

A review of Latin America's regional integration efforts - Discussing the need for a post-colonial turn with respect to the ecological challenge

Uma revisão dos esforços de integração regional da América Latina - Discutindo a necessidade de uma virada pós-colonial em relação ao desafio ecológico

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Recebimento do artigo Junho de 2018 | **Aceite** Julho de 2017

Abstract This paper argues that a post-colonial re-thinking of international relations and specifically regional integration models will help overcoming Eurocentrism and will contribute to solving contemporary global ecological challenges. By schematically reviewing Latin America's regional integration models, the economic penetration by the European Union and the United States becomes apparent. (Economic) regional integration has led to ecological challenges. These challenges are especially evoked by the effects of economic development models based on extractivism of natural resources. This paper will illustrate the need for a re-orientation of the discussion of regional integration by presenting the post-extractivism debate as a promising starting point. It exemplifies how a more interdisciplinary and pluralistic approach helps to re-think global power structures in international relations and regional integration theory, as well as to question the economic and political dominance of the Global North. **Palavras-Chave** international relations theory, post-colonial studies, regional integration, ecological challenge, extractivism.

Resumo Este artigo argumenta que um repensamento pós-colonial das relações internacionais e especificamente dos modelos de integração regional ajudará a superar o eurocentrismo e contribuirá para resolver os desafios ecológicos globais contemporâneos. Analisando esquematicamente os modelos de integração regional da América Latina, a penetração econômica da União Européia e dos Estados Unidos se torna aparente. A integração regional (econômica) levou a desafios ecológicos. Esses desafios são especialmente evocados pelos efeitos dos modelos de desenvolvimento econômico baseados no extrativismo dos recursos naturais. Este artigo ilustrará a necessidade de uma reorientação da discussão sobre integração regional, apresentando o debate pós-extrativismo como um ponto de partida promissor. Ele exemplifica como uma abordagem mais interdisciplinar e pluralista ajuda a repensar as estruturas globais de poder nas relações internacionais e na teoria da integração regional, bem como questionar o domínio econômico e político do Norte Global. **Keywords** teoria das relações internacionais, estudos pós-coloniais, integração regional, desafio ecológico, extrativismo.

Introduction

Various scholars have accredited that the discipline of international relations is deeply implicated in Western foreign policy-making (see e.g. SHILLIAM, 2010) and that there is no non-Western international relations theory (see ACHARYA; BUZAN, 2010). In their book on “International Relations Theories around the World”, Tickner and Wæver (2009, p. 335) explain:

Within a perspective of geo-cultural epistemologies it would be tempting to see the near absence of non-Western theory as the sole effect of Western dominance, or of the core setting rules of the game whereby theory cannot originate in the periphery. Without a doubt, [...] the center has come to be viewed as the primary producer of scientific theory while peripheral sites are deemed incapable of theoretically based thinking and therefore constitute sources of ‘data’ [...]. Sadly, academic communities in the South (not to mention political and economic elites) also internalize and reproduce it by favoring core knowledge as more authoritative and scientific in comparison to local variants.

As for Latin America, the U.S. discourse on international relations has significantly shaped how international relations are thought of there. However, the specific Latin American context came up with alternative ideas which have influenced how international relations are constituted in this continent. Theories such as the dependency theory, as thought by Cardoso and Faletto (1969) and André Gunder Frank (1977), are considered valid components for re-thinking U.S. dominated theory (TICKNER, 2003).

Alongside the view that international relations theory is dominated by U.S. thought, others like Acharya (2012) and Acharya and Buzan (2010) also demonstrate European or “Western” dominance. Without going into the discussion on what “Western”¹ or “occidental” means and who defines it, this paper acknowledges the underlying power structures, hegemonic forces and historically constituted reasons for the invisibility of alternative theories from other regions than North America or Europe. Post-colonial studies (see MORAÑA et al., 2008; QUIJANO; ENNIS, 2000) provide a valid framework to discuss these reasons and to reflect on the importance of re-thinking the current ideas on regional integration from a post-colonial perspective. So far, scholars have put their focus only on international relations theory in general, but they have not discussed post-colonial trajectories specifically with respect to its importance for analyzing regional integration efforts.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to link the post-colonial thoughts with the so far neglected ecological debate in the discussion of Latin American regional integration efforts and to demonstrate that a post-colonial turn is necessary.

