

It's always sunny in Brazil: images, stereotypes, ignorance, and the country's international status

Daniel Buarque¹ 

Brazil is an emerging country with tremendous potential and the ambition to become a major player in global politics. Achieving high international status, however, depends not only on aspiration, but on the intersubjective perceptions of states that are already established as great powers. Brazil's rise is connected not only to its attributes of power but to how the country is perceived by others. This article advances the study of Brazil's status by analyzing the image of the country according to the perceptions of the foreign policy community of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. It contributes to International Relations scholarship by addressing the relation between images of a nation and its level of prestige. The article argues that knowledge about Brazil is limited even among global elites and is mostly associated with superficial stereotypes.

Keywords: Status; images; stereotypes; interviews; nation branding; prestige

Introduction

Brazil is a nation with enormous potential, a vast territory, a population of over 200 million people, rich natural resources, a vibrant culture, and a strong economy. The country has historically aspired to increase its level of prestige and achieve the status of a great power, and over the past few decades, it has made significant strides in its efforts to become an important player on the global stage by playing significant roles within institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Security Council and groups such as the BRICS and IBSA (Grina, 2014; Gardini, 2016; Saraiva, 2016; Esteves; Jumbert; Carvalho, 2020).

Ambition, however, is not enough for a state to climb the international rank of status to its highest level and become one of the countries responsible for managing global relations, as great powers do. Status must be accorded to a state by other, established, great powers that formally recognize it, treat it as a major power, and grant it membership in key international decision-making groups and organizations. Thus, status is dependent on how a state is perceived by the great powers. Therefore, for Brazil to raise its standing, in addition to accumulating power, it must convince the great powers to perceive and

¹ University São Paulo (USP), Institute of International Relations. São Paulo (SP), Brazil. E-mail: <dbuarque@gmail.com>.

recognize it as a peer (Larson; Shevchenko, 2014; Paul; Larson; Wohlforth, 2014; Murray, 2019; Esteves; Jumbert; Carvalho, 2020; MacDonald; Parent, 2021).

This approach to status in international relations highlights the importance of images and perceptions of nations in the process of increasing a states' status. However, apart from Brazil's real potential and its formal power attributes (which are not negligible), the country's status appears to lag in terms of its recognition as one of the most important global players (Spektor, 2016; Røren; Beaumont, 2019; Beaumont; Røren, 2020; Carvalho, 2020; Lessa; Becard; Galvão, 2020). One major obstacle that can hinder a country's efforts to raise its prestige is the perceptual/ideational-level, where the presence of external pervasive cultural biases - even racism - prevalent in the global system result from the preponderance of stereotypes about the country and its people (Nayar; Paul, 2002; Buarque, 2019). These external perceptions are important because international relations scholarship defines status as the rank of a nation within a global society and is highly dependent on the intersubjective beliefs of actors outside that nation. A country has the level of prestige that other nations recognize it has (Clunan, 2014; Larson; Shevchenko, 2014, 2019; Paul; Larson; Wohlforth, 2014; Murray, 2019; Beaumont; Røren, 2020; Carvalho, 2020; Götz, 2020; MacDonald; Parent, 2021).

This article advances the study of Brazil's international status by focusing on the perceptions about the country held by the elites that form the foreign policy community (FPC) of the five permanent members (P5) of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC): the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia and China. The text assesses perceptions about Brazil found among the elites of nations that have higher status and their views about the general beliefs about Brazil found within these nations. It attempts to understand how these images are related to Brazil's status and contributes to the scholarship of status in IR (International Relations) by addressing the relation between the external perceptions held by elites and policymakers in other countries and the level of prestige of a nation.

The article argues that from the perspective of the FPC of the P5, although there has been a narrative in recent decades about Brazil's rise in the world, with increased projection of positive images about economic success and political and social stability, the level of knowledge about the country is still limited even among elites in powerful nations. The perception of the interviewees is that Brazil is still largely unknown abroad. The country is poorly understood, and images of the country are marked by superficial stereotypes. Respondents themselves refer to Brazil using many stereotypes popular among the general public and identify a superficial knowledge about the country even among the elites of their countries.

The article is divided into four main sections. It begins with "International status and images of nations", which is an assessment of the theoretical framework about status and images within IR. This is followed by a discussion of the scholarship about images of Brazil and its status in the section "International images of Brazil's and its status". Next is

presented the "Research Design" used to understand the perceptions held by the FPC of the P5. The article concludes with "Analysis of the data: Behind a wall of clichés", focusing on the lack of knowledge about Brazil and the many stereotypes of the country as a sunny tropical place great for tourism, fun and games.

International status and images of nations

Status is traditionally defined in different disciplines as the rank or standing in the hierarchy of a group, and is referred to within international relations as a nation's position within a social stratification and hierarchy, which consists of collective beliefs about a state's standing and membership, based on valued attributes, and is recognized by voluntary deference (Clunan, 2014; Paul; Larson; Wohlforth, 2014; Larson; Shevchenko, 2019; Götz, 2020; MacDonald; Parent, 2021). In a stratified global society, status refers to the way nations are differentiated and ranked according to their perceived characteristics and capabilities (Clunan, 2014; Dafoe; Renshon; Huth, 2014; Paul; Larson; Wohlforth, 2014; Renshon, 2017; Larson; Shevchenko, 2019; Carvalho, 2020; Esteves; Jumbert; Carvalho, 2020; Götz, 2020; MacDonald; Parent, 2021).

