to the major role that Itamaraty has been playing in the promotion of Brazilian business enterprises in Africa, the articulation between the diplomatic and the business sectors are still not developed to its full potential. By instance, one of the main constraints to increase Brazilian investments in Africa are related to the lack of information on that continent real economic and political dimension, which is often underestimated by a good deal of companies – to overcome this situation, by presenting the existing opportunities in Africa to the Brazilian businessmen, is one of Itamaraty's main goals in order to tighten the economic link with the African continent.

Other fields of interaction

In the scope of exchange of information and technology, the Senai organization - a complex of professional education aimed at the generation and diffusion of knowledge applicable to industrial development - also represents a very important supporting element in the current Brazilian foreign policy. The first teaching center installed in Africa was located in Angola, within the CPSC scope. Currently, this institution, as well as Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), carries out expressive works in the implementation of projects of technical cooperation, not only in Angola, but also in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, with an announced expansion, expected to happen in 2009, to Mozambique and São Tome and Principe – noticeably all members of the CPSC. At the same time it should be underlined that important science & technology joint projects are been implemented in bilateral and multilateral terms and trough IBSA.

At last, another aspect that should be underlined about the recent Brazilian presence in Africa is the cultural influences, specially related to the spread of evangelical churches throughout the continent – mainly in Portuguese speaking countries and South Africa. That is reflected by the expansion of some of the Brazilian main missionary expeditions, such as the World Missions of the Batista Congregation – active in 15 Africa nations, from Egypt to South Africa - and the MIAF group (Mission for the Interior of Africa) – active in 13 nations. Furthermore, the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus has an impressive number of temples settled in the African continent spread over 25 countries, having over 300 churches in South Africa only.

Conclusion

If all these developments are only political discourse (prestige diplomacy) and economic interest (“soft imperialism”) or an association between two peripheries in the

pursuit of socio-economic development (southern solidarity) only time will tell. It is a process on the way, with many actors involved and claiming different objectives. The African governments, for their part, must overcome the conduct of assistance and help, created during the Cold War period and made more severe during the “lost decade”, and intensify its integration processes, under the challenging impact of the globalization. Overcoming some aspects of 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 an independent foreign perspective, reversing the marginalization of the continent.

Brazil, on the other hand, is a *mestizo* country, not a “racial democracy” or a multicultural nation. 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 the majority of black people, 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 if it could overcome some internal political, economic and social obstacles. Africa, in turn, may also be helpful for Brazil, not only in economic aspects, but also political and cultural ones. As a developing nation on the Third World, there is always the First World temptation of Brazilian elites, who see the country as “white, western and Christian”. In addition a part receiving African students, Brazil should also 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 from 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.

North Atlantic integration is already done and many analysts focus on the rising of the Pacific Ocean region. What about South Atlantic and Indian Ocean? Here, it is possible to understand the rationale behind IBSA strategy and Brazil-Africa relations. Of course, there is empirical evidence of Brazilian diplomacy attempt to project influence worldwide through African cooperation (prestige diplomacy), a not new initiative. But it is important for both sides, because bilateral links and multilateral common action is vital to upgrade African countries international capabilities to balance not only the old European/North American asymmetrical challenges and opportunities, but the new Chinese/Indian ones. It is a pre condition to African social and economic development.

At the same time, as a capitalist country, Brazilian business community wants to make profit where it is possible, especially in the new markets (“soft imperialism”). However, historical experience shows that only political will and a rhetorical solidarity are insufficient without been economic links solid established. Recent political developments show, by the other hand, that African governments are becoming more pro active in defense of their interests. And Brazil is not in a power position capable to impose something that Africans do not want.

It is evident that the present government has a comprehensive approach on South-South Cooperation and tries to propose a new shape to the International System. It is not the case only to ask a new kind of treatment from more powerful partners, but to do the same in relation to the less developed partners. This is coherent to Lula’s

political and social program. It is nothing to do with the old fashion third-worldist strategy of the seventies, a coalition against the North. Post Cold War scenario and globalization produced a new international environment. Brazil needs more strong partners in way to build a multi-polar and multilateral world order.

Finally, Brazil-Africa relations gains even more significance in the current context of world financial crisis, in which developing countries are threatened by the decreasing on commodities prices and diminishing flow of external investments. It is, therefore, a critical moment to the partnerships to the African countries accomplished during Lula government, in which there is a potential either for an even closer connection between them or a rupture in that policy approach that could even threat the evolution made so far. For what Lula has been expressing in the most recent forums – as in the III IBSA Summit, G-20 and UN General Assembly – he seems to be interested in the first option, tending to maintain, or even stress, the main lines of his foreign policy by making diplomatic efforts in order to deepen Brazil's relations with the underdeveloped nations.

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