

## Review – Status and the Rise of Brazil

Written by Camila Amorim Jardim

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# Review – Status and the Rise of Brazil

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CAMILA AMORIM JARDIM, JUL 27 2020

***Status and Rise of Brazil: Global Ambitions, Humanitarian Engagement and International Challenges***  
**Edited by Paulo Esteves, Maria Gabrielsen Jumbert and Benjamin de Carvalho**  
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The book *Status and Rise of Brazil* is a collection of research papers from some of the most referential authors in Brazilian Foreign Policy Analysis (BFPA) dialoguing with the status and recognition literature. It is the result of a joint research initiative between the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO, Norway), and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI, Norway). The book presents a well-constructed mapping of the main foreign policy strategies and agendas in humanitarian and development cooperation during the Worker's Party administration in Brazil (2003-2016). It gathers analysis on different issue areas from multiple perspectives and, even though it presents little consideration of the post-impeachment period, regarding Temer's (2016-2018) and Bolsonaro's (2018-current) administrations (present mostly in the introduction and chapters 6 and 11), the book is still contemporary and relevant. It analyses the pre-impeachment period with a valuable and timely distance, necessary to better evaluate the initiatives and results of what is considered to be one of the periods of greater activism in BFPA's history.

The book presents a very ambitious research question in the introduction: 'What are the drivers of Brazilian foreign policy, and to what extent has it been motivated by concerns to achieve higher status on the international arena and in the eyes of other great powers?' (p.2). This is one of those million-dollar questions for emerging or middle power foreign policy analysis (FPA) and, as I see it, one could hardly give full and definitive answers. Instead of answering whether status and recognition is the main driver (or one of many) of Brazilian foreign policy (BFP), the book makes a very good claim that, yes, foreign policy actions during the Lula period (2003-2010) and less prominently, but also during Dilma Rousseff period (2011-2016), were largely motivated by the pursuit of higher international status.

The book is divided into three parts. The first discusses BFP strategies and agendas under Lula and Rousseff from a panoramic perspective, introducing the main references and concepts in the status and recognition literature. The second part focuses on initiatives of status and recognition in humanitarian cooperation and peacekeeping operations, mainly MINUSTAH (United National Stabilization Mission in Haiti), R2P (Responsibility to Protect), RWP (Responsibility While Protecting, a concept proposed by Brazil), and Brazil's quest for a permanent seat in the UNSC (United Nations Security Council). The third part is dedicated to Brazil's international cooperation for development initiatives, mostly with African and Latin American partners. Whether those initiatives were adequate or presented any level of success is a conclusion that differs a lot across the chapters, providing multiple critical perspectives.

What appears to be the central puzzle connecting the chapters of the book is even more interesting than the questions presented at the outset, which is: what are the dilemmas of trying to simultaneously reconcile Brazil's status as a representative of the Global South (in need of differentiated treatment regarding its development challenges) and its status as an emerging power (able to contribute directly to the provision of international public goods). Both of these positions have demanded different and sometimes contradictory positions. For some of the authors (chapters 2, 4, and 5), these contradictions have doomed Brazil to remain a middle power, as it avoided playing the great power game. To others (chapter 8), playing both sides required great ability and proved to be a good strategy for Brazil to acquire greater international status and present a singular international footprint.

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Again, we have not reached a final answer to this question, as the diplomatic activism found in the Lula years was not sustained long enough for analysts to be able to point towards a direct relationship with palpable results. As many authors in the book describe, the Rousseff years were marked by reduced international activism, particularly from 2013 onwards. The authors state that this happened due to several factors, such as the domestic political and economic crisis (e.g. chapters 1, 3 and 10), and Rousseff's personality, which was very different from her predecessor's, and her reduced interest in foreign affairs, 'soft power' or status seeking initiatives (e.g. chapters 5 and 6).