The research presented here was developed using a theoretical framework of status in IR and is based on the idea that status is not a perfect reflection of a state's material attributes, and is not based on quantifiable power, but rather depends on the perceptions of others. It refers to higher order beliefs about a state's relative ranking and to "beliefs about what others believe" (Paul; Larson; Wohlforth, 2014, p. 8). Status is determined by what others believe about an actor's quality, power, and influence, independently of factual reality. Status is a relational concept that describes a subjective reading of an intersubjective evaluation of a potential objective quality (O'Neill, 1999; Clunan, 2014; Gilady, 2017; Murray, 2019).

The scholarship about status in IR and about the images of nations intersect because it is accepted that status is an intersubjective attribute (Clunan, 2014; Paul; Larson; Wohlforth, 2014; Larson; Shevchenko, 2019; Casarões, 2020; MacDonald; Parent, 2021). The place where a country stands in the global stratification depends not just on what the country believes itself to be, what it wants, its capabilities or how it behaves (although these are also important). Status depends fundamentally on how others in the international community interpret the identity, intentions and behaviors of that country, and on what is the collective belief about the status of that nation (Mitzen, 2006; Clunan, 2014; Paul; Larson; Wohlforth, 2014; Murray, 2019; MacDonald; Parent, 2021). This is why images about a country are important to its status, they are one way of understanding these collective beliefs others hold about a given state.

The term image is a synonym for subjective knowledge, personal knowledge, and belief. It is what determines the behavior of a person or group (Boulding, 1956). The concept is similar to the definition of stereotypes as pictures in our heads (Lippmann,

2015). However, the current literature on images recognizes that it is difficult to find a consensual definition of the concept as it applies to nations. Bignami argues that images should be understood as the most prevalent representations of a nation in the mind of individuals. According to her, social and historical factors, geographic position, weather, and the media contribute to the definition of this commonly found image (Bignami, 2002). The literature on nation branding tends to argue that image and reputation are a matter of perception and cannot be thought of as synonymous with reality. A nation's image should be understood as a function of a reputation of one nation among various stakeholders and multiple categories (Go; Govers, 2011). One review of conceptualizations of the images held about nations has found more than 1,000 published studies that have analyzed the concept since the 1960s. Most of these define images of nations as perceptions, impressions, associations, stereotypes, schemas, and beliefs (Roth; Diamantopoulos, 2009). More critical studies have argued, however, that it is not possible to talk about a single image of a country, and that it is more appropriate to discuss images, in the plural, since they depend on who is looking at the nation at a given time and may vary (Jiménez-Martínez, 2017, 2020).

The focus on images and beliefs as being an important source of status and reputation also leads to challenges because different observers can have different beliefs about any particular characteristic of a state. However, the idea of reputation in general is also linked to the concept of image, which is generally associated with the perceptions that are prevalent among a community. If a state has a particular reputation, this implies that most observers hold this relevant belief about the state. When a certain belief about a state is prevalent, or agreed to on all important levels, it can be argued that there are common beliefs or even common knowledge about a fact, which can become a social fact (Clunan, 2014; Dafoe; Renshon; Huth, 2014).

Even if it is important to understand the perceptions held about nations and the fact that images are relevant in global politics, a study of status in IR should go beyond the general populations of countries and focus on the perceptions held by the people who define the policy of a state. "Insofar as status is equivalent to reputation, it might be measured by obtaining the views of national leaders about their and other state's standing" (Rosecrance et al., 1974, p. 13). As this seems to be almost impossible to do in full, analyzing the views of elites in the FPC of important reference countries may help to better understand the status of a country.

This article draws from the analysis of perceptions about Brazil found among the elites in the great powers to understand the images these respondents have about Brazil and their view about how other elites in their own countries think about Brazil, to assess the possible connections between these beliefs and the country's status.

International images about Brazil and its status

Brazil has long wanted to project itself internationally as a significant nation in global politics and has the ambition of being recognized as a Great Power (Buarque, 2013, 2019; Stolte, 2015; Mares; Trinkunas, 2016). Although Brazil is a strong state in global affairs and clearly plays an important role in international politics, the general perceptions about Brazil among the population of the rest of the world are not of a strong, serious and responsible country (Bignami, 2002; Carvalho, 2008; Lopes, 2010; Buarque, 2019). Global nation branding surveys provide important evidence that there is a gap between Brazil's international ambition to become a global power and the external perceptions about the country and the role it plays in the world. While Brazil believes it is destined to greatness and wants to have greater involvement in international politics (Souza, 2008; Esteves; Jumbert; Carvalho, 2020), the rest of the world generally perceives it superficially as a country that is not serious and that is mostly associated with fun, play, beaches, tourism and parties (Barbosa, 1995; Bignami, 2002; Souza, 2008; Mares; Trinkunas, 2016; Buarque, 2018, 2019). International surveys tend to analyze the images of countries in different categories and show that Brazil traditionally fares well among the "soft" attributes of a hedonist country and is negatively perceived in "harder" characteristics related to politics, business and economics (Buarque, 2019).

