

REGION, REGIONNESS AND REGIONALISM

in Latin America:
towards a new
synthesis

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INTRODUCTION

The reconfiguration of Latin American regional governance is one of the major features that characterises the hemispheric political economy over the last half decade. Regional governance is currently transiting a 'garden of forking paths', in the telling words of Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, where different regional policies, regional identities and regional forms of cooperation and competition are transforming the cartography of Latin American politics.¹ Latin America today offers alternative pathways to region building whose rationales are not restricted to reasons of trade or (often rhetorical) opposition to US hegemony. Although it is undisputable that regionalism is driven in part by economic calculations, the new political economy of Latin American regional governance represents a conglomerate of projects in which issues of commerce, political integration and trans-societal welfare are reclaiming – perhaps even re-inventing – some of the principles of collectivism and socialism that have previously characterised the political tradition of the region. In this overlapping and sometimes conflicting scenario, the terms of regional integration are being redefined as regional projects offer substantially divergent visions of what *Latin Americanness* should mean and how integration projects should respond to current challenges of global political economy.

The paper is concerned with the question of how transformative these new regionalist projects are in shaping new spaces for thinking and negotiating alternative models for political and social cooperation. Looking at the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) we ask: how are we to understand regional agreements that are grounded in different systems of rules, that contest 'open regionalism' and that are part of a complex set of alternative ideas and motivations affecting polities

and policies across the region? In a context marked by the declining ability of the US to shape regional orders, institutions and discourses, can we genuinely discern forms of new regional governance emerging that amount to more than rhetorical rebellion against the Washington Consensus? In addressing this question, we argue that UNASUR and ALBA should not simply be seen as *ad hoc* subregional responses to the recurrent crisis of neoliberal governance and the collapse of US-led hemispheric leadership, but are best conceived as visible manifestations of the re-politicisation of the region, creating foundations for new polities in which citizens, social movements, political parties, and government leaders interact and construct new understandings of regional community. Our claim is, thus, that ALBA and UNASUR represent new and distinct projects in constitution of a post-hegemonic and post-trade regional order (Acharya 2009).

Focusing on the question of regional governance in UNASUR and ALBA, it enables us to test the theoretical power of New Regionalist approaches that have usefully embraced issues beyond mainstream EU studies yet have presupposed that regionalism is to be viewed as taking place *within* and *modelled by* neoliberal economics, establishing the contours of the debate around the dichotomy 'old' and 'new' regionalism. Our finding is that such approaches are of limited value and consequently we propose an alternative approach based on 'reclaiming' the concept of *regionness* developed mainly by Hettne (1993, 2005) and Hettne and Söderbaum (2000: 462) to link social-political and institutional aspects of region building. The concept of 'regionness' has been largely overlooked in the studies of regionalism beyond Europe, and while it has been productively applied to explain social cohesion and the position of the EU as an international actor (Hettne 2008), has not been applied to the analysis of regionalism in the Americas. We argue that an approach built on the concept of 'regionness' can

provide a more perspicuous analysis of the politics of regionalism in Latin America and enables us to break with the dichotomy 'old' versus 'new' regionalism, neither of which adequately grasp the socio-political and institutional transformations in a post-hegemonic regional order.

The article is divided into four parts. This first part reflects on the usages of New Regionalism and of *regionness* explaining Latin American regional governance, and on how these considerations can be connected with the current context of transformation in Latin American regional politics. A call for a new synthesis between New Regionalist approaches and the concept of *regionness* is made to explain the construction of post-trade and post-hegemonic regionalism. The second part analyses the complex cartography of current regionalism(s) in Latin America, reviewing the trajectory of regional politics vis-à-vis American leadership and the emergence of alternative, post-hegemonic regional projects with a new emphasis on social and political aspects of integration. The third part concentrates on how Venezuela-led ALBA and Brazil-led UNASUR contest 'open regionalism' of the 1990s while proposing the construction of new regional polities: one that embraces a trans-national welfarist model of (micro)regionalism with an emphasis on socio-economic development; the other seeking geopolitical and economic autonomy with an emphasis on institutional-building and inter-regional outreach. The fourth part builds on the concept of *regionness* to explain the transformative capacity of ALBA and UNASUR. The article closes with a discussion of the implications of these visions for the way we theorise regional governance beyond neoliberalism, beyond the 1990s, and beyond Europe.

NEW REGIONALISM, REGIONNESS AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

New Regionalism as an approach has captured the intellectual imagination of scholars concerned with regionalism beyond neo-functionalist understandings of integration. The evolution of the theoretical debate about regionalism since the 1980s has been driven by a proliferation of regional cooperation agreements that, unlike the previous experiences of (old) regionalism associated with economic protectionism and inward orientation policies of the post-war era, were part of a broader process of global transformation. In an increasingly globalising world regional integration became immersed in the logic of the market.

Old regionalism began in the 1950s and declined in the late 1970s. During that time, the logic protectionism and welfare state, shaping national policies across the world, became regionalised as another form of regulating the global market economy (Hettne 1999: 7). As processes of economic globalisation and regionalisation are occurring simultaneously, new regionalism is thus distinguished from the 'old regionalism' by a new porosity to the global rules. As these efforts proliferated, theorising about regionalism became an exercise of debating whether regionalism was a building or stumbling block reinforcing multilateralism. As a governance project, it was understood as a state strategy designed to minimise new challenges of economic globalisation by promoting activities to improve their position in the global market (Grugel and Hout 1999).

The boundaries of the empirical analysis and the theoretical conceptualisation were established by considering regionalism as a process led by multiple actors beyond the state. This process was defined as *regionalisation* in allusion to a process led by non-state actors in their construction of regional (economic) spaces that exceeds those formal spaces created by the states (Hettne and

Inotai 1994; Hurrell 1995; Marchand and Shaw 1999; Bøas, Söderbaum and Shaw 2003; Phillips 2003). From the perspective of New Regionalist approaches, regionalism is thus an outcome of comprehensive and dynamic relations between state and non-state actors. In other words, states are not the only regionalising actors; business and social actors are active participants in formal and informal regional inter-linkages.