Some authors argue that Brazil played a 'good state strategy' (e.g. chapters 1, 2, 3 and 6), 'seeking to be ranked on moral authority rather than power by showing willingness, responsibility and commitment to international order and stability and the peaceful mediation of conflicts' (p.24). Indeed, it appears to be an accurate perception of Brazil's positions during that period, but it seems that the other side of the coin could also have been explored in more depth. Some authors present 'the good state strategy' as an almost naive attitude (e.g. chapter 5). Nonetheless, one could say that Brazil capitalized a lot by playing the 'good guy'. The book could have provided a more critical debate on Brazil's strategic signaling which, by positioning itself as an ambiguous Southern and emerging country, had its elites strongly benefit from the unequal and hierarchical international structure it was discursively questioning. An interesting example would be that Brazil profited significantly from the intensification of cooperation with other developing countries, either directly through private sector investments, or by claiming to represent developing countries. These representative claims were portrayed through Brazil's election to the UN Security Council, the World Food Programme, the World Trade Organization and other international forums as a chair or representative. At the same time, Brazil did not necessarily have compatible positions with those they claimed to represent, particularly regarding least developed countries, which differed on relevant issues such as agriculture.

From a theoretical perspective, the book presents a contribution to BFPA by articulating concepts from the literature on status and recognition in IR that are not commonly found in BFPA studies. This literature presents a wider ontology when compared to mainstream BFPA, as it differentiates material capabilities from status, allowing for interesting discussions of moral authority and power dynamics in IR. Mainstream BFPA is dominated by realist ontologies and systemic analysis, while this book also contributes to the debate on domestic determinants in foreign policy formulation and implementation.

Nevertheless, the book still reproduces the largely traditional perspective on FPA and BFPA of rational choice, presenting no diverging perspective on it. This sole consideration of the existence of rational actors is problematic because it deals with the unrealistic presupposition that actors (either states or individuals) always make choices and act guided by an objective cost-benefit calculus, which some have already argued is not real. Choices and politics can, and should, also be analyzed as deeply embedded in emotions and affections, as works such as Sandrin (2020) and Vieira (2017) highlight. Hence, under a different ontology that considers emotions and affections, "actor coherency" is also not expected. This is demonstrated by framing a foreign policy choice that would go against a state's 'rational' interest (as a middle power, for example), or through incoherent claims made by acting as both the southern state and the emerging power, which is an idea discussed in many chapters throughout the book.

This rational choice actor ontology also reflects a predominant epistemology that seeks to draw straight lines and explanations of cause and effect, which is also questionable and perhaps more interesting questions could have been asked if other epistemologies were also explored. Examples of other possible questions are how BFP is also implemented by the state seeking to stabilize national identities and narratives which are inherently multiple and conflictual, a perspective inspired by post-structural analysis on FPA, such as Campbell's (1992). A critical and/or post-structural approach to BFPA would question, what are the conditions of possibility for the Brazilian State to declare itself a "black nation" (arguing it has the second biggest black population in the world only after Nigeria in order to seek a specific international status), while nationally it still promotes policies of mass incarceration and genocide (also approached as necro politics) of black populations (Nascimento, 1989; Mbembe, 2003; Murray et al., 2013; Wilson Center, 2019; Almeida, 2019)? This and many other puzzling contradictions could be considered, involving not only race, but also coloniality and gender (see for example Kinnvall, 2019). These could highlight whether the effects of foreign policy actions impact directly over national identity narratives and consider who and for whom is Brazil, as well as its desired futures.

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Those 'other' topics, such as race, coloniality, gender, emotions and affections, amongst others, are not exceptions, but pervasive of every single topic discussed in the book, and I wish they had more presence in the discussions. Still, the book is not entirely responsible for those silences, as it already represents a valuable advancement and enrichment of BFPA both theoretically and methodologically. Those structural silences have been haunting us since the creation of the discipline and it is our responsibility to keep pushing its and our (narrow) boundaries.

I believe this book will be helpful for graduate and postgraduate students and researchers willing to better understand BFP agendas, recent history, domestic determinants and its role in development and humanitarian cooperation. It can also contribute to our understandings of the applicability of Status and Recognition theories and methodologies in BFPA. It presents very well constructed literature reviews, interesting research methodology examples in status research (chapter 3), rich contextual analysis considering both international and domestic constraints, as well as government oscillations and relevant topics throughout the period from 2003 to 2016. Overall, the book is a relevant contribution in mapping and analyzing the main foreign policy strategies and agendas of status and recognition during the Worker's Party administration in Brazil. It presents important reflections on whether and how foreign policy choices during that period sought a higher international status and to what extent they could be considered successful. Presenting multiple perspectives, the book will definitely enrich the readers' portfolio on Brazilian foreign policy and status and recognition.

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