This argumentation will be structured in the following way: First, this paper presents a review of the Latin American integration effort with special emphasis on the more emancipatory projects during the pink tide and existing problems. In the second chapter, the main themes of post-colonial studies will be presented. This will then help to elaborate on the argumentation that a post-colonial induced analysis will be useful in re-thinking regional integration models. By mentioning the problematic nature of comparative regionalism, Eurocentrism in regional integration models is identified as the main problem. By utilizing this interdisciplinary analytical framework and linking political, cultural and ecological studies, the paper's

1 Even though utilizing the term “Western” and “non-Western” creates such dichotomy which this text later criticizes, these terms are utilized for facilitation purposes and because many scholars use them, too. Differentiating it into more accurate demarcations (discussing the concepts of Global North and Global South, Occident and Orient etc.) would extent this paper's scope.

argumentation is that solutions to complex interlinked problems can be formulated, in particular to the ecological challenge. Finally, the paper will give a current example of a regional integration model that tries to consolidate economic integration without fostering the old structures of geopolitical and economic exploitation by resource extractivism in the Latin American region.

1. Review of Latin American efforts to regional integration

In this chapter, a short overview of the categories of different Latin American regional integration processes will be given. Since the end of the Second World War, most of the Latin American nation states have entered a permanent process of political and economic integration while being dominated by external actors such as the United States, and starting from the 1980s by the European Union. With the beginning of the 21st century, also new actors such as China and Russia have entered the constellation which by then has been governed by the U.S. and Europe. Additionally, internal regional integration processes took place in Latin America and the Caribbean independent from dominant external actors. This complex overlapping of the most important regional integration organizations in Latin America is illustrated in figure 1 below.