There is, however, something of a paradox about New Regionalist approaches. While they portray regionalism as a multifaceted process, emphasising in particular the role of non-state actors in the process of regionalisation, the social and political dimensions of regionalism were often subsumed into an orthodox narrative of regionalism as a passive response to a structure of (global) economic constraints. As a consequence, empirical patterns of political and social relations in the making of regionalism were often brushed aside. The emphasis was rather placed on 'regionalising' forces and regionalism as a defensive mechanism. For instance, Gamble and Payne (1996) identified three models of regionalism, namely American, European, and Asian, shaping the pathways to regional governance based on distinctive structures of intra-regional power, often involving a regional hegemon. As Phillips (2005: 21) remarks, issues of regional economic governance must be conceived as political processes inherently linked to the region's prevailing power structures, and the way power is exercised. Regional governance, from this perspective, reverberates a model of rule makers and rule takers in global power relations, as well as a dominant meta-narrative associated with the triumph (and the discipline) of neoliberalism as a political and economic project. Departing from this perspective, yet without denying the construction of regionalism as a response to the forces of globalisation, New Regionalist approaches address varieties of regionalisms as a consequence of

the interplay between exogenous and endogenous forces, as well as top-down and bottom-up processes (Taylor 2003: 314). Regionalism is thus conceived as the interplay between macro-processes of regulation and micro-processes of regionalisation (Breslin and Hook 2002: 8).

It is at this point that it is valid to explore the tensions and contradictions between these logics and the emergence of new forms of regionalisms – in terms of identity, community, purpose and models of governance. As New Regionalist approaches accept that the hegemony of neo-liberalism permeates the logic of regionalisation, it can hardly be seen as a counter-reaction to the global rule. But, given that the political and economic circumstances that gave substance to new regionalism in the 1980s and 1990s – as a project and an approach – do not hold so firmly any longer, and that a number of social and political inter-linkages are reflecting a new sense of purpose in Latin America (especially in the Southern Cone) perhaps the most significant questions about current regionalism in Latin America are: What sort of alternative social and political dynamics, institutions and scope can be identified in new regionalist projects such as UNASUR and ALBA? How do these regionalisms represent themselves as a cohesive group? These are pressing questions as we are moving from US-led open regionalism to distinctive forms of cohesion and regional identity, and in turn new forms of regional governance.

These questions, at the same time, challenge the explanatory power of New Regionalist approaches which have often slipped into the terrain of a structural understanding of globalisation as a structure of constraints, and regionalism as a defensive mechanism. To address the politics and the transformative capacity of new regionalisms in, but not only, Latin America, New Regionalist approaches

need to reach a new synthesis between globalisation and regionalism, between inter-governmental integration and regionalisation, and between regionalism and expressions of regionness. This becomes more even pressing in the current context of global transformations where emerging economies are becoming new 'globalisers', and region building rationales are not restricted to trade or simply rhetorical opposition to US hegemony but real spaces for autonomous development.

What we propose in the following analysis is to understand the politics of regionalism in Latin America as an amalgam of longstanding projects of integration and cooperation cohabiting with more radical alternatives. This complex scenario demands a new way of thinking about regionalism beyond the distinction 'old' versus 'new' regionalism, neither of which adequately grasp the implications of the socio-political and institutional transformations in the current Latin American political economy. We thus propose a new synthesis between the concept of *regionalisation* – led by different configurations of state and non-state actors – and that of *regionness* – as identitarian manifestations of distinctive practices and interactions within a regional community – to understand not only the drivers of regional cooperation but also the factors leading to different and overlapping models of intra-regional policy-making, institution-building, and social politics.

Regionness as a concept was framed in the early 1990s to reflect the degree of economic, political and social interactions in a given area, which distinguishes it from another area. According to Hettne and Söderbaum (2000; also Hettne 1993, 2008) *regionness* defines the position of a particular region in terms of regional cohesion, which can be seen as a long-term historical process, changing over

time from coercion, the building of empires and nations, to voluntary cooperation.

Hettne and Söderbaum (2000: 461) describe five levels of regionness:

- The region as *regional space* is a geographic area, delimited by natural, physical barriers. The region is thus objectively rooted in territory.
- As *social system* the region is organised by human inhabitants constituting some kind of trans-local relationship which can result from demographic change or changes in transport technology.
- The region as an *international society* implies a set of rules that makes interstate relations more predictable (less anarchic), and thus more peaceful, or at least less violent. It can be either organised (de jure) or more spontaneous (de facto). In the case of a more institutionalised cooperation, the region is constituted by the members of the regional organisation.
- The region as a *community* takes shape when a stable organisational framework facilitates and promotes social communication and the convergence of values, norms and behaviour throughout the region. Thus a transnational civil society emerges, characterised by social trust at the regional level.
- Region as an *institutionalised polity* has a more fixed and permanent structure of decision-making and therefore stronger acting capability as a global actor – what is identified as *actorship*.

What these categories bring is an understanding of regionalism as a complex structure of ideas, actors and institutions in the formation of a social polity. There is something of a paradox about the embracing of *regionness* within the explanatory categories within the literature of New Regionalism. Although *regionness* as an approach covers new grounds in understanding how ideational

factors such as non-state actors' motivations, culture, identity, shape regionalism, as a research agenda it is still a fertile terrain. This is even the case despite prolific scholarly work that built on the notion of regionalisation to explore dynamics of cooperation and integration in different areas of policy, or even demanding responsive and inclusive agendas of regional politics (see Söderbaum and Shaw 2003; Gomez-Mera 2008, 2009; Tussie and Trucco 2010). Many of these works, however, implicitly assumed regionalism as taking place *within* a fundamental and ongoing world order in which sovereign decisions and calculations are modelled *by* neoliberal economics. The place for contestation within the literature of (new) regionalism is, in fact, vague and ambiguous, as regionalisation ultimately is considered to reinforce, albeit often adding a social content to the integration agenda, the position of the region in a competitive world. As a consequence there has been little exploration about regionness as manifestation of contestation and resistance. In fact, contestation and resistance, in the literature, has mainly taken the shape of transnational activism of civil society organisations and hemispheric social movements independently from political parties (Saguier 2007; Icaza *et al* 2009; Von Bulow 2009).

But given the strong and novel emphasis on political and social integration, the new economic and welfare considerations, and the strong search for autonomous development in most regional projects emerging in the South America since the early 2000s, we need to refocus our attention to the factors governing and making (micro)regionalisms to understand how much these experiences contribute to the development of alternative spaces contesting the capitalist global economy. Different expressions of regionness are expression of (micro)regionalisms, and the place from where critical responses to unequal economic, cultural, political, environmental, and technological globalisation can

emerge.