Although Brazil has long strived to project positive images, and it is recognized as a cool nation (Valaskivi, 2016; Neild, 2017), surveys show that the country is perceived as "decorative" and has become associated with stereotypes not generally applied to responsible countries (Mariutti; Giraldo, 2012; Buarque, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2019). One problem with these stereotypical images of the country is that the external perceptions are that Brazil is synonymous "only" with fun and leisure. Although this is accepted as the brand of a "cool" nation, which could have the potential to position a state within the framework of modern Westernized civilization (Valaskivi, 2016), in the case of Brazil, it seems to work in a different direction. Being perceived as the country of fun, parties and carnival means not being the country of anything else. It means being a country where the population 'lives to party' and does not perform other activities (Bignami, 2002).

Even if they may be wrong, these images have been constructed along the history of the country. Since the arrival of the Portuguese colonizers in the sixteenth century, the images of the new territory held in Europe has been one of exoticism (Buarque, 2017). These perceptions also appear in depictions of Brazil in the international cinema. The country is a victim of negative stereotypes as a sensual, tropical place, an excellent destination for revelry and little else (Amancio, 2000; Marsh, 2012; Dennison, 2017). Until today, most of the literature on national images describe the foreign perceptions of Brazil as a country that is exotic (Amancio, 2000; Bignami, 2002). These stereotypes of Brazil are also often projected in international media. Analysis of international media coverage during the 2014 World Cup confirms that Brazil is not perceived as a serious country

(Buarque, 2015, 2016; Guimarães, 2016). Hosting the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics in the country reinforced the association of these stereotypes with Brazil's images (Buarque, 2018).

Although these surveys show what people in general in different parts of the world think about Brazil and not the perceptions of elites such as politicians and diplomats, these results are particularly important when considering that images and soft power are the primary basis on which Brazil has attempted to become a more prestigious country in international relations. Instead of focusing on the real capabilities of the country when pursuing global prestige, Brazil has often focused more on gaining recognition through a positive international perception of the nation as an active player in global affairs through negotiation and conciliation (Stolte, 2015; Mares; Trinkunas, 2016; Ricupero, 2017; Esteves; Jumbert; Carvalho, 2020).

The IR literature offers interesting evidence of how these images of Brazil may influence its foreign relations. One assessment of Brazil's aspirations on the global stage argues that the rest of the world does not perceive the country as one that is ready to accept the duty of upholding the international order (Lebow, 2016). Another study conducted by the US government in the 1970s found that Americans did not know much about Brazil and thought it was not relevant (Spektor, 2009). Washington policymakers often seem to consider Brazil an interloper in world affairs, a nation that does not quite measure up to the status and power it has achieved and whose foreign policy judgments are often uninformed and misguided. Washington officials often ridicule Brazil's foreign policy stances as "quixotic and naïve" (Stuenkel; Taylor, 2015, p. 2). Although the country is generally well perceived, and has a professional and respected diplomatic corps, its members should understand that the most prevalent images held of the country are still not that of a serious nation. This is important considering that a country's "brand", the way it is perceived abroad, is relevant to international politics, especially when working under the framework of constructivist theories of (Van Ham, 2001, 2002, 2008; Kaneva, 2011).

However, the very concept of a "serious country" is highly questionable. One study analyzed ten different surveys about Brazil's images and argued that being perceived as serious may refer to fulfilling a Western view of modernity and individualism. A serious country was then defined as a Western construct, to which peripheral countries may have a hard time adapting to because of their own cultures, identities, and traditions (Buarque, 2019). Another approach, based on perceptions held by elites in powerful countries, showed that major powers tend to take a country like Brazil seriously only in situations in which they can profit and defend their own interests (Buarque, 2022). These attempts to define a serious country confirm the criticisms of authors who accuse Westerners of "Orientalism" and of continuing to hold pervasive biases and prejudices that may hinder an emerging state's attempt to achieve recognition while the powerful nations are able to dominate, restructure, and maintain their authority over less powerful nations, maintaining the status quo (Said, 1979; Nayar; Paul, 2002; Mosbah, 2011; Ward, 2017).

The study presented in this article tries to go beyond these general perceptions and anecdotes from the political realm to understand what the FPC of powerful nations thinks about Brazil and its image within the great powers. The objective is to assess what is Brazil's image from the perspective of these stakeholders in powerful nations to understand the difficult ideational barriers the country must overcome to advance in its aspirations to become a major player in global politics.

Research design

Assessing intersubjective perceptions about a nation is a challenge for this scholarship since it is virtually impossible to gather data that represents the entire population or even all the elites of great powers. The study presented here is part of broader qualitative research about Brazil's international status. It involved semi-structured interviews with single respondents representing the FPC of each of the P5. For this study, FPC refers to a universe of individuals involved in foreign policymaking or who significantly contribute to forming opinion regarding foreign relations in the countries analyzed here. The group is formed by people who have an in-depth and nuanced knowledge about Brazil and its relations to the country they represent and includes politicians, diplomats, members of interest groups, leaders of think tanks and NGOs, academics, journalists and businesspeople involved in the international sphere (Souza, 2002, 2008; Esteves; Herz, 2020; Esteves; Jumbert; Carvalho, 2020).