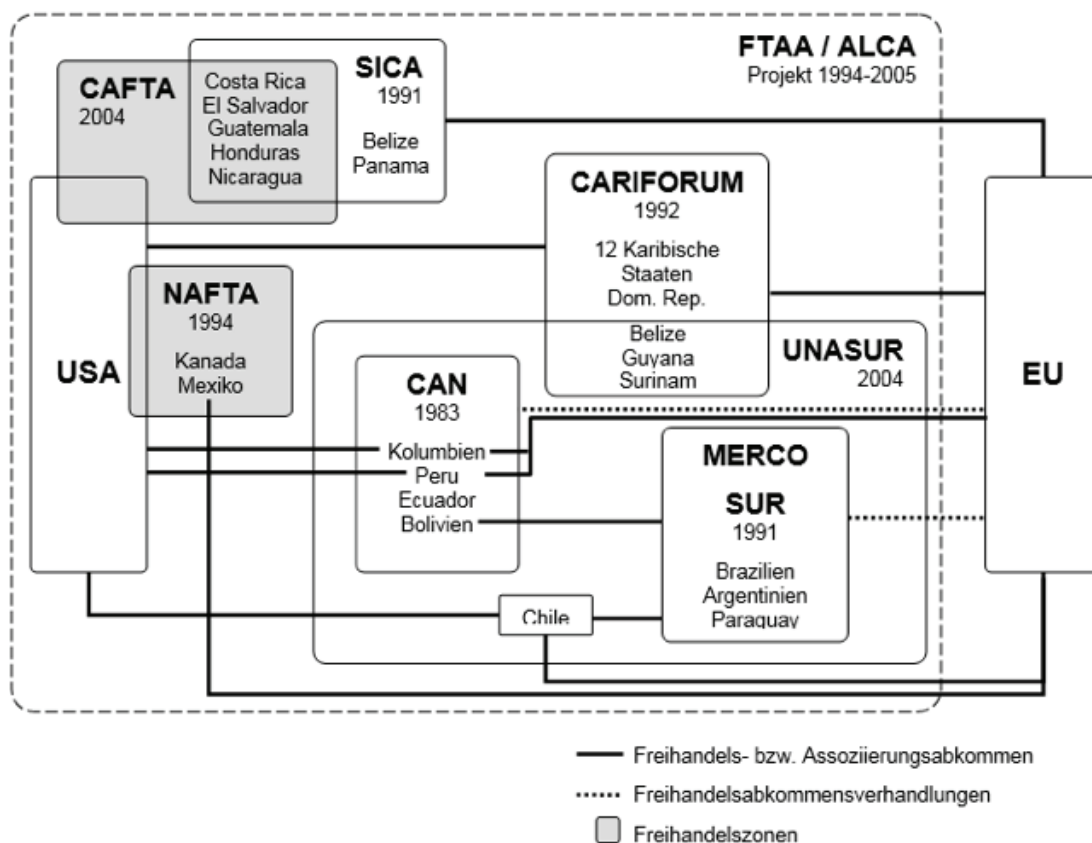


Figure 1: U.S. and European penetration of Latin America (STIMMER, 2017, p. 12)

In the following section, the most important integration concepts for the Latin American region will be resumed in order to illustrate the influence exerted by the United States and the European Union. This will later be useful for assessing the post-colonial potential for re-thinking these models.

1.1. Open regionalism under U.S. patronage

Culminating in the Washington Consensus in the 1990s, the U.S. guided this Latin American integration project with the objective to form a free-trade zone between North and South America. The impacts of the neoliberal Washington Consensus agenda are well known: austerity politics, liberalization of commerce and capital transactions, deregulation of markets and prices as well as privatizations. For implementing the U.S. oriented model of open regionalism, the “Panamerican Free Trade Zone” was declared in 1991, but defeated by the resistance of MERCOSUR (common South American market), leading to the implementation of sub-regional free trade agreements such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) as an alternative North American strategy (see STIMMER, 2017).

With the politics of import substituting industrialization (ISI), under the patronage of the 1948 founded Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) as part of the UN-chapter, Raúl Prebisch was the general secretary who implemented this development strategy for the region.

1.2. Protectionist regionalism after European Union model

Thus, after the open regionalism phase in the 1990s, the neoliberal crisis of Latin America in 1997 led to another dominant form of regional integration – the closed, competitive regionalism after the European Union model. It was marked by bi-regional free trade agreements such as the 2002 installed fiscal union of the Caribbean countries CARICOM, as well as the Caribbean Forum CARIFORUM, SICA (integration system of Central America), CAN (Andean community), MERCOSUR in combination with cooperation forms between the European Union such as the Rio-Group (id.).

1.3. Alternative post-neoliberal integration

In Latin America, the most forceful counter-hegemonic resistance to the neoliberal project has arisen, being referred to as the “pink tide” with many leftist, progressive governments, such as under Chávez in Venezuela, Lula in Brazil, Kirchner in Argentina or Morales in Bolivia. These governments have governed in the region in the 2000s and promoted forms of closed regionalism (CHODOR, 2015). Within this period, two distinctive anti-neoliberal forms of regional integration arose, the Bolivarian Alliance of People of America (ALBA), initiated by Venezuela's president Chávez in 2004, and the Union of South American States (UNASUR). ALBA and UNASUR have intensely fostered intra-regional economic collaboration projects and developed independent banks or even currencies (e.g. the “petro-dollar” in Venezuela).

1.4. The political and the ecological challenge of regionalism

To contribute to a useful discussion on practical implementations, this paper will also draw the connection between political and economic regional integration issues and the challenges that globalization poses with respect to the ecological question of climate change, environmental degradation and many other negative effects, as first proposed by Robson and Eckersley (2006). As the tradition of post-colonial studies does not explicitly address any ecological questions but many other interlinked problems which only lead to environmental issues as its manifestations and effects, it is important to highlight that these issues are inextricably linked to the regional integration projects.