OVERLAPPING REGIONALISMS IN LATIN AMERICA

Regionalism is a dynamic and important force in the Americas, a site from which to understand the complex interplays of domestic and external influences. Most of our understanding about regionalism in the Americas has developed from the view that Latin America engaged defensively in regional cooperation schemes to either counteract or better cope with the pressures of external forces. Until very recently the debate about regionalism amongst the majority of scholars and policy makers was dominated by trade integration, and the extent to which regionalism fostered or hindered neoliberal globalisation (Jayasuriya 2009). In the Americas our understanding of regional integration has thus been constructed around issues of trade liberalisation, US hegemony since the 19th century and US-led institution and hemispheric governance-building. Issues of identity, social cohesion and social networking within the regional space remained largely under-explored despite some work on transnational networks of resistance at the hemispheric level (Saguier 2007; Serbín 2007; Icaza *et al* 2009). In the meantime, changes in the political economy of the region refocus collaboration towards political and social policies, rather than trade liberalisation, as the central motor for regional cooperation, reflecting the pressures for changes at different levels of governance.

It would be wrong to assume that the transition from trade-led to political and social integration constitutes a rupture with Latin America's recent past. Current regional developments are shaped by legacies of past trajectories and *ad hoc* responses to global and regional politics and context. Yet, transformation in this

scenario is about possibilities for new agency and autonomous choice in a context where a hegemonic single mode of political economy for the region is over. In many ways, it can be argued that, following the words of Whitehead (2009: 46), far from a coherent new grand 'meta-narrative' of unambiguous transformation and rupture, Latin American regionalism rests in multiple but partial attempts at change that combine motivations and policy initiatives of the past with new policy responses to the current challenges of political economy.

In retrospective, there are two (competing) narratives that historically embraced the struggles for independence – both at the birth of Latin American nation-states as independent political entities in the 19th century, and more currently in the search for new socio-political and economic organisation. On one hand, the idea of a united region has been embraced as a 'U.S vision' born in the Monroe Doctrine and embodied in the Pan-American ideal that advocates an Americas free from the influence of countries outside the Western Hemisphere – yet guarded by the US. On the other hand, the 'Latin American vision' embraced by Simón Bolívar's quest for a unified body of former Spanish colonies linked a vision of integration to culture, language, and history. These two visions evolved into modern manifestations of contrasting and competing models of economic and political governance, which dominated the 20th Century.

In practice, a perceived sense of common legacy together with a *realpolitik* calculus of cooperation against imperialist external rule, political and economic, have been drivers of different regional arrangements and integration projects. As bluntly put by Myrdal (1968: 39) there are no mystical qualities in geographical proximity that make neighbouring nations a *unit* in any real sense culturally, politically or economically. This call for unity has been mainly conceived as an

instrument to balance external influences – in a broader sense, that is U.S. hegemony; EU economic competitiveness; international capital and globalisation demands. In other words, rather than a teleological destiny, regionalism in Latin America has tended to be driven by defensive rather than offensive reasons, setting Latin American countries as takers rather than makers of global rules (Keohane 2001).

Since the Great Depression and up until current developments, the US and the Latin American visions reflected a debate of national and regional development defined in terms of statism versus liberalism. The ways in which this dichotomy was resolved had been inherently related to how Latin American nations managed autonomy *vis-à-vis* regional power. This defined at the same time three moments or waves of regionalism in Latin America. This first wave of regionalism can be seen as a response to the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957, and the access of former colonies to the EEC by means of preferential agreements. The statement by the President of Uruguay in the early 1960s illustrates the notion of defensive regionalism as he established that ‘the formation of the European Common Market is a state of near-war against Latin American exports. To an integration scheme we must respond with another integration’ (quoted in Mattli 1999: 140). The general idea of this defensive orientation was that economic integration would improve the bargaining position and facilitate industrialisation through import substitution on a regional scale. This was at the core of ‘old’ regionalism in Latin America. Trade was the motor of integration, with low or even no socio-political content. The first relevant trade project of this kind took shape in 1960 with the creation of the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA, or ALALC in Spanish). LAFTA was created, under the inspiration of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the

Caribbean (ECLAC), by Mexico and six South American countries with the objective of eliminating all barriers to intraregional trade. At its centre was the notion of bounded sovereign states, largely able to control the nature of regional commitments and to protect their domestic producers from external competition via subsidies and tariffs (Chibber 2004; Lewis 2005). In this context, economic nationalism framed a new way of thinking and speaking about politics, economics, and culture; while regionalism became a generalised reaction to the liberal rule. In Central America, a similar initiative gave birth to the Central American Common Market, joined by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, which set a more ambitious objective of creating a free trade area and to implement a common external tariff. In 1969 a split from LAFTA led Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru to establish an even more institutionally ambitious common market project, the Andean Community, with an executive body with 'supranational' powers and mechanisms to promote an equitable distribution of benefits. To complete the regional architecture, a Caribbean Free Trade Agreement (CARIFTA) was signed in 1967, to be superseded six years later by the Caribbean Community (Bouzas and Knack 2009). Despite this ideational convergence and some sort of sense of common (economic) destiny, political instability together with general difficulties attendant on import-substitution across Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, led to 'stop-go cycles' of economic expansion followed by contraction that in turn led to a loss of faith in state-led growth. Political nationalism and economic protectionism caused overvalued and uncompetitive exchange rates for exports, the economy was dependent on the imports of capital and intermediate goods to sustain industrialisation, creating a progressive trade deficit. Public spending, meanwhile, was financed by growing external indebtedness, taking most of Latin America into a lost decade in the 1980s, characterised by economic collapse and a brutal fall

in employment and living standards (Haggard and Kaufman 1992). As nationalistic development projects increasingly became unsustainable, the failure of import substitution projects, together with the severity of many years of political repression during military dictatorships that followed, affected the spirit and the progress of close regionalism (Mattli 1999: 145). This decline in many ways meant not only a failure to tie the region closely in terms of its cohesion but critically, a dilution of its identity. In this context, severely indebted economies were left with little choice other than to align closer with the US, a gatekeeper to external finance, and standard-bearer of 'open markets and open regionalism'.

