American Crossings: Border Politics in the Western Hemisphere

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American Crossings is a publication in the field of Latin American Studies, which produces academic analyses on various aspects of Latin America in the most varied areas of knowledge (Berger 1995; Delpar 2008). The main novelty of the collective book organized by Maiah Jaskoski, Arturo C. Sotomayor and Harold Trinkunas is to address the political boundaries of the Americas from Political Science and International Relations.

To demonstrate how the collaborative work in question contributes to the debate of political boundaries in International Relations – a debate virtually absent in the Brazilian academy – two findings stand out. The first is a broad proposal of border analysis from three approaches: geopolitical, national security and behavioural. The second finding is a specific contribution to the ‘most problematic’ frontier of the Southern Cone: The Triple Frontier (or Tri-Border Area) between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay.

In general, the authors propose that political boundaries in the Americas can be analyzed from the three approaches mentioned, each corresponding to one of the three parts of the book. The first is a classic approach to International Relations based on geopolitics and refers to territorial boundaries. In this part, the articles by Cameron Thies, Arturo Sotomayor and Kristina Mani deal essentially with the rivalries, tensions and judicial disputes generated in Latin America since independence, some of which still drag on in the contemporary period.

The second proposed approach refers to national security policies and the resulting interaction of the States concerned with border entry/exit control. Three complex frontiers are analyzed: The Triple Frontier in the Southern Cone, by Arie Kacowicz; the Colombian border with Venezuela, by Harold Trikunas; and the United States border with Mexico by Adam Isacson. For the organizers of the book, the three borders share the fact that they are peaceful, demilitarized, and resolved. In addition, they also share a somewhat high crime

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rate and the expressive increase in the circulation of goods and people after the wave of economic liberalism of the last decades of the twentieth century. The success of regional development is counterbalanced by poverty, illegality and the spread of organized crime.

The third approach proposes the analysis of the borders from the licit and illicit behaviors operated by ‘frontier actors.’ Maia Jaskoski analyzes the actions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia on the border with Ecuador. Peter Andreas and José Carlos Aguiar, respectively, deal with smugglers in different contexts: the United States border and the Triple Frontier (named by the author Iguazú Triangle).

Considering the classic concept of the Western Hemisphere that corresponds to the entire New World after Independence (Whitaker 1954), Peter Andreas is the only one of the authors who claims to address the full scope of the term. In his analysis of contraband in the Americas, he explores the smuggling relationship of the United States to both Latin America and Canada. This is the only article in the book that justifies keeping the reference to the whole hemisphere in the subtitle. The other analyzes deal with objects exclusively from the United States-Latin America relationship.

Therefore, the scarce bibliography on the possibilities of border analysis from International Relations received a major boost with the publication of American Crossings. With regard to the Brazilian academic debate, an additional contribution is the articles and proposals on the Triple Frontier. On the South American radar of the international security agenda since the 1990s, the region became associated with the financing of international terrorism after 2001 (Amaral 2010). In his paper, Arie Kacowicz describes what occurs in the region as a phenomenon of porous boundaries in a context of peace and integration. It is a phenomenon that is not unique, since it can be observed at the borders of the United States since the independence period in Latin America. In the South Cone, it is a more recent phenomenon compared to North America. According to the author, while in North America there is a long history of licit and illicit coming and going since independence, in the Southern Cone the movement dates from the late 1970s.

Another important aspect addressed by the author is his proposal that there are two views on the issue of terrorism in the Triple Frontier. The first view, and in which the author inserts himself, is that ‘there are terrorists,’ based on ‘evidence’ from ‘several authors’ and agencies and the US government. The second view is that ‘there are no terrorists’ and would be based on anti-Americanism stemming from explanations of US foreign policy against Arabs and Muslims, and of South America as a lawless land.

Finally, the chapter by José Carlos Aguiar is the only one that dialogues with International Relations from Anthropology. His method of analysis, which may be useful for Anthropology, does not serve the study of International Relations. In dealing with smugglers as non-state actors in border areas, the chapter’s conclusions on the ‘Sacoleiro Law’ (in Portuguese, Regime de Tributação Unificada, Law 11,898/09) as a broad ‘legalization of contraband’ do not agree with findings in other studies on the subject. Based on data from the Central Bank of Paraguay, Cesar (2016: 22) has noted that the imported products that serve the commercial triangulation with Brazil totaled $4.76 billion dollars in 2014, while the amount coming in Brazil via ‘Sacoleiro Law’ represented only 0.01% of that value (Department of the Treasury [Brazil] 2018).
In summary, *American Crossings* contributes greatly to the study of borders in the area of International Relations. Specifically, it helps to shed light on the study of the Triple Frontier between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Certainly a basic and obligatory reading on both subjects.

**References**


**About the Author**

Micael Alvino da Silva, PhD in Social History from the University of São Paulo (USP), is Assistant Professor at the Latin American Institute of Economics, Society and Politics of the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA). Coordinator of the Postgraduate course in Contemporary International Relations, of which he is professor of History of International Relations. Coordinator of the Triple Frontier and International Relations Research Centre (CNPq). At the undergraduate level, he works in disciplines of the sub-area of the history of international relations, history of Latin America and history of the Triple Frontier (Argentine, Brazil and Paraguay). In the scope of his research, he works with the international insertion of the Triple Frontier in the post-Cold War in the context of the implications of the transnational crime, especially illicit trade and terrorism.

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