

Felipe Antunes de Oliveira, *Dependency and Crisis in Brazil and Argentina: A Critique of Market and State Utopias*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2024. ISBN: 9780822948100 (cloth); ISBN: 9780822991298 (ebook)

Latin American politics and developmental trajectories have long been one of the hottest fields of intellectual debate in fields like international political economy, political geography, historical sociology, and beyond. A region that has been, in many senses, paradigmatic of global trajectories of colonization, decolonization, neoliberal restructuring, and revolution (and counter-revolution) has unsurprisingly hosted some of the most important developments in these fields, from the emergence of dependency theory to any number of heterodox approaches to globalization (one name above many others: the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos), and recent re-engagements with Gramsci.

Many thousands of pages have been written to try and explain how the political and developmental pendulum has swung across the region through exogenous and endogenous factors. Felipe Antunes de Oliveira's *Dependency and Crisis* is an important contribution to this debate. It has the double goal of reassessing development in Brazil and Argentina, and setting the grounds for a renewed engagement of developmental critique with dependency theory. This second goal has special relevance as "international" debates in English have too often ignored the rich Latin American literature in Spanish and Portuguese—see, for example, Melgaço (2017) and Jesus Neto (2024) on the recent rediscovery of Milton Santos (who was pretty active on the pages of *Antipode* during the 1970s and 1980s). And this is particularly the case with dependency theory, which had taken some space in Anglophone journals in the 1970s (in *Antipode*, see, for example, Bardinet 1977; Regan and Walsh 1976) but has been fundamentally forgotten later on, even after the powerful "return" of uneven and combined development with the likes of Neil Smith (for rare recent examples of references to dependency theory, again in *Antipode*, see Green 2023; Parnreiter et al. 2024).

Back to *Dependency and Crisis*' two goals: in a nutshell, the book succeeds, bringing forward a number of rigorous insights, on its first goal; but falls somehow short of delivering on the broader theoretical goal of re-energizing dependency theory.

At the core of the book is a simple, straightforward, and well developed argument: that most of the economic, political, and academic discussion on development in Brazil and

Argentina (and, by extension, Latin America) of the last few decades is based on the opposition of two theoretical and ideological frameworks—neoliberalism and neodevelopmentalism—that, after all, have much more in common than it is usually assumed. As Antunes de Oliveira puts it:

Although they superficially appear as polar opposites, neoliberalism and neodevelopmentalism actually share two very problematic presuppositions. First, they are based on similarly idealized views of development as capitalist catch-up. Second, they rely on an oversimplified division between states and markets. (p.6)

Antunes de Oliveira thus sets out to build a critique of the Latin American versions of neoliberalism and neodevelopmentalism, of their discourses and their policies. Both approaches, he argues, amount to forms of utopia—the perfectly realized market, the perfectly successful developmental state—that, however, end up foreclosing the political horizon and atrophying politics. As the catch-up, itself idealized in terms of old ideas about (Western) development, is predicated on the achievement of the perfect market/state, the ultimate failure of every cycle based on either approach can always be blamed on not having actually achieved the utopia: for the neoliberals, not having unleashed the power of the markets enough; for the neodevelopmentalists, not having given the state all the instruments and power it needed to materialize development.

In contrast, building on a solid tradition of theorizations of uneven and combined development, Antunes de Oliveira proposes to understand development “simply as the material transformations that emerge from the interplay between international pressures and social disputes” (p.8): not as a normative program shaped by either the market or state utopia, that is; but as an analytical lens to consider processes of socio-economic change. The point, thus, is not understanding why have neodevelopmentalism and neoliberalism failed; rather, to make sense of who has benefitted and lost from either policy cycle, and what external and internal conditions have prompted, and afterward interrupted, each cycle.

In engaging with this field, *Dependency and Crisis* is neatly organized. After a chapter that sets the book’s theoretical framework—the limits of neoliberalism and neodevelopmentalism from the perspective of uneven and combined development, and

dependency theory—it is made up of five substantive chapters, each of them being dedicated to a stage of Brazilian and Argentinian presidential politics: neoliberalism with Menem (Chapter 2) and Macri (Chapter 6) in Argentina, and Cardoso (Chapter 3) in Brazil; neodevelopmentalism with Lula and Dilma (Chapter 4) in Brazil, and the Kirchners (Chapter 5) in Argentina. Every chapter is itself organized around the analysis of the political discourse typical of the cycle, and macroeconomic and foreign policies. This allows Antunes de Oliveira to explain the end of each cycle through a mix of external and internal factors: in a nutshell, how shifts in international conditions—Trotsky’s “whip of external necessity”—result in worsening conditions for some national groups and classes, pushing to social and political conflict. In the brief conclusions, Antunes de Oliveira makes the argument for a return of dependency theory, before looking, in the epilogue, to another, more worrying, return—that of peripheral fascism in Brazil, impersonated by Bolsonaro, whose doors had been opened by the judicial *golpe* against Dilma and Temer’s short presidential stint.

For all its strength in making the core argument, one may say that the book is *too neatly* organized. Chapter after chapter, the neoliberal/neodevelopmental arguments and counter-arguments are repeated through the same analytical and discursive tactics. On the one hand, this implies that the critique of the two “neos” is hammered with rigor—the book more than convincingly makes the case for their limits and for a different understanding of development. On the other, however, as the reading progresses, one starts realizing what is missing from the picture: the promised engagement with dependency theory (see also Julius 2024). In the introduction and theoretical chapter (e.g. p.9 and p.64), Antunes de Oliveira argues for the relevance, for his argument, of concepts developed by the pioneers of dependency theory—super-exploitation of labor, subimperialism, dependent fascism, and dominated-dominant ruling classes. Antunes de Oliveira makes large use of the concepts as descriptors: the implications of various policy cycles for the deepening or worsening of super-exploitation, the role of dominated-dominant ruling classes in driving the policy cycles. However, the book fundamentally does not engage with the concepts as *explanans* or *explananda*, with the exception of dependent fascism, which is unpacked to justify defining Bolsonaro in this field (p.248 ff.)—Antunes de Oliveira uses Fanon to argue, convincingly, for the need to “slightly stretch” certain categories in the Global South. The same is not made

for the other, and key, concepts of dependency, leaving the reader to wonder for a more robust “actualization” of the theory for our times.

Still, *Dependency and Crisis* constitutes a robust contribution to the history of certain ideas, which is useful to think about neoliberalization, austerity, and dependent fascism beyond Latin America. While reading, for instance, I found myself repeatedly comparing the forms of economic and political subordination typical of Argentina and Brazil, to those that Southern European countries have been experiencing in the context of the European integration. A return of dependency theory is certainly (still) necessary, in Latin America and beyond—and, hopefully, the work of Antunes de Oliveira will be of inspiration for others to follow up.

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