Closed regionalism was largely superseded by a second period of 'open' regionalism in the 1990s, reflecting the changing global and regional political economy and the new geopolitics of the post-Cold War, although organisations from the first period, such as the Andean Community, did not disappear. The agenda of 'new' regionalism, as it was termed, was also dominated by questions of trade and investment but rather than tariff protection it was underpinned, politically and ideationally, by the perception of an 'unavoidable reality' of the market-led globalisation (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995; Payne 2000; Varynen 2003; Sørensen 2004). In this context, linking up with the US economy was seen as a way, paradoxically, for state actors to re-assert some control over the direction of their economies and an accommodation with the global market and US dominance (Grugel 1996; Grugel and Hout 1999; Phillips 2003). Partly as a pragmatic programme to regain access to international financial flows, and partly as a result of a sense that there was little choice, the region almost submissively embraced the Washington Consensus (Drake 2006). The US also provided debt relief through the Brady Plan while it involved Latin American governments in a discussion of the (new) rules for regional integration. For the US, meanwhile, this

context opened a new opportunity towards a more ambitious US-led 'Enterprise for the Americas', launched in 1990 by President G.W. Bush senior and designed to lead to a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) with a deadline for its signature in 2005. The FTAA epitomises US ambition in terms of intra-hemispheric relations, resembling the old vision of Pan-Americanism, under the umbrella of neoliberalism. The FTAA sought to integrate the Americas politically through common liberal democratic values and political structures, and economically through the liberalisation of economic policies. However, the establishment of the NAFTA and the FTAA as paragon of American-led regionalism was a double-edged sword. Although, as Tussie (2009: 178) argues, it 'triggered panic reactions in a spate of excluded countries' the idea of neoliberal-led regionalism was highly contested from the outset by social actors within one major partner, Mexico and externally by the global financial crisis in 1995-95 and its 'Tequila' effect. The adverse effects of integration in terms of social cohesion and development contributed to deep disenchantment with neoliberal policies as they failed to deliver on their promises beyond controlling inflation. Latin American countries were increasingly hit by unsustainable levels of poverty and inequality.

By the end of the 1990s, it was clear that the neoliberalism in Latin America was running out of steam. A slow-down in growth following currency difficulties, rising indebtedness (especially pronounced in Argentina) and a growing awareness of the appalling social costs the liberal model had occasioned, changed attitudes towards pro-market reforms. The rate of economic growth in Latin America throughout the 1990s – less than the average growth figures in the 1960s and 1970s – was deeply disappointing, especially in view of the neoliberal reforms (Pribble *et al* 2006). As the agenda of integration ushered in by the FTAA

negotiation encountered the difficulties of losing support and legitimacy, the US, paradoxically, turned to a number of bilateral trade deals that, although more resilient, deeply shook the US transformational goal of hemispheric integration (see Phillips 2005; Shadlen 2005; Gallagher 2008; Phillips and Prieto Corredor 2011). Consequently, a declining appeal of 'open' regionalism has been closely linked with a dwindling leverage of US hegemonic power in the Americas, a general loss of faith in neoliberal economics, and the gradual re-emergence of nationalistic views of political economy across the region.

The consequence has been the gradual emergence of a third wave of regional integration. This wave is part and parcel of a new spectrum of policy responses to the legacies of past development trajectories and, more generally, a search for nationalist models of political economy in Latin America embraced by the so-called 'new Left' (Hershberg and Rosen 2006; Grugel and Riggirozzi 2007; MacDonald and Ruckert 2009; Panizza 2009). New left movements and governments reflect broader social processes in Latin America that reject neoliberalism and marketised versions of democracy and propose instead a 'new politics', based on a transformed understanding of democracy and inclusion. At the regional level, this translated into new regional commitments to cooperation as a way of resisting US power. Ideational aspects of what Latin American should mean in the face of the crisis of neoliberalism together with the establishment of *ad hoc* institutions supporting new transnational networks of solidarity were in fact the two elements that redefine the contours of regionalism in Latin America since the early 2000s. The emergence of the New Left across the region responded to multiple attempts at change, and thus Panizza (2005) concludes, there is an overall absence of 'conceptual clarity or distinct policy initiatives'. But a common rejection of market democracy, and the need to rediscover the morality of

democracy, crystallised in a clear opposition to neoliberal integration. This became evident at the Fourth Summit of the Americas, which took place in Buenos Aires in November 2005. The Summit declaration grounded two opposing views: one favouring the proposed FTAA – mainly supported by the US, Mexico and Canada, and countries especially dependent on preferential US trade agreements– and another dissenting group – including MERCOSUR countries, Venezuela and Bolivia – which declared themselves against a hemispheric trade agreement and refused to commit to future FTAA talks. It soon became clear that the window of opportunity that opened for Washington to remake the hemisphere in its own image had found clear limits.

Today the regional picture presents a complexity that challenges both the notion of defensive regionalism and US-led regional governance. In a context where the very pillars of neoliberalism – as a political and economic paradigm, as a model of market democracy, as a sustainable and inclusive model of development – are critically questioned by academics, politicians, social actors and practitioners and many other stakeholders, Latin America is reasserting new rules of regional engagement and cooperation based on the reconfiguration of alliances, institutions and regional governance. From this perspective, the current configuration of the Latin American regionalist map is defined by three main overlapping and sometimes competing projects, as described below.

Overlapping Regional Governance in Latin America	
Logic of Regional Cooperation and Governance	Integration Projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong emphasis on commercial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pacific Rim with Mexico

<p>integration as a transit to broader multilateralism, with low socio-political content</p>	<p>under NAFTA (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Andean Community (1969)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance trade at its core, deepening linkages with neighbouring countries • Seeking alternative and autonomous trade, and political projects • Reaching out of the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Central American Common Market (1961) ➤ Caribbean Community (CARICOM, 1973) ➤ Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR, 1991) ➤ Andean Community (CAN, 1969) ➤ Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, 2008)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A radical emphasis on political and social aspects of integration • New economic and welfare commitments • Strong emphasis on distributional policies • Reclaiming – and redefining – the principles of socialism in direct opposition to neoliberal globalisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Venezuela-led Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA, 2004)

What the current wave of regionalism represents, in sum, is a hybrid model, expressive of alternative continental strategies for growth and social justice, representative of a more political and confident 'Latin' America, suspicious of US leadership yet still largely in tune with the need for open markets. New logics of

regional governance thus challenge the notion of defensive regionalism and bring to new focus the institutional and ideational underpinnings of new regional agreements. From this perspective, developments such UNASUR and ALBA embrace new systems of rules that contest 'open regionalism' of the 1990s while proposing the construction of new regional polities that seem to stem not only from the volume of trade but from cooperative advantages in the areas of social policies, education, health, social safety, and security.