Even if it may be questionable that such a group is directly responsible for the policies towards Brazil of great powers, they can be understood as a sample of the community of people involved in discussing the country at high levels of politics and diplomacy and helping to generate the common knowledge about the country in each of these states (Rosecrance et al., 1974; Clunan, 2014; Dafoe; Renshon; Huth, 2014). A similar approach of focusing on views by the FPC of a country has been used within Brazil to determine the international priorities of the country's diplomacy (Souza, 2002, 2008), while other studies about international status of nations have drawn on this approach to assess the interests of nations and their achievements. As Esteves and Herz explain, diplomats, academics and foreign policy experts can be described as "repositories of collective memories, specific practices and representations that structure their interaction and their discourse" (Esteves; Herz, 2020, p. 114). Although it is not a homogenous group, these actors are prominent and form a community that composes the foreign policy field and its imaginary and may mobilize concepts for political change (Doty, 1993; Weldes, 1996; Guzzini, 2012; Esteves; Herz, 2020).

This article is based on the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) of 60 interviews selected from the universe of 94 conducted with this group. The number of interviews in the dataset was defined to guarantee a balance of representativeness per state of origin of sources and a balance of the sizes and depth of the discussion in the interviews analyzed.

In total, 12 interviews were selected with sources from each of the countries of the P5. The dataset is highly representative of the entire data corpus, with sources from think tanks, academic fields, diplomacy (including ten former ambassadors who served in Brazil), journalism, business, and politics. The total time of interviews recorded in the dataset amounts to 1,977 minutes, and the total size of transcribed interviews amounts to 169,034 words. The data was treated in this study as being a general representation of the FPC of the P5, and although the perceptions revealed in the interviews were varied and offered very different and interesting points of view, these were not explored further here for a lack of space and time to develop a more careful analysis.

The P5 was selected as the reference to assess Brazil's status because these are all countries with historically recognized great power status and because the UNSC is still symbolically viewed as one of the main international institutions making decisions about security in international relations and as the main symbol of high status in the global stratification (Berridge; James, 2003; The UN Security Council, [S.d.]). The UNSC is also an important reference for Brazil's status because the country's pursuit for global prestige has been permeated by its historical bid to become a permanent member of the organ (Arraes, 2005; Vargas, 2008; Garcia, 2011; Andrade, 2012; Mendes, 2015; Uziel, 2015). Such an inclusion of Brazil in this prestigious group would demand a reform of the institution and a recognition of the country as a peer by the five permanent members.

The interviews were conducted between March 2018 and July 2019, and the interviewees were asked to give their own opinions about Brazil's status and the role of the country in international relations considering the period between the democratization of the country in 1989 and late 2014. The semi-structured interviews followed a systematically designed protocol formed of 8 questions and other possible follow-ups used to assess the views about Brazil's status. These included "what is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Brazil?", "what is the image of Brazil in your country?" "what kind of part/role do you think Brazil plays in the international system?", "what do you think Brazil wants to achieve in international politics?", "what is your opinion about Brazil's aspirations?", and "how relevant do you think is the balance between soft and hard power for Brazil's foreign policy?". For the purposes of the analysis presented in this article, the focus of the assessment is on the informants' replies about the image of the country, which was the subject of the first two questions of the protocol. The analysis focused on the images and stereotypes informants used to answer the first questions, and on their view about how well the country is known in their own nations (both by the general population and the elites).

The interviews were assessed using reflexive thematic analysis, a method with a strong focus on the importance of qualitative research and how the data is systematized and analyzed. It is a way to let researchers reflexively find meaning in the interviews, a method that allows researchers to see and make sense of meanings and experiences, using both deductive and inductive approaches (Braun; Clarke, 2019a, 2019b).

This qualitative approach presents the research as if it was a story with a coherent analysis that is grounded in the data. This paradigm accepts that complete objectivity is impossible and the research does not need to claim to tell the only or absolute truth, but to be telling a decisive truth about the data, providing an interpretation that is compelling for theoretical reasons and based on grounds of credibility and trustworthiness (Flick, 2009; Bryman, 2012; Braun; Clarke, 2013; Miles; Huberman; Saldaña, 2014; Reiter, 2017). This approach focuses on validating meanings, views, perspectives, experiences, and practices expressed in the data. Within this study, this means that the systematic qualitative analysis of the interviews offers a sample of the interpretations made by the foreign policy community of the great powers about Brazil's status, but other perceptions can be found in interviews with different respondents and analysis by other researchers (Flick; Kardorff; Steinke, 2004; Barkin, 2008).

To systematize research using reflexive thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke developed a step-by-step guide to conducting this method of qualitative study. They proposed a blueprint of how to conduct thematic analysis, proposing 6 basic steps for the method: 1. Become familiar with the data; 2. Generate initial codes; 3. Search for themes; 4. Review the themes; 5. Define and name the themes; and 6. Produce the report (Braun; Clarke, 2006).

Although the respondents consented to be interviewed and most of them authorized being named in the research, codenames were assigned to all interviewees to offer them anonymity and the interviews were randomly codenamed with initials connected to the country of origin of the interviewees as UK1-UK12, US1-US12, CH1-CH12, FR1-FR12, and RU1-RU12.

