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**Área de Relaciones
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Latin America in Global International Relations

FLACSO- UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance WORKSHOP

V FLACSO CONGRESS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

November 2-3
FLACSO Argentina

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Deadline: August 1st

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Of late, the field of international relations (IR) has seen a growing awareness of, and dissatisfaction with, the narrow and Euro-American centric framing of mainstream IR theories. IR scholars have come to recognize and even demand a more genuine broadening and deepening of the existing IR knowledge, including its theories, methods and empirical base. Some earlier theoretical perspectives, such as constructivism, postcolonialism, and the English School, as well as newer ones such as what has been called “non-Western” or “post-Western” international relations, have encouraged the incorporation of the voices and writings from regions into the discussions and debates in IR. The peculiar feature of Latin American thought is that it is neither fully ‘Western’ nor ‘non-Western’. As such, this feature provides an illustration of why we need to take up Latin American thought and practice as part of the wider



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“Global IR” movement at a time that world order is changing rapidly into what Amitav Acharya has termed the “Multiplex World.”

Against this backdrop, this workshop will explore new and changing Latin American contributions that have relevance for the project of redefining and broadening IR theory. Our goal is not merely to establish what is unique or distinct in Latin American context in these and other areas. This is important, but what is even more important is to find ways to link them and compare them with more general theoretical trends and explanations. Moreover, the goal of the workshop is not to engage in bland theory-testing or to apply established concepts in mainstream IR about power, institutions and ideas, to a Latin American context and make minor adjustments to make them fit better. The goal is rather to identify and conceptualize Latin American ideas, voices and relationships *on their own terms* and assess their relationship with those we find in existing IR theory.

The conference especially highlights and discusses the growing possibility of a Latin American agency, defined broadly to include both material and ideational elements, in regional and international relations, covering areas where Latin America’s contributions are especially visible and relevant, such as regionalism, security management, and Latin America’s relations with the outside world. This is not about exclusively “Latin American solutions to Latin American problems”, but rather about contributions in which Latin Americans define the terms for understanding the issues and set the terms for the nature and scope of outside involvement. At the same time, we recognize that Latin American contributions to IR theory should not and need not be based exclusively on claims about Latin American distinctiveness or *Latin American exceptionalism*. We are not here to unearth a “Latin American School of International Relations”. Rather, we believe Latin American voices and contributions should have a global resonance and can be brought to the core of the discipline of IR.

From Non-Western International Relations Theory to Global IR: Background

In a project on what they call “non-Western IR theory”, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (2007) argued that the main current theories of IR, especially realism, liberalism and to a lesser extent constructivism are too deeply rooted in, and beholden to, the history, intellectual tradition, and agency claims of the West to accord little more than a



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marginal place to those of the non-Western world. This creates a “disjuncture”, whereby these supposedly universal theories fail to capture and explain the key trends and puzzles of international relations in the Global North. In response, they call for the development of a new paradigm of international relations theory that is more global, open, inclusive, and able to capture the voice and experiences of both Western and non-Western worlds and avoid the present disjunctions between theoretical tools and the ground realities of the world beyond the West and in the case of Latin America, beyond the Euro-American centric framework.

The reasons for the underdevelopment of IR Theory (IRT) outside Europe and the US are many, including cultural, political, institutional factors. These include the politics of academic knowledge, the assumption that Western IRTs provides a template, the “hegemonic” status of Western IRTs whereby the key institutions, journals and conferences are either located in or controlled by the West, the possibility that indigenous IR theories may exist but remain hidden from public view due to language and other barriers, and finally that local conditions such as lack of institutional resources, and the attractiveness of better paying policy-oriented expertise might detract IR scholars to the neglect of theory.

The concept of a non-Western IR theory was met with criticism. Some would rather call the new project “post-Western,” with a more radical agenda to disavow and displace the existing “Western” IR. Others criticize the category non-Western as divisive and outmoded in view of the blurring differences between the West and the Rest. This forms the core rationale for the idea of Global International Relations, or Global IR. (The Global IR idea is outlined in Acharya, 2014) Global IR puts regions at the center of the scene, calling for the importance of conceptualizing and investigating forms and functions of regionalism in an attempt to bring non-European experiences into light. The end of North-South and East-West governing principles, have led to an increasingly decentralized system setting the stage for a new geography and the reconfiguration of political – diplomatic strategies. Regions became arenas of contestation, articulation, competence, and inter-state coalition building. "Regionalism is both policy and project" (Tussie 2009:169), constantly shaping and reshaping international relations. At the same time, a great deal of the theoretical debates in Latin American IR have been mainly built on numerous approaches to regionalism, focused on the idea of gaining leverage in global affairs while retaining autonomy.



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Goals

Against this backdrop, in this conference, we set out to investigate broadly how Latin America fits within the scope of the idea of Global IR. As part of this effort, we pay some attention to what are the reasons for Latin America's marginalization in IR discipline and theory, and how this issue can be addressed. While this has to some extent already been studied, the new challenge is how to redress it. Using the Global IR paradigm, we argue that to have relevance for Latin America, the Global IR needs to be more authentically grounded in Latin American history, , and the ideas, institutions, intellectual perspectives and practices of Latin American states and societies. To this end, our approach identifies the following as the sources of a Latin American contribution to IRT: history and culture, thoughts of revolutionary leaders, practices of statecraft, writings of contemporary IR scholars, and distinctive local and regional interaction patterns. Lived Latin American realities on the ground means Latin America can offer up local and regional interaction patterns to inform, enrich or transform contemporary IR studies. Too often, Latin America has been the testing ground for outside concepts which have been experimental or had little durability. Not only is there, overall, a need for new IR theories but these also need to be more truly or holistically grounded in the lived world, in this case, in Latin American history and the ideas, institutions, intellectual perspectives and practices of Latin American states and societies. The new IRT therefore, ought to look towards having existing theories take fuller cognizance of events in the developing world, as well as to develop concepts and approaches from Latin American and other developing world contexts. Concepts that have local validity but do also have wider applicability to how the world works.

In calling for a Latin American contribution to IRT, we recognize, consistent with the Global IR concept, the need for eschewing Latin American exceptionalism. We recognize limitations of theory-building that relies exclusively on the unique historical and cultural matrix and behaviour patterns of Latin America, its sub regions and nations. Relatedly, we believe that the new IRT must develop concepts and approaches from Latin American contexts that are valid locally, but have applicability to the wider world. Such an IRT cannot, and need not, supplant Western IRT but should aim to enrich IRT with the voices and experiences of Latin America, including its claims to agency in global and regional order. This is strengthened by our focus on Latin



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American agency, again a key element of Global IR that takes us beyond the marginalization narrative found most existing contributions to the literature on Latin American IR? The issue of Latin American agency is not only critical to addressing Latin America's marginalization in IRT, it also helps to illustrate the new approach to the study of regions found in the "regional worlds" perspective that goes beyond the traditional view of regions as either passive spheres of influence or self-contained entities to stress how region's link with the global level and contribute to world order at large.