UNASUR AND ALBA AS ALTERNATIVE (MICRO)REGIONS: PRACTICES AND MOTIVATIONS

The Latin America region is at a complex interface between sub-regions defining and projecting different worldviews and models of trade and post-trade governance. This diversity is evidence of the absence of a single consensus ruling inter-American relations for the whole hemisphere. Resilient trade-related agreements and transformative social and political integration projects embrace different trans-national and trans-societal commitments.

The extent to which Latin America is transiting a positive road from 'rule-taker' to 'rule-maker' is still to be seen. What is certain is that crises are always an opportunity for ideological contestation and accommodation of political and economic projects. Ideologically, the re-accommodation of actors and alliances in the 'historical backyard' of the US suggests a new opportunity to reassert alternative ideas. In contrast to the proverbial 'There Is No Alternative'; now promising alternatives not only emerge as possible options but they chime with local demands for more responsive political economies. That the Latin American region realigned its strategy to refocus on a more nationalistic course for

development and governance is already a significant change, shaking the framework of regionalism as conceived by the 'open regionalism' that prevailed during the 1990s.

Although the idea of a unified counter-hegemony to supplant neoliberalism in Latin America is clearly an overstatement, UNASUR and ALBA embrace different regional projects that frame alternatives to the US-led neoliberal revolution of the 1980s and 1990s. UNASUR and ALBA crystallised in two models of regional governance. UNASUR is fundamentally a project that ranks from free trade areas to security alliance. It represents a regional construction that capitalises on pre-existing trade-led agreements, as part of the 'open regionalism' of the 1990s, such as MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay plus Venezuela, Chile and Bolivia as associates) and the Andean Community (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru). UNASUR is aimed to strengthen its institutional structure while seeking open markets abroad and autonomous position vis-à-vis external influences such as the US or the EU. ALBA, on the contrary, represents a radical, ideologically transformative project that extends Chávez's 21st Century Socialism into a regional integration scheme pursuing, in direct opposition to neoliberalism. A type of *transnationalised welfarist* based on intra-regional cooperation in areas of health, education and housing. The contrasts with other regionalist projects such as NAFTA, MERCOSUR, and UNASUR are seen not only in its social dimension but paradoxically in its construction of a regional space whose members (Venezuela, Honduras, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Dominica, Antigua y Barbuda, San Vicente) do not share *any* contiguous borders. Resource endowment here is also critical. Oil revenues have been key to move ALBA's social agenda forward.

Although contrasting in nature and scope, both regional projects are immersed in a new imaginary of post-neoliberal politics. Brazilian and Venezuelan interests have coincided in underwriting the influence and presence of the US in American multilateralism. More radically, these initiatives show that in areas where US-leadership has always been undisputable, security, development and finance, new regional leaders are re-writing the rules of the game showing not only that the dominance of the US has weakened but also that its backing is not needed. Furthermore, despite common motivations, these initiatives are transiting different paths. UNASUR is developing strong commitments in energy integration, physical infrastructure, defence, and in higher education, including policies on accreditation, mobility and legibility of degrees (Universia 2010) – although the main initiatives are the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) which has already formulated an ambitious project list to boost infrastructural integration throughout the continent (see South Centre Bulletin 2007); and the South American Defence Council, which picked up steam first in face of the territorial conflicts between Ecuador and Colombia, and more recently involving Venezuela and Colombia. These are important initiatives that restrict US interference in the South balancing the authority of the existing US-led institutions such as the Organisation of American States (OAS).

UNASUR's moderate ideological position compared to ALBA means that it also aims at strengthening the representation and leverage of the South in international forums of negotiation. The construction of regional politics goes beyond the continent to engage in intra-regional negotiations to obtain a free trade area with the Andean Community and Central America, as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the South African Customs Union and India (Tussie 2010: 12). This is particularly relevant at a time when intra-regional trade has dropped

dramatically since the early 2000s (see ECLAC 2010).

In addition to market-seeking and deeper political integration, UNASUR seeks to strengthen the construction of new supranational and intergovernmental institutions as well as reinforcing its capacity to act as a predictable and stable actor in the regional and international arena. The Constitutive Treaty of the UNASUR sets out analogous institutions to the EU, that is, an Executive Council of Delegates as well as a General Secretariat, a Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and a Council of Heads of State and Government. The Constitutive Treaty also provides for a Parliament that is yet to be established. While these dimensions vindicate the tenets of the New Regionalist literature, it is important not to understate this regional arrangement as it represents a new perspective in the regional and global politics without being 'washed away by the powerful waves of globalisation' (Cooper and Heine 2009: 21). In other words, while the extent to which UNASUR can reconfigure broader links in terms of political and social community is questionable, what is certain is that it represents an alternative and more fruitful geo-economic union institutionalising bridges between CAN and Mercosur, and as a block with extra-regional emerging powers such as China, India, and South Africa, particularly led by Brazil; renewing negotiations with the EU, and laying the foundations for moving from trade negotiations to infrastructure and more politically sensitive projects in the area of security.

It is somehow difficult to discern the actual motivations and increasing diffusion of 'soft power' by Brazil in the construction of UNASUR as political coordination to regulate and mediate intra-regional politics and as an actor that potentially can act as a block in international and multilateral arenas. Brazil represents half of

total South American GDP, and is the sixth-largest investor in the group of developing countries. Brazil has been actively pursuing a policy of greater engagement, both economic and political, with its neighbours, often using this platform to engage with other emerging powers and in international forums. Brazil has played an increasingly important role in world trade negotiations and in the efforts to bring the Doha round to a conclusion. It has actively promoted the reform of multilateral financial institutions, led negotiations within the Group of 20; and actively pursued, with the support of UNASUR countries, a permanent seat in the UN Security Council for Brazil and other emerging powers such as India, Germany and Japan. Brazil has been a key player in discussions on a whole range of global issues, including nuclear proliferation, the reduction of world poverty and disease (especially HIV/Aids), intellectual-property rights and climate change; and hosted 'global south' summits with BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and IBSA groups (India, Brazil and South Africa) in 2010 (Bethell 2010).