After transcribing the interviews and assuring their anonymity, all files selected for the reflexive thematic analysis were uploaded into a new project in software NVivo and linked to memos to include the notes written immediately after each of the interviews. The first round of coding in the 60 files took six weeks of reviewing the interviews and resulted in a total of 610 different codes. After the initial round of coding, the process continued with the development of the initial interrelated ideas for the themes that could be inferred from the codes for the data. From that, the full list of codes was refined, codes were collated and renamed to develop a series of sub-themes that were then collated into the 9 main themes. After four months of analyzing the data, the main themes had been developed, named, described, and mapped.

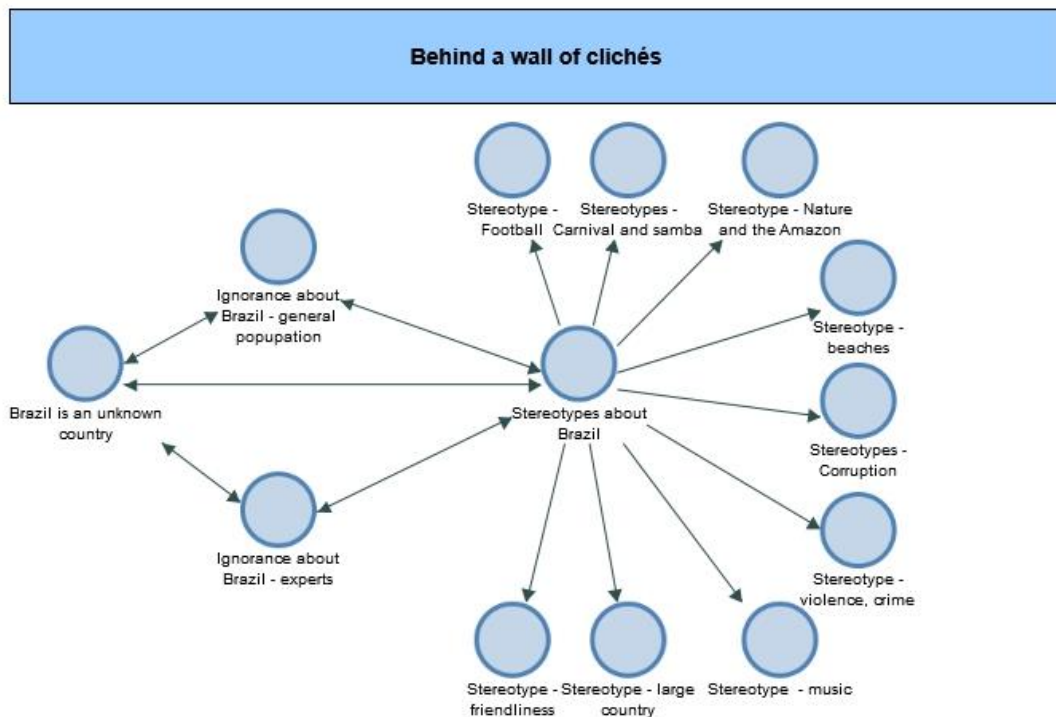
This article focuses on one of those nine themes, assessing Brazil's images according to the FPC of the P5. The following section will address the main findings of this study about Brazil. It will present the analysis of the data and quotes selected from the interviews to reinforce the argument developed from the analysis.

Analysis of the data: Behind a wall of clichés

The perception of the foreign policy community of the great powers is that Brazil is still a largely unknown and misunderstood country even among the elites and policymakers of some of the world's most powerful nations. "Behind a wall of clichés" was one of the nine themes developed from the reflexive thematic analysis of interviews with the FPC of the P5. It was one of the most prevalent of the themes developed during the study concerned with the international status of the country based on the intersubjective perceptions held by the FPC of great powers. It was established from codes developed from all the 60 interviews analyzed and was connected to 421 different references to the same general idea. It is formed by two sub-themes, one of them concerned with the different clichés and stereotypes used to describe the country and another about the perception of informants that Brazil is largely unknown both by the general public and the elites of the FPC.

The analysis of the data from the interviews led to the development of the thematic map below, which helps understand how the perception of the study sources is that Brazil is largely unknown in their own countries and that its images are hidden by stereotypes.

Graphic 1
Thematic map – Behind a wall of clichés



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the RTA of 60 interviews with the FPC of the P5.

"Brazil is an unknown country" was one of the most prevalent codes developed from the analysis of the data, established from 42 of the interviews. The data reveals that the foreign policy community in the great powers believes there is a general ignorance about Brazil within these nations, that the general population in their countries knows very little about Brazil and thinks only in terms of superficial clichés. At the same time, stereotypes and shallow understanding also reign among politicians and experts who are supposed to think about diplomacy and participate in political decisions that influence the relations of these powerful nations with Brazil, according to the respondents. This may hinder a more nuanced understanding about the country and limit knowledge about the country's real capabilities and power attributes, which in turn can make it harder for Brazil to increase its level of prestige.

When asked what first comes to their minds when they think about Brazil and to describe their views about Brazil's image in their own nations, the country was linked to shallow clichés by almost all of the interviewees from the foreign policy community of the P5. Stereotypes were used to describe the country and to discuss what the general population, as well as politicians and experts in those powerful nations think about Brazil. These clichés reinforce the idea revealed by nation-branding surveys that Brazil is not perceived as a serious country, since the clichés are either linked to Brazil's image of being a place for fun and play, or to negative images linked to serious matters.