Summing up the review of the Latin American integration processes, it can be said that they have led to a current intensification of extractivist development models. It is important to point out that the dominant positions of the United States and Europe are now being challenged by the rising primary resource interests by the new actors Russia and China. Stimmer (2017) even identifies a paradigm change from the neoliberal “consensus of Washington” in 1990, to the “consensus of commodities”, as the international price building for primary resources (see MARISTELLA SVAMPA, 2013), to the “consensus of ALBA”, a counter-model working independently of the international financial pricing system and trade union, to the “consensus de Beijing”, aiming at cheap raw materials import and technology export. In this case, the so-called South-South cooperation model is not very advantageous for Latin America and some scholars even call it the new South-led imperialism (see STIMMER, 2017).

As this paper will argue later, the ecological effects of such unequal cooperation structures must be taken into account in analyses of regional integration models and the post-colonial scholarship can help in addressing these ecological challenges.

2. Post-colonial critique and comparative regionalism

2.1. Post-colonial view on regional integration

In the introduction to their comprehensive anthology, Chowdhry and Nair (2002, p. 1) have expressed their concern with conventional international relations theory for naturalizing the “racialized, gendered and class processes that underwrite global hierarchies” and thus “reproduc[e] the status quo.” Consequently, they propose to consider the insights of post-colonial studies for critical reading of international relations because this approach addresses the intersections of race, class and gender in the construction of power asymmetries. By recognizing these underlying historically constituted hierarchies as results of imperialism and colonialism, post-colonial studies are significantly relevant for re-thinking regional integration as part of international relations theory. This re-reading of international relations, so the argumentation of this paper, is so crucial because it can lead to innovative and more comprehensive solutions to today's complex global problems.

Hence, the following chapter, will first present the specific premises of post-colonial theory before going on to discuss them in relation to the international relations theory, evaluating its implications for re-thinking regional integration.

Post-colonial studies

To begin with, post-colonial studies are based on the writings of Fanon during the 1950s and 60s² which have been complemented by Edward Saïd's (1979) work on "Orientalism" and Homi Bhabha's (1994) thoughts on "The location of culture"; which revolutionized the social sciences. They are rooted in the particular experiences of the French and British colonies and are a descendent of French post-structuralism. As a relatively new, interdisciplinary field, post-colonial scholarship is understood in various way. Without diving into theoretical discussions about its exact definition, post-colonial thought demonstrates how binary oppositions of colonizer and colonized, Orient and Occident, center and periphery are results of the imperialist project which still impact our today's world even after the formal abolishment of colonialism. It explains the interlinkages of marginal categories and power structures behind cultural differences (see MORAÑA et al., 2008; QUIJANO; ENNIS, 2000).

Coloniality of power

In line with Aníbal Quijano's work on the "coloniality of power" (see QUIJANO; ENNIS, 2000), in which he explains that there is a global hegemonic power patron that functions along modern, colonial, capitalist and Eurocentric premises, Chowdhry and Nair (2002) acknowledge the persisting Eurocentric worldview and un-interrogated production of power in critical international relations theory. Hence, the resulting unequal relations of power and asymmetries between the Global North and Global South, also with respect to the capitalist production mode, are one of the relevant issues in international relations as revealed by post-colonial analysis.

Situated knowledge production

In addition, international relations theory and thus its models of regional integration are faced with the problem of situated knowledge production which reiterates an ontological and epistemological distinction between higher valorized "Western" knowledge and an inferiorization of "non-Western" knowledge, as Chowdhry and Nair (2002, p. 12-13) point out with reference to Saïd's work. Additionally, Bilgin (2008) asks in his work whether non-Western concepts of international relations are in fact uninfluenced by "Western" elements. He points at the necessity to questioning the relation between the "West" and "non-West" and assumptions of "wanted Westernization". By utilizing Bhabha's (1994) notion of "mimicry", he exemplifies how mimicked ways of thinking and doing can be "almost the same but not quite" (see BILGIN, 2008) and that "mimicking Westernness" can be considered as "non-Western" resistance and/or "difference" (ibid., p. 14).