Ideologically UNASUR is a more versatile and even contradictory project embracing different discourses from different members. There is no *one* political, ideological identity although there is a new ideological space in terms of fencing-off American pre-eminence. The fluidity of UNASUR in terms of politics and policies has also been transformed by the presence of Chávez. The expansion of Mercosur to include Venezuela as an associate has added a nationalistic and more confrontational tone as Venezuela became a key player engaging in region-wide initiatives and spreading its oil wealth throughout the continent. In recent years, Chávez has actively taken the lead, exceeding the US in terms of underwriting debt and offering strategic injections of capital to its neighbours. In addition to providing 200,000 barrels of oil a day (worth perhaps US\$1.6 billion a year), new policies of aid for the region have been announced, totalling some

US\$5.5 billion. One of the most significant moves was the acquisition of a leading micro-credit institution in Bolivia, PRODEM, which owns ninety-two branches across the country and has 250,000 clients. Venezuela also bought a large share of the new bonds issued by Argentina – US\$2.4 billion of Argentina's debt in 2005 – that has cushioned the impact of the economic downturn and at the same time forged new alliances based on a very different perception of the world (The Economist 2007).

Chávez's initiatives also seem to have launched a broader cross-regional interest in creating a common energy policy. Acknowledging the current global issues and demand for energy, various South American Presidents met in April 2007 at the first South American Energy Summit to design an energy integration strategy for the region. To meet their energy needs, the member countries at the summit agreed to implement energy cooperation and integration in the region. For example, Venezuela and Brazil launched a joint petrochemical plant, which is a clear step towards energy cooperation and integration. Central to their integration plans the leaders discussed the construction of the gas pipeline known as the Great Gas Pipeline of the South, and the Trans-Caribbean Pipeline. With these pipelines Venezuela could supply the region with its gas reserves, beginning with Brazil. Most strikingly, the pipeline is set to be built by Petrosur, a new venture between *Petroleos de Venezuela*, *Petrobras*, and *Enarsa*, respectively the Venezuelan, Brazilian, and Argentinean state-owned oil companies, created in 2004. In this context, Argentina was one of the first countries to support Venezuela's application to the sub-regional bloc MERCOSUR a year later, and more recently both countries became strategic partners in the start up project for the *Banco del Sur*, which represents the basis for a more comprehensive reformation of regional financial architecture so long dependent on the

Washington-based institutions. If it succeeds in terms of goals and achievements, such an institution could play a significant role in regional monetary policy and provide resources to secure sound balance of payments finance.

Venezuela is, in fact, an interesting player as it sits at the intersection of the more moderate model of regional governance represented by UNASUR and the radical 'socialist model of regionalism', epitomised by ALBA. In contrast to established and resilient regional arrangements, ALBA has taken a particularly confrontational line in trying to challenge the US with regard to almost all issues on the inter-American agenda. Although arguments may point at the fact that Chávez seems to be more interested in exporting the socialist revolution by regionalising national politics, ALBA nevertheless represents an unprecedented attempt to foster a social agenda that is not based primarily on trade liberalisation but actually on welfare cooperation and solidarity. This agenda places an extraordinary emphasis on civil society participatory practices in planning and administration of social programmes (Harris and Azzi 2006). The social agenda is critical to understand the differences between the two models of governance in many dimensions: in terms of agency; in terms of ideology; and in terms of region-making and, as we will analyse in the next section, in terms of regionness.

Since its conception in 2004, ALBA represented a new space of collective action for social movements resisting the FTAA, and in particular the Hemispheric Social Alliance. This hemispheric social articulation elaborated the document 'Alternatives for the Americas' which served as basis for the initial formulation of ALBA (Saguier 2007; Serbín 2007). Progressively, ALBA developed a programme for the implementation of social and welfare projects for ALBA countries based on an alternative model of development and accumulation that

echoes the government socialist view. State-owned oil and gas company, *Petróleos de Venezuela* (Pdvsa), became central for the funding of social welfare programmes.

Many arguments have pointed at out that ALBA resembles a mere propagandistic project whose future and resilience are conditioned to the presence of Chávez and more significantly the revenues from the oil market. True, there is a great deal of ideological conformation in the shaping of ALBA as a region and as an integration programme, but we emphatically argue that, unlike other regional projects in the Americas, the significance of ALBA and its resilience relies in its transformative power understood as socio-economic impact. The impact of ALBA as regionalism on human development is a key element that should step to the forefront of a wood that is often overlooked for the (ideological) trees.

Emine Tahsin (2009) has reviewed the main socio-economic projects undertaken under the wing of ALBA. Her analysis supports the thesis that, for countries with high levels of poverty, very low levels of human development and deprived economic structures, the impact of ALBA-sponsored social programmes is to be measured in the long term. ALBA has been sponsoring common economic projects in the areas of health, education, agriculture, sports and technology. For instance, Tahsin's analysis shows that in 2008, projects between Cuba and Venezuela in these areas reached 1,355 million US dollars. Likewise, since 2004 5000 Cuban medical scholarships are given to Bolivia. Bolivia is reportedly benefiting from 600 Cuban medical specialists. Bolivian doctors are educated in Cuba which at the same time helps coordination of health centres in Bolivia by sending specialists and doctors. Literacy has also been a key component of socio-economic development in ALBA. Cuba provides Bolivia with the

experience, didactic material and technical resources necessary to implement the literacy programmes, and has been assisting Bolivia in expanding its public schools and hospitals. In the Dominican Republic, over 100 students are reportedly attending Cuban medical and nursing schools, and approximately 75 Dominican students are in other Cuban schools. Some 2,000 Venezuelan and Cuban scholarships are available to qualified Dominican students in computer science, medicine, engineering, sports, physics, math, and agriculture. Venezuela and Nicaragua have also implemented agreements of mutual assistance around social programmes particularly in housing and education for 47,000 street children in the last country (see Tahsin 2009: 14-17). In addition, ALBA is moving into the consolidation of the Unified System for Regional Compensation (Sistema Unitario de Compensación Regional de Pagos, SUCRE), signed in October 2009. The Sucre is a common monetary denomination for the payment of commercial transactions between ALBA countries. Transactions are carried out through the Central Banks of each ALBA and supervised and regulated by the Regional Monetary Council of the Sucre (see Trucco 2010). This is a financial instrument to help stimulate and deepen trade, based on the principles of cooperation, solidarity and sovereignty.

