BOOK REVIEW

“A RELAÇÃO BRASIL-ÁFRICA: PRESTÍGIO, COOPERAÇÃO OU NEGÓCIOS?”

by Paulo Visentini¹

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The international projection of Brazil in the last decade and a half caught the attention of the great powers and this includes more intensity and quality in Brazil's relations with Africa. Even in the academy, studies about those ties between the Global South are, in many cases, laden with distorted, biased and shallow visions. In this sense, both Brazil and the African countries lack deeper and less speculative analysis of the roles that they play in international relations.

Visentini's book overpasses this superficiality, bringing up highly relevant questions and developing a pertinent historical analysis. The book has six chapters that cover a period since the relationship existed within the colonial logic up until the strategic resizing of the XXI century. The first chapters are dedicated to the historical analysis. By using major milestones of world history, of the African history and of the Brazilian foreign policy, the author traces objectively the path taken by the country and the continent for building their relations. The periods of distancing and rapprochement become evident and the conjectural reasons are presented, which allows the understanding of the multiple analytical levels: national, regional and global.

After analysing the historical dimension, Visentini then presents the transitions and changes occurred in the post-Cold War. After intense relations during the military regime, the neoliberal reforms that marked the last decade of the twentieth century affected not only Brazil and its

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African partners at the domestic level, but also the relations between them. The work clarifies the contrast between this period and the early years of the twenty-first century. The changes are not limited to the intensity of the relationships, but mainly to the qualitative dimension of them. Africa starts to occupy a prominent role in Brazilian foreign policy and the cooperation between the country and the region gains strategic outlines. The relations are not restricted to economic issues since they cover areas such as global diplomatic arrangements and technical cooperation.

In the second half of the work, the author goes on to consider more specific aspects of these new spheres of the relations between Brazil and Africa. Not much explored in previous analysis, the multilateral dimension of these relations highlights the importance of both Latin America and Africa in contemporary international relations. Moreover, the preference for multilateralism is one of the characteristics of Brazilian foreign policy, evidenced by political arrangements such as the IBSA, the Africa-South America Summit (ASA) and the Summit of South American-Arab Countries (ASPA).

Even though the African continent has common characteristics, it cannot be treated as a homogeneous unit. Visentini does not neglect these features and brings up analysis of bilateral relations with the most relevant nations in the fifth chapter. The deepening of some bilateral relations and the differences in the type of the relations with the various African regions show that Brazilian diplomacy in Africa is settled in medium and long-term goals. Brazil - as well as China, India and Russia - see the potential of the African continent both from an economic and political point of view.

Finally, the author steps into the regional issues of the South Atlantic and puts the Brazil-Africa relations in a strategic context of unique importance in the current scenario. The relations between the countries of the Southern half of the globe go well in addition to the economic sphere. Therefore, what has been conventionally called South-South cooperation embraces a complexity of connections in areas ranging from economy to important policy and security issues. The geopolitical position of countries as Brazil and South Africa leaves no doubt about the relevance of this region and the need to understand deeply such connections. Finally, a detailed chronology of Brazil's relations with Africa is an indispensable query tool to the public concerned.

Africa currently is in a position of great importance for international relations. Although it is often considered in the analysis as a subordinate part of European history, the continent has its own dynamic. After the departure of the European colonizers, Africa begins to be restructured presenting itself as a prominent region because of not only its economic potential, but

also its political, strategic and security relevance.

The analysis made by the author is sophisticated and profound, since it is the result of a long research work and experience gathered in the Brazilian Centre for African Studies (CEBRAFRICA). The sources of bibliographic information about Africa are not always reliable and even today are scarce and with important gaps. Visentini overcomes these difficulties conducting field research, interviewing and establishing contacts and relationships with academics, diplomats, employees and politicians of that continent. This results in a qualified research which presents Africa - and its relations with Brazil - from an inside look of a continent that projects itself at the international scene with their own views and interests.

The work helps to fill an important gap in the Brazilian academic researches about Brazil and Africa. The analysis in the work of Visentini traces a historical overview without forgetting specific aspects that are fundamental for an understanding of the circumstances surrounding this strategic partnership between Brazil and African countries. In a time in which one questions Brazil strategies' and priorities' in its foreign performance, the author brings important contributions to understand the role of Africa in this context. There's no doubt that it is a reading of great value for many Africanists and Brazilianists who work with the arduous task of trying to understand the trajectory of these rich and complex countries. And it tries to answer the question of the title: are these relations aiming diplomatic prestige, partnerships or profitable business?

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