Historically, international relations theory, just as many other theories in the field of the humanities, assigns the right and credibility to speak only to central powers while denying this right to the subaltern and peripheral groups. This has been described by Spivak's (2003) provocative thought on "Can the subaltern speak?". Hence, it is not surprising that most analyses in international relations

2 FANON, Frank: *Piel negra, máscara blanca* (1952), *Los condenados de la tierra* (1961).

have also identified the “non-Western” world as the “problem-maker” or have assigned it the partner role in the global power game. However, the “non-Western” world has never been considered as the active and thriving power such as the “Western” world (BILGIN, 2008, p. 11).

Deconstruction and decentralization

This leads to the third important premise of the post-colonial studies which demands a deconstruction and decentralization of solidly constructed principles which are commonly considered as the truth and advocates a plurality of world views and interpretations (see TICKNER; WAEVER, 2009). For the international relations field, this means that it must open up to a more pluralist approach (see BENNETT, 2013), considering the intersectionality of race, gender, and class constellations as a source of unequal power distribution. This paper identifies these problems as one of the primary constituents of global conflicts.

Eurocentrism

Finally, all the trajectories of post-colonial studies for regional integration studies that were discussed above, can be summed up in one central problematic issue: Eurocentrism. The European tradition of thinking is a hegemonic representation and knowledge system that appropriates its own universality (see MORANA et al., 2008; QUIJANO; ENNIS, 2000). For the regional integration studies, this means that the problem is to take the European Union as a model for regions that have historically developed differently from Europe and function economically and politically in other ways.

For instance, in their analysis of UNASUR as an intergovernmental organization, Nolte and Comini (2016, p. 549) point out that many studies of regional integration often evaluate regional organizations according to their correspondence of pre-established models of integration, mostly the model of the European Union (see also ACHARYA, 2012, p. 7).

Critics of Latin American regionalism often start with a narrow definition of regional integration, or lambast Latin American governments for failing to deliver something that they never actually promised or aspired to creating in the first place. [...] Although the European experience of regional integration is unique, many authors often take that continent as the ‘gold standard’ of regional integration. (NOLTE; COMINI, op. cit., p. 550).

However, they also mention diverting opinions e.g. by Malamud and Schmitter (2011) who claim that there is no distinctive Latin American pattern of integration as they remind that regional integration should be differentiated from mere regional cooperation or collaboration (NOLTE; COMINI, op. cit., p. 551).

2.2. Problematic comparative regionalism

Among the few post-colonial analyses that exist on integration efforts, Acharya's (2012) work is especially important. Although having studied primarily the Asian region, her findings are appli-

cable to other non-central regions. She states that “comparative regionalism” is a better term to be utilized as it stands for regional cooperation; other than the term “regional integration” which goes hand in hand with a loss of sovereignty and which has always been influenced by the European Union’s experiences (ibid., p. 12).

In her definition of regionalism, it is “defined here as purposive interaction, formal or informal, among state and non-state actors of a given area in pursuit of shared external, domestic and transnational goals” (ibid., p. 3) with its main referents being regional international institutions and its transnational dynamics.

According to Acharya, with the exception of European-based regional integration, regionalism has historically been understood as a global phenomenon and had only been considered as a European model during the rise of the European Economic Commission in the 1950s:

Thus, whether in the economic, social, political or security realm, regionalism in practice has always had a multiple, global heritage. Yet from the 1960s onwards, a narrow theoretical approach developed by a group of European and US scholars came to dominate international relations scholars’ idea of what regionalism means and how to study its origins, evolution and effectiveness. (ibid., p. 6-7).

By citing Haas (1961, p. 378), Acharya (2012, p. 7) underlines his view “that there could be no universal ‘law of integration’ deduced from the European example” and that regional integration theory has shifted from Eurocentrism to “euroexceptionalism”, which is a response to globalization’s challenges and which takes non-state actors and informal processes into account (ibid., p. 8).

Therefore, in addition to the fact that regional integration has been a concept thought not only for Europe, regionalism has been influenced by ideas from Latin America, Asia, North America and the Middle East and comparative regionalism is constituted by various theoretical and methodological approaches (ibid., p. 12-13). The up to this point still insufficient interaction between European and international views on regionalism as well as a lack of interdisciplinary exchange is also supported by other scholars (see DE LOMBAERDE et al., 2010; BENETT, 2013; HAAS; SCHMITTER, 1964).