These programmes are not only significant in terms of what Murh (2010: 50) identified as 'transnational organised society', or the formation of a regional consciousness and cohesiveness, something like a 'region state', but more importantly, and potentially resilient, is the impact of ALBA's social agenda on human development. In other words, unlike UNASUR, which is strongly focused on the formation of institutionalised geo-political and economic intra and extra regional relations, the transformative power of ALBA has to be seen not merely in the transmission of ideas, diffusion of new ethics and practices, but in the extent

to which it consolidates a social dimension in the integration process. Crucially, while ALBA structured integration on the basis of social solidarity and complementarities, in Mercosur and more generally in UNASUR, what a 'social agenda' with regard to policy-making remains unclear (Di Pietro 2003; Grugel 2008).

The extent to which these initiatives can consolidate coherent and resilient projects is still to be seen. Nevertheless, they need to be taken as part of valid transformative arrangements shaping new spaces for thinking and negotiating alternative models for political and social cooperation. Theoretically these developments call for new rigorous and critical analysis able to supersede categorisations of 'old' and 'new' regionalism to look which at the transformative capacity of ALBA and UNASUR as new and distinct projects in constitution of a post-hegemonic and post-trade regional orders. The following section brings to the forefront the concept of regionness to link social-political and institutional aspects of region building.

REGIONALISM AND REGIONNESS IN LATIN AMERICA: A NEW SYNTHESIS

The changing political economy of Latin America, and recent transformations of its regional governance landscape, suggests a need to reflect upon the meaning of regionalism as a new place that proposes new models of regional cohesion and institutional building beyond trade-led integration.

Venezuela and Brazil have helped to promote a proliferation of new and viable sub-regional multilateralisms that are independent from the US, and US institutions' leadership. The nature and scope of these schemes, however, vary

as does their level and depth of transformation. Undeniably there is a degree of pragmatism and ideological calculation in both UNASUR and ALBA that cannot be underplayed. However, these regional arrangements are creating new political and social spaces embracing alternative polities and politics in a post-trade fashion. The implications of political and social regional cooperation within these spheres are to be measured in terms of their transformative capacity. As the previous analysis substantiates, it is essential to move beyond hegemonic understandings of regional construction and trade-led regionalism. To explore the transformative power and even the politics of alternative models of regional governance in the current context, is not enough to address the practices and processes that distinguished 'old and 'new' / 'close' and 'open' regionalism, but to understand the Americas as a place where alternative and overlapping models of regionalisation are constituting new forms of regional governance and manifestations of regionness.

The challenge for New Regionalism, as we previously claimed, is to reach a new synthesis between an understanding of the world order where neoliberal economics are predominant, yet transformative regional projects creating foundations for new polities in which citizens, social movements, political parties, and government leaders interact and construct new understandings of regional community beyond trade and beyond hegemonic politics. This doesn't mean denying the importance of trade and international competitiveness as drivers of integration. But since the beginning of the new century increasingly political and social issues became new motors for progressive integration, reflecting in many ways the new political agenda of the New Left across the region. Furthermore, given that extra-trade has been growing across the Americas, in particular led by the emergence of new trade motors in Asia, the importance of regional

integration does not stem from the volume of trade but from cooperative arrangements in areas with great potential for human development and security, such as health, education, housing and defence.

In this context, ALBA and UNASUR represent new and distinct projects in constitution of a post-hegemonic and post-trade regional order. The type of practices defining region-building, and the level of institutionalisation of those practices, however, vary reflecting different pathways and approaches to regionalism and regionness. ALBA and UNASUR are indicative new links between new practices in the regional economic, social and political agendas supporting new arrangements in the construction of alternative political communities. In other words, the construction of alternative political communities is related to trans-nationalised practices of social and state actors aiming at growing cooperation and exchange in a wider field of activities beyond trade.

In many ways, the legacy of neoliberalism in Latin America has elicited a response 'from below' in the form of demands for new social provisions in regional agreements and more autonomous development projects. Regionalisation, in this sense, has manifested since the early 2000s as resistance to socially irresponsible market economies and neoliberal democracy. What is particularly significant is that the logic of resistance has been articulated by rhetorical appeal and practices of new state leaders and civil society actors in response to a perception of vulnerability and exclusion. New practices and inter-linkages between these actors are at the same time redefining what the 'from below' or 'bottom up' processes of regionalisation means. This notion of regionalisation is supportive of a new manifestation of regionalism, where regionalism becomes the area for contesting governance at different levels of

authority. The *who* and *what* of contestation in the cases of UNASUR and ALBA have manifested in different trans-national practices, projects and actors. These three elements are at the core of the construction of regionness in each regional space, their cohesiveness, and sense of identity, community, purpose and institutions. Practices underlying the construction of regionness in UNASUR and ALBA have implications for not only how the regional polity positions itself vis-à-vis the outside world, but more importantly for the community that it is built upon.

From this perspective, we can think about UNASUR and ALBA as new responses to neoliberalism but, at the same time, as new spaces for thinking and negotiating alternative models for political and social cooperation. The social fabric and practices of regionalism and regionalisation in both UNASUR and ALBA are different, yet they both reflect new and diverse manifestations of identity politics associated with the emergence of new leaders and social movements challenging the shallowness of neoliberal democracies, demanding a new democratic ethos and new responsibilities for the state and rights of citizens. Many of these demands and even representatives of these movements came for the first time to occupy more favourable positions within the correlation of social forces that shaped a new institutional design aimed at transforming the political system into participatory and, in some cases, as in the case of Venezuela, direct democracies. Chavez advanced radical social programmes that epitomise a new model of development that consolidates an ideological and organisational alternative to neoliberalism trans-nationalised, through regional practices, to the ALBA members. In the case of UNASUR, the regional space is given by a new sense of inter-governmentalism propelled by new global terms of exchange that augmented the margin of manoeuvre of leading countries vis-à-vis the US-led order. Without the radical nationalistic stand of Venezuela, countries in UNASUR

led the way for states to generate power and legitimacy behind particular political and economic projects. As a result UNASUR observes an enduring emphasis on market creation but with new commitments in infrastructure and energy integration, creating new conditions for autonomous development. These conceptions of the region are at the core of two logics of regionness being shaped in South America.

In terms of institutionalisation, UNASUR is heading towards deeper inter-governmentalism and potentially supranationality *a la EU*, replicating a more traditional understanding of open regionalism yet one that not merely reacts to constraining global forces (defensive regionalism) but rather stands as a proactive actor seeking to redefine its position as a platform to play global politics. Although less seen as a community in terms of values and identity, UNASUR is developing an intergovernmental *institutionalised polity* more fixed and permanent structure of decision-making and therefore with stronger capability to project its *presence* in the international arena (Hettne 2005: 555-556).