The notion that people in powerful nations do not know much about Brazil was one of the issues most repeated by the informants in this study. It is particularly evident in the countries outside the Western hemisphere, such as China and Russia.

According to one informant from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CH2), because of geographical distance and language differences, Chinese people do not have a clear image about Brazil. "The Chinese know football, know Rio, know Carnival. Know Brazil produces a lot of sugar, cane sugar. But there is very limited knowledge between the two countries", explained a professor at the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China (CH5). "The general public, their perception is that Brazil is a very attractive country, but they don't have knowledge about it", informant CH5 said. "I can tell you that Brazil has been an unknown country for the Chinese people", said a Chinese academic working at the Aalborg University, Denmark (CH8).

However, this lack of knowledge is not only noticed among the general public, according to the Chinese sources. "If you ask Xi Jinping, he will obviously say that Brazil is important, but if you ask the elites in the academy and think tanks, they have difficulties to clearly position Brazil in the region and also in the BRICS", informant CH8 explained. A researcher at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy (CH6) explained that there is only one person in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Latin American program that focuses on Brazil, which shows how little the country focuses on the country:

I never got the impression that there were more than a very, very, small number of people, even sometimes one or two individuals, who were focused

on Brazil. And even then, I wasn't totally impressed with them. And Brazil was arguably the most important country in all of Latin America for China. Again, for economic and bigger geopolitical reasons. (...) You have one guy at CASS that is doing this. At the universities, there is almost nothing, almost no one studying Brazil-related issues. Part of this is a question of what opportunities Chinese students, but also, businesses and then officials saw in Brazil.

Similarly, according to a director of the think tank Russian International Affairs Council (RU10), in Russia there is not a complete and well-developed image of Brazil. "There are some glimpses, and there are ups and downs of interest in Brazil depending on specific situations, so I think that the picture is quite eclectic". For a professor of the World Politics Department at St. Petersburg State University (RU4), Brazil has a "very positive image, but at the same time unfortunately we don't know a lot about Brazil. It is a very exotic country for us". This lack of knowledge was noticed by a director of research of the independent Levada Center pollster (RU6): "My compatriots have very, very I would say, shallow knowledge about your country".

As discussed in the case of China, in Russia a lack of knowledge about Brazil is also present among the elites. "One of the most important reasons for that is the lack of experts in Latin America. We don't have experts on Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia", said informant RU4. According to a former head of research at the Moscow State University (RU8):

Ordinary Russian people, including intellectuals, think that Brazil is the country of soccer, football, samba, carnival and so on. This is a simplification, a very primitive vision of Brazil, which is very obsolete. Unfortunately, people in government, except maybe some professionals from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, share this simplistic approach, this simplistic vision of Brazil.

In addition to being present in the non-Western nations, this lack of knowledge was also discussed by informants from France, the US and the UK, countries that have important historic ties to Brazil. "Among politicians there is some lack of knowledge and clichés, but in general the population will not associate Brazilian politics with two or three key words or particular representations", argued a French professor and member of the think tank Observatoire Politique de l'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes (FR6). "Brazil continues to be very little known in France", explained a sociologist and professor at Université de Paris 7 (FR3). According to a former British Consul General in São Paulo (UK6), Brazil "is very largely unknown in the rest of the world".

Informants from the UK mentioned anecdotes that indicate this lack of knowledge, even at the core of the British government's foreign policy establishment through history. Two former ambassadors in Brazil talked about their experience with this absence of awareness about the country. One of the diplomats (UK3) described the time when a prime minister visited the country. He said that:

Tony Blair came and spent a week in Brazil when I was there and lots of senior advisors came with him and every one of them were astonished by what they saw. It was very unlike anything that they had been led to believe it was. [The experience of] flying into São Paulo was an eye opener for any Western European visitor who hasn't been to South America before. It is like flying into ten New Yorks at the same time. Yes, there is a lack of awareness about Brazil [in British politics].

Another former British Ambassador to Brazil (UK5) remembered a similar story:

A large amount of ignorance which still persists about the nature of the country and what one finds... I mean there was an apocryphal story about Margaret Thatcher visiting Brazil, but it was also true about many other senior political visitors ... and senior officials, that they would typically come to Brazil and after a couple of days they would say: 'Why didn't anybody tell me it was like this? I didn't realize there was this huge dynamic city of São Paulo. There is optimism, there are...' It was a lot of ignorance because it did not impinge upon people's political consciousness or even economic consciousness.

The lack of awareness about Brazil has led to the country being “rediscovered” from time to time, according to a fellow in Politics at Nuffield College, Oxford University (UK2):

Every time we have a new government, the minister – and we are talking about the Foreign Ministry that ought to know better – gets on the plane and gets off at São Paulo and says: 'I had no idea there were all these skyscrapers'. In other words, it is constantly being rediscovered by people who ought to know better. But is rediscovered in the most superficial way.