Lombaerde et al. (2010, p. 742-743), highlight in their work on “The problem of comparison in comparative regionalism” that regarding the European integration as the primary “model” for regional integration is one of the main problems of comparison within this research area, which is mostly conducted by realist/intergovernmental, liberal/institutional scholarship. “In other words, Eurocentrism results in a false universalism” (ibid., p. 743). According to them, the European integration is still a valid experience for an integrated comparative analysis, but instead of focusing on the differences between the European integration and the rest of the world, dominant interpretations must be challenged and more alternative theories should be considered (ibid, p. 745).

Without going into detail on the different definitions of regional integration or regionalism in general, these lines of argumentation were presented to illustrate how these afore mentioned debates circle around the problem of taking the European knowledge systems and theories as reference points – since it is the structural deficiency that is challenged by post-colonial studies (as outlined in chapter 3.1.). Hence, this discussion illustrates that re-thinking a concept of regional integration is necessary and linked to the post-colonial idea of overcoming Eurocentrism and advocating a plurality of approaches.

Obstacles and challenges

In their book on “Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations”, Chowdhry and Nair (2002, p. 15) discuss the major themes central to a post-colonial analysis of international

relations theory, including the power of representation, race, global capitalism, class and resistance. Similarly, when this analysis is broken down to the regional integration models specifically, one of the biggest obstacles in re-thinking and finally implementing post-colonial trajectories in modelling regional integration projects will be the opposition of the peripheral elites in Latin America. They constitute the by-product of colonialism and historically evolved power relations. Additionally, the foreign policy agenda will dictate the course of action and the questions will still be: “who is in the position of making decisions?”, “who has the social and material resources to produce and divulgate knowledge?” and “how to consolidate internal fragmentations and diverting points of view?”.

As we have seen, in the review of the Latin American integration efforts, emancipatory projects such as UNASUR and ALBA have tried to think regional integration from a rather post-colonial induced angle, but could not stand against the multiplicity of parallel aspirations of integration. Certainly, several of the above-mentioned obstacles have also hindered these projects from flourishing.

The argument of this paper is that regional integration should be re-thought with the post-colonial perspective in mind and new political projects should be designed in a way that questions the “Western” superiority and reflects upon “whom does what for whom and with which motives”. In addition, it should break down barriers for “non-Western” intellectuals and foster collaboration and knowledge exchange between nations and regions.

This leads to further implications to which Robson and Eckersley (2006) point at in their book on “Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge” which is “the growing realization that mainstream theory is not – at this historical juncture – complete without taking account of its ecological counterpart” (ibid., p. 2).

2.3. Interlinkage with the ecological challenge

After having reflected on the main themes of post-colonial studies and how they could inform a critical re-thinking of regional integration models, this chapter tries to link these findings with the challenges which have been elaborated through the review on Latin American integration efforts (see chapter 2.4).

To gain a better understanding of how the various, overlapping Latin American integration institutions and organizations could be re-thought in terms of post-colonialism, in order to overcome their shortfalls with respect to the ecological challenge, the exemplary case of “post-extractivism” will be discussed. This concept has been vastly elaborated and divulged by the Uruguayan Eduardo Gudynas (2011). “Post-extractivism” constitutes an appropriate example for a post-colonial informed, comprehensive solution to the Latin American national economies’ high dependence on primary resource exportation (see e.g. the extreme cases of the petroleum-dependent development model of Venezuela). Likewise, as Robson and Eckersley (2006), in his “Review of Political Ecology”, Blaikie (1999) also underlines the importance of considering the interconnected political and ecological issues.