While UNASUR is deepening objective elements of an institutionalised regional society capitalising on existing institutions from MERCOSUR and CAN, and new institutions in the areas of security and energy, ALBA represents a radical departure from previous experiences of integration in Latin America embracing a *regional community*. Social cohesion and welfarism rather than institution-building drives ALBA's construction of region. Regional practices, from this perspective, are seen in unprecedented trans-societal cooperation in social projects in education, health and housing that not only impact on human development but also create new state-society contracts with regard to inclusion, welfare, security and dignity for long time excluded groups. In other words, beyond the regional

space, ALBA's transformative capacity must be seen in the construction of a trans-local social system or regional community through a series of welfarist programmes such as basic education, literacy, micro-finance and community development. Of course there is an ideological component that aims at expanding Venezuela's socialist state to ALBA countries but trans-nationalised welfare programmes add an element of cohesion and cooperation that may support resilience beyond ideology in the new regional space. This is part of a new compromise that has far deeper implications than what any analysis focusing simply of policy style can offer. In practice, this represents a new milestone that can help to overcome traditional forms of nation-state. This is not a minor issue in societies with high levels of poverty, exclusion and inequality, and that struggle to mobilise funding for social cohesion programmes. In other words, the building of a regional community within ALBA is not simply rhetoric or symbolic politics.

The welfarist model of regional governance, and the practices of regionalisation supporting it, contrasts with other regionalist projects such as NAFTA, MERCOSUR, and UNASUR where elements of social cohesion and subjective integration are weak or absent. It could be argued that the constitutive content and the degree of internal cohesion defining regionness here is inherently linked with the construction of regional social, political and economic linkages that differentiate one group from others. These elements are explicitly and differently rooted in ALBA and UNASUR providing the former with a certain degree of singularity that distinguishes ALBA *from the others* producing and reproducing a unique intra-state and inter-societal space. Processes and actors that foster regionness in ALBA are not aimed at reproducing and guaranteeing rules that could enhance economic development and investment predictability, or the negotiation position vis-à-vis international actors but rather at reproducing a

grand anti-capitalist narrative which, beyond rhetoric, has significant potential to consolidate a social dimension in the integration process.

What the above suggests is that ALBA and UNASUR interact in different levels of regionness and visions of regionalism in a post-hegemonic, post-neoliberal scenario. Beyond populist rhetoric and symbolic politics, we need to address current regional transformations as part of deeply rooted dilemmas of development, growth and inclusion, and how to effectively tackle dependency and external vulnerability. What this means in terms of regionness is that both ALBA and UNASUR are addressing these dilemmas by de-emphasising traditional understandings of trade-led regionalism, which although important, do not capture the real extent of trans-social and political arrangements that are re-shaping the alternative pathways to region building beyond neoliberalism, beyond the 1990s, and beyond Europe.

FINAL REMARKS

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the standard prescriptions for development focused on shrinking the state, or reducing the scope (and cost) of its activities. Arguments about conditions for economic development assumed an inevitable neoliberal insertion into the world economy. This consensus underpinned Washington's hegemony which went unchallenged in inter-American relations at this time in a way that was genuinely without precedent. The trend since the early 2000s is towards a form of post-neoliberal governance that projects two regionalist models, a more moderate model that nests in resilient institutions of the 1990s, epitomised by UNASUR; and a more radical model of integration,

ALBA, led by a transnationalisation of the Venezuelan Socialist state. What these models suggest is that to recognise the particularities of the societies and their regional arrangements we need to be aware of the constraints they face but also the alternative spaces they open.

Despite different rhetoric and political styles, UNASUR and ALBA are manifestations of a new regional cohesion and institution building that defies the notions of defensive regionalism and US regional governance. The different dimensions of regionness in terms of new constructions of space; social cooperation; rules and identity formation; and institutionalised polity, help us to understand how these two alternatives, and overlapping, models of post-trade and post-hegemonic integration are deepening levels of social integration while creating pro-active actors seeking to redefine their positions within the region and outside. UNASUR represents a formation with deeper levels of institution building and less social cohesion that aims at enhancing its presence as an actor. ALBA's socio-economic programmes are creating a significant new space that should not be overshadowed by uncritical analysis of ideological rhetoric. Social welfarism at a trans-national level of implementation amongst ALBA countries has the transformative potential to integrate a regional society with low levels of institutionalisation but with high levels of socio-economic impact. From this perspective, welfare regionalism constitutes a central dimension to understand the type of regionness advanced by ALBA and the development of transnational political spaces with new levels of interdependence and trans-local relationship which to date is not only led by Venezuelan/Chávez political calculations and oil diplomacy but also by civic organisations of doctors, educators and builders that are transforming the nature of collective action in the process of regionalisation.

Certainly, the resilience of these projects as alternative models of governance is still to be seen as these are regionalisms in the making. At the moment, Latin America is a continent of contradiction where diversity in motives, ideologies and leadership aspirations are driving alternative (post-neoliberal) models of integration. Nevertheless, what the emergence of post-hegemonic regionalisms shows is that long-standing projects of integration and cooperation cohabit with more radical alternatives – what for some may reflect the difference between social democratic responses to neoliberalism and populist appeals to radical change. The politicised regional arena echoes a nebulous yet important spirit of change in the region with important implications for inter-American relations. Theoretically, this is a tall order for scholars. The new political and economic trends and the emergent regional institutional architecture, suggest that the ‘old’ and ‘new’ characterisations of regionalism are insufficient to explain how states are currently responding to their own commitments within national areas of governance, and to new region-building projects that contest the politics and policies of established neoliberal architecture. Although there are important differences in terms of how projects like UNASUR and ALBA embrace regionalism and construct a sense of *regionness*, what unites these initiatives is a real need to re-found the nation state, to re-embed socially-responsive models of development and social justice, and to distance themselves from the US over a number of key issues. In this sense, this paper contributes to readdressing the relationship between national-states, integration and globalisation, inspired by the concept of *regionness*, and explaining not only the factors that govern the emergence of alternative projects that contest the ‘open regionalism’, but also offering a more nuanced discussion about what new regionalism means in terms of a new political economy in a post-hegemonic scenario. We thus hope the paper adds new dynamism to the literature on comparative regionalism and the

continuing widening-versus-deepening debate understanding regionalism and regionalisation for other regional orders.

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¹ *El Jardín de Senderos que se Bifurcan* (1941)

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