Informants from the United States argued that the view from Washington, D.C. is also obscured by a general ignorance about Brazil, and that there is only a very small group of people that understands the country, while the majority has no clear idea about it. From the US point of view, Brazil is “a country that everybody likes but very few people understand”, explained a senior vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (US5). According to a fellow in the Brazil Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (US1):

There is a big problem in Washington because there are probably five dozen people in Washington who really know Brazil. There are probably 500 people in Washington who are thinking about foreign policy in Brazil. And then there are about 5,000 people in Washington who know something about Brazil, but just enough to be dangerous. People who know that it is close to Bolivia, but perhaps don't realize that it is a much bigger economy than Bolivia, that it is

more important geostrategically things like that. I am always astounded by, even at events that talk about Brazil, the level of ignorance, especially about a country that is the 5th largest population, the 4th largest democracy, 7th or 8th largest economy.

A sunny place for games and fun – the stereotypes about Brazil

The analysis of the data shows that the perception of the FPC of the P5 is aligned with what surveys of the general public reveal about Brazil's images and that even when the images are positive, they may not support the country's claim for higher status (Buarque, 2019; Mariutti; Giraldo, 2012). Stereotypes were mentioned both when the interviewees were describing the first thing that comes to their mind when they think about Brazil and when they were asked about the general images about Brazil within the countries they represented in this research.

The most popular stereotypes cited by the interviewees when discussing the perceptions about Brazil were, in order of prominence:

- (1) Football - mentioned by 32 interviewees,
- (2) Carnival and samba - mentioned by 25 interviewees,
- (3) Nature and the Amazon - mentioned by 18 interviewees,
- (4) Beaches - mentioned by 18 interviewees,
- (5) Corruption - mentioned by 17 interviewees,
- (6) Violence and crime - mentioned by 13 interviewees,
- (7) Music - mentioned by 13 interviewees,
- (8) Large country - mentioned by 13 interviewees,
- (9) Friendliness - mentioned by 11 interviewees,
- (10) Happiness - mentioned by 8 interviewees,
- (11) Tourist destination - mentioned by 8 interviewees,
- (12) Distance - mentioned by 8 interviewees,
- (13) Culture - mentioned by 7 interviewees,
- (14) Soap Operas - mentioned by 5 interviewees,
- (15) Exoticism - mentioned by 5 interviewees,
- (16) Rio - mentioned by 5 interviewees,
- (17) Lula - mentioned by 5 interviewees,
- (18) Fun people - mentioned by 5 interviewees,
- (19) Coffee - mentioned by 4 interviewees,
- (20) Women and Sensuality - mentioned by 4 interviewees.

The most prominent views about Brazil were very positive but mostly related to the idea that it is a sunny place with great natural beauty that is wonderful for vacations, leisure, and sports, with lots of beaches, music, parties, happiness and sensuality. When

more serious aspects of economics and politics were mentioned, however, they were mostly with negative connotations focusing on corruption, underdevelopment, poverty, and violence. In sum, Brazil's images are clichés that reveal ignorance and a pervasive bias that can hinder Brazil's attempts to increase its status.

"There is this sympathy for Brazil, for the Brazilian culture, for the music, the culture in general, but also the idea that Brazil is not a serious country, that Brazil is the country of carnival", explained a president of the Association pour la Recherche sur le Brésil en Europe (FR8). "Brazil is carnival, samba, coconut trees and the beach", summarized a former French ambassador to Brazil (FR4). "Brazil is the beach, sun, carnival, happiness, football. This is the exotic side", explained a journalist at Radio France International (FR5). "It is kind of a country (...) that has a very positive perception because Brazil is a place that people like as a concept. It is friendly, it is attractive, it is sort of exotic", argued a senior vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (US5). "Brazil is probably most widely perceived as a tourist destination", argued a professor of social sciences at Arizona State University (US2). Brazil is just "a place that you can go to have a lot of fun", summed up a director of analysis for Geopolitical Futures (US3).

From a Russian perspective, according to a former head of research at Moscow State University, "ordinary Russian people, including intellectuals, think that Brazil is the country of soccer, football, samba, carnival and so on. This is a simplification, a very primitive vision of Brazil, which is very obsolete". "It is a very friendly country, with a very emotional people", said a vice-head of the World Politics Department at St. Petersburg State University (RU4). "The problem in Brazil is that the society is too relaxed. I do not see hard working [people] in Brazil", said a Chinese informant who was director of research at Aalborg University, Denmark (CH8). A Brazilian journalist working for Xinhua, the Chinese state news agency (CH7) said this view was very common in China: "I've heard that because it's hot we don't have to work, that we're lazy, that we love football, that we go to the beach after work. All this is inside their heads".

Beyond this general perception of a lack of serious aspects related to the country, the most prevalent of the stereotypes related to Brazil in all of the interviews with sources from the five permanent members of the UNSC were, in order, the relation between the country and football, carnival and samba, nature and the Amazon and beaches.

"Football is the most important image of Brazil among the average population in China", explained a professor at the School of Government, at Sun Yat-sen University (CH1). "It is a country of a very enthusiastic people", affirmed a researcher of the Institute for Latin American Studies of CASS. "People in France in general, when they think of Brazil, immediately think of the joy of living, football, and bossa nova and carnival", argued a former French ambassador to Brazil (FR11). "They are positive images, but they are also commonplaces like carnival that are part of the cultural baggage in relation to Brazil that crosses the minds of all French people. Carnival, football. They are clichés, but they are positive clichés", said a researcher at The French Institute for International and Strategic

Affairs (FR12). "The people who do think about Brazil think about the beach. They think about swimsuits", argued a chair for inter-American affairs at the University of California, San Diego (US4). Brazil's images in the UK are formed by these same clichés, according to the CEO of the think tank Canning House (UK9). "I think it is mostly stereotypes: The Amazon, beaches, Carnival. It doesn't go very deep". "There is a sort of optimistic feeling. It is a country where people do like to have a good time and have fun. But, on the other hand, that is only one aspect of a very complex country", summarized a former British Ambassador to Brazil (UK5).