Eduardo Gudynas (2011), like other Latin American scholars such as Alberto Acosta (2008, 2013) and Arturo Escobar (2012) have voted to consider and elaborate “alternatives to development” instead of following the mainstream solutions of “alternative development” paths. This means that they want to bring the discussion one step further, surpassing the old premises of progress and ask for a questioning of the notion of “development” and “modernity”. This questioning of established and as universally valid considered Eurocentric paradigms shows us how deeply the discussion is rooted in the post-colonial context. This is exactly, what Gudynas’s (2011) notion of “post-extractivism” transports as its main message. He proposes this model as a comprehensive solution to socio-ecological problems evoked by the current regional integration and economic external relations of many Latin American countries. Gudynas sees those

extractivist activities which are conducted in a massive way in order to satisfy global markets, as particularly ecologically damaging and gives examples of monocultures in Brazil and Argentina. Often, the activities supporting these extractivist projects such as transportation, hydroelectric stations etc. are most harmful to the local environment and constitute a threat to the socio-economic conditions of the local residents. By including locally affected people into the research process and trying to foster a cross-national dialogue and knowledge exchange, Gudynas highlights the importance of a transition phase in changing the economic integration model, mostly with respect to the external relations with primary resources importing countries. This means that extractivist activities should be reduced radically and patterns of consumerism should be changed, as well as local economies and interregional trade between different biological regions should be fortified. The complexity of the problem shows that solutions to transnational problems should be solved also on a global level. In this specific case of extractivism, E.U. policies on raw materials have to be revised as to not be uniquely directed towards easy access.³

With this example of “post-extractivism”, it became clear that it is an alternative approach to facing multi-levelled problems with the help of post-colonial ideas of interdependencies. In the same way, this example has shown that regional integration topics can be re-thought from a plurality of angles and a deconstruction of common ways of thinking might lead to innovative solutions.

However, exactly those structural obstacles of universal knowledge systems and power relations, which have been addressed by post-colonial studies, will constitute the main challenges for putting the re-thought of regional integration into practice and to establish those ideas on a long-term basis, as e.g. the EU will hardly resign from its privileged position of easy access to resources.

3. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to review the Latin American integration effort's effects with respect to its ecological impact and struggles to combat the reproduction of the Global South's power dominance. By looking at these efforts from a post-colonial perspective, the need to further challenge U.S. and European dominated international relations theory and its linked regional integration models has been emphasized.

To illustrate the dominance of “Western” thought, a general overview of Latin America's integration efforts between 1945 to 2017 was given, with a special emphasis on the economic penetration by the European Union and the United States. By changing from progressive to conservative, neoliberal governments, different integration models have been implemented – ranging from open regionalism to protectionist aspirations and finally alternative approaches during the pink tide.

Independently, mainstream scholarship has dedicated itself to comparative regionalism and mostly criticized Latin American integration efforts departing from the European point of view. Many of the analyses took the European Union Integration Model as a reference for discussion. However, it is crucial to bear the continents specificities in mind and try to overcome colonialism and common deficit analyses when thinking of Latin American ways for regional integration.

Facing today's ecological challenges, as provoked by our current capitalist production mode and economic growth paradigm, this long-needed reflection on how a regional integration should be re-thought in economic and political terms from a post-colonial perspective has been overdue. Indeed, this is the recommended strategy to challenge the institutionalized unequal power structures, the dominance of the “Western” hemisphere and therewith linked problematic effects of exploitation of natural resources.

3 This discussion on post-extractivism has been elaborated by Eduardo Gudynas in workshops and conferences on resource extractivism in Vienna in October 2016.

Thus, it appears indispensable to further engage in analyses of regional integration theories and models by taking the post-colonial debate into account to address problems invoked by globalization with transnational solutions.

As the case example of “post-extractivism” for the Latin American region as an alternative regional integration model has shown, this re-thinking can lead to innovative, alternative solutions for challenging the primary resource paradigm of economic growth.

However, bearing in mind that the institutionalized, alternative, counter-hegemonic efforts of ALBA or UNASUR have not led to impactful long-term results, these interdisciplinary debates also face the threat of being supported by a minority of progressive scholars and being confronted with colonial constellations.

Nonetheless, a post-colonial re-thinking of international relations and regional integration can be undertaken by engaging in reflective understanding of one's own positioning, by recognizing the historically evolved socio-economic and political circumstances, by questioning situated knowledge production and by its re-appropriation.

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