

ON THE PROFESSION

Luciano Tomassini and Latin America's International Relations

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In a world buffeted by the winds of economic uncertainty and political violence, Latin America finds itself on a steady footing. Between 2003 and 2008, the region grew at a yearly average of five percent, its best performance in three decades. In 2008-2009, for the first time in two centuries, a financial crisis in the North did not wreak havoc in Latin America. Brazil was the last country to be hit by the Great Recession, and the first to get out of it. If we exclude Mexico, the region would, in fact, have experienced positive growth in 2009. The recent visit to the region by President Obama, widely touted as designed to increase U.S. market share in these thriving economies, is emblematic of this new outlook, at a time when several European countries are on the verge of default and the U.S. economy is still grappling with the aftermath of its subprime mortgage crisis.

There are several reasons for this regional bonanza. One of them is the way in which countries like Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Uruguay, among others, have taken on the challenges of globalization. In this age, prosperity and progress are closely linked to a country's insertion into the world economy. The key lies in being adequately tied to the trans-border flows of goods, services, capital, and cultural products that have increased exponentially since 1980. Although this is partly dependent on adequate macroeconomic and fiscal management, it is also a function of a precise understanding of the workings of the international system, and the measures taken to deal with them.

Professor Luciano Tomassini, the remarkable thinker, political scientist and analyst who died a little over a year ago in Santiago, Chile, was one of the few Latin American analysts to anticipate the extraordinary changes we have seen in the international arena over this period. Luciano, as he was known to his friends and colleagues, devoted his enormous talent to spread the word about the need to

understand these changes, so as to make the most of Latin America's place within the international scene. In contrast to so many international analysts of today, who base their reputation on sound-bytes, Luciano based his standing as the dean of Latin American international relations (IR) studies on informed reflection and systematic thinking. For half a century, he did little else but ponder and dissect Latin America's role and place in the world.

Trained originally as a lawyer at the University of Chile Law School, he worked for a number of years in the legal department of the Ministry of Land Affairs and Colonization, before being drawn to international affairs. He did graduate studies in international relations at Georgetown University in Washington DC, and started to work with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) shortly after its founding in 1960 under the leadership of Felipe Herrera. This would be the first of his many associations with regional organizations in the Americas, to which he would give so much of his energy and creativity. Known for his fluid and eloquent prose, Luciano churned out books, learned articles, speeches and reports with unique ease and swiftness (one of the secrets to his being so prolific was that he preferred to dictate rather than to type). From Felipe Herrera to Enrique Iglesias, many IDB presidents came to depend on his inputs on many fronts, and benefited from his encyclopedic knowledge and deep understanding of international relations and public policies, his skill in deploying his understanding in an accessible manner and his ability to translate vague and diffuse ideas into concrete policy proposals.

From Washington, he was posted to the Institute for Latin American Integration (INTAL) in Buenos Aires, where he continued, with his customary flair, to train diplomats, promote regional integration and produce

books on international relations. It was there, in 1977, with Argentine scholar Roberto Russell, that he conceived of what was to be perhaps his most ambitious project, and certainly the most noble one: the *Red de Relaciones Internacionales de América Latina* (RIAL), which brought together think tanks, research centers and individual scholars from around the region to focus on the common task of analyzing the changing international scenario and Latin America's place within it.

At a time of military governments with a limited understanding of the world around them, Luciano grasped that future democratic transitions would need governments and cadres that were able to make sense of the international environment. RIAL's annual conferences, held from 1977 through 1992, in localities throughout the Americas as well as in Spain, provided ideal platforms for that purpose. The papers presented at the conferences, around a central theme, ended up published in elegant editions by Grupo Editor Latinoamericano (GEL), that first-rate publisher, now sadly no longer extant, in Buenos Aires. A large number of future foreign ministers and cabinet members like Celso Lafer of Brazil, Rodrigo Pardo of Colombia, Eduardo Ferrero of Peru, Dante Caputo of Argentina, Rosario Green of Mexico and José Miguel Insulza, Luis Maira, Heraldo Muñoz, Juan Gabriel Valdés and Carlos Ominami of Chile, were part of that veritable diplomatic academy that RIAL came to be. It helped develop a Latin American perspective on IR, while also linking up scholars from the region with those from elsewhere. It provided international publishing opportunities at a time when such outlets were very scarce. In many ways, it would also sow the seeds of the remarkable intra-regional political cooperation that flourished through summit diplomacy and other tools in the 1990s and to this day. No less than ninety books were published under the aegis of RIAL. Luciano himself published

some fifteen in total, of which my personal favorite is *Teoría y práctica de la política internacional* (1989).

Luciano returned to his native Chile in the 1980s, setting up shop at ECLAC headquarters, and teaching at the Institute of International Studies of the University of Chile. There, he continued his role as editor of *Estudios Internacionales*, one of the oldest and most established academic journals in the region, which he managed to keep afloat under difficult circumstances, always keeping its pages open to top scholars from the region and elsewhere. In this, as in many others of his undertakings, he could always count on the support and help of his wife and lifelong partner, Ana María Aguirre, a prominent editor in her own right, who always stood by him.

Topics like the end of the Cold War, the rise of Asia and the impact of the Third Industrial Revolution were incisively analyzed in RIAL's many meetings, a network established, nurtured and kept alive by Luciano for fifteen years, through the generous support of regional institutions, as well as funders like the Ford Foundation, the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC) and the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation (AECI). If there is a father of the successful internationalization of Latin America, it is Luciano Tomassini.

After Chile's transition to democracy, many of us left academia to join the government. Not so Luciano, who valued his independence and preferred the life of the mind to that of the bureau. He became president of the Chilean Political Science Association, continued to teach in a variety of public policy programs, and joined FLACSO-Chile, where he produced, as his *capo di lavoro*, a massive volume, one that many consider to be his

magnum opus, *Rompiendo códigos: el cambio cultural de nuestro tiempo* (FLACSO, 2010), published posthumously in 2010, and which won Chile's National Book Award.

On March 31, 2011, ECLAC, the OAS and the UNDP-Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean organized a seminar at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago entitled "The State of Latin America's International Relations," to pay homage to Luciano Tomassini and his enormous contribution to the field. Inaugurated by former Chilean president Ricardo Lagos and opened with a video conference call by Enrique Iglesias from Madrid, it brought together many of Luciano's disciples from across the world. LASA, in turn, has established the Luciano Tomassini Latin American International Relations Award for the best book on the region's IR and foreign policies published in English, Spanish, Portuguese or French in the previous three years.

Luciano: we miss you, but your legacy remains with us. ■