On the other end of the spectrum from the positive images connected to Brazil being a tropical paradise for vacations were negative associations related to problems in the country. From this perspective, the most prevalent clichés thought about when considering Brazil were corruption, violence and crime, and crisis in general.

"The corruption issue really is a major problem for Brazil's reputation in the world", said a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute (US11). Brazil is "a country in political crisis, with many corrupted politicians, with generalized corruption", argued a sociologist and professor at Université de Paris 7 (FR3). From a Russian perspective, violence appears as a common perception about the country. According to a director of governance at Deloitte in Moscow (RU9), "you get a lot of alerts in terms of crime levels, particularly in São Paulo. So you have to be cautious, and you cannot just walk the streets, and keep yourself safe".

A researcher at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (US1) believes that many of the negative perceptions can be linked to the lack of knowledge people have about Brazil: "There is a tendency to say that all of Latin America is similar and faces the same problems of state-led development, of populism". Nevertheless, a vice-president of the think tank Observatoire Politique de l'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes (FR6) argued that the positive aspects of Brazil's image, however superficial they are, are stronger than the negative ones: "All this does not undermine a positive view of Brazilian society. It is true that there is corruption, that Brazil is going through economic difficulties, but the image of Brazil is still a very positive image".

Conclusion

This article analyzed Brazil's international images to assess how they are related to the country's status and its ambition to increase its level of international prestige. It shows that the foreign policy community of the permanent members of the UNSC believe that Brazil is still a country unknown even by the elites of great powers, and that both policymakers and the general public in these powerful nations tend to see the country in stereotypical terms.

The analysis presented here is an excerpt of a more detailed study about Brazil's status from the perspective of great powers. It focuses on the general images of Brazil, the stereotypes that are associated with it and the perceived lack of knowledge about the

country even among policymakers. It fills a gap in the literature about Brazil's images by focusing on the perception elites in powerful nations have about the country.

Based on the systematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with the FPC of the P5, this article has argued that people in nations with more prestige see Brazil as if it is hidden behind a wall of stereotypes. The country is unknown in these powerful nations, and even the elites of the P5 do not necessarily have a better understanding about Brazil than the general global population. This reveals a negative bias that can hinder Brazil's emergence and its recognition as an important global player.

The analysis presented here contributes to scholarship about Brazil's international status by advancing understanding about these external images of the country and how they can negatively influence its attempts to increase its level of prestige in the world. The study shows that elites in the P5 believe that global nation-branding surveys provide accurate evidence of a gap between Brazil's ambition to become a global power and the external perceptions about the country and the role it plays in the world (Buarque, 2019). While Brazil believes it is destined to greatness, both the general public internationally and the elites of the P5 are ignorant about the reality of the country and perceive it as a nation that is mostly associated with stereotypes connected to fun and play, beaches, tourism and parties – or to problems related to more serious attributes of politics, business and economics.

The theoretical framework of status in IR establishes that international standing is dependent on intersubjective beliefs held outside a nation, especially by the elites of high-status nations. Thus, it is possible to say that any increase in Brazil's level of prestige depends not just on the country expanding its material attributes, but on convincing the powerful nations that it is a peer and deserves to have a strong voice in international politics. The research presented here shows, however, that the rise of Brazil can be limited by the fact that it is still not recognized by these significant others as a country that is important enough to become a great power. It is not well known, and its image is associated to shallow clichés. This means that even if images about Brazil can be considered misleading, or the result of negative bias, prejudices and orientalist attitudes that serve the interests of the established powers in maintaining the status quo and limiting the rise of other states, these images are still relevant and capable of blocking the ambitions of countries like Brazil.

This study has limited scope. It is based on a small-n qualitative research and may not tell a complete story about the perceptions of Brazil. However, the focus is not on the complete knowledge about the country in other nations, but on what the FPC of the P5 believe to be this knowledge or lack thereof. At the same time, the study does not propose to actually measure the level of knowledge the elites in powerful nations have about Brazil and is based on the perceptions interviewees discussed when interviewed. Further research can develop a more complete analysis about images held of Brazil by conducting further

interviews and perhaps testing the level of knowledge about Brazil of elite policymakers in these powerful nations.

Another caveat is that the study focuses solely on Brazil, without addressing the images of other states' and the relation of these images to the status of these countries. A comparative analysis about images and status of both powerful countries and other emerging nations would be important to improve the understanding of the phenomenon of blocked status and the hurdles faced by states that want to increase their level of prestige.

Nevertheless, this analysis provides a fresh interpretation both of Brazil's image, by focusing on the perception of elites in powerful countries, and the challenges the country faces in its ambition to achieve high international status.

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Resumo

O Brasil é sempre ensolarado: imagens, estereótipos, desconhecimento e o status internacional do país

O Brasil é um país emergente com muito potencial e ambição de se tornar um dos principais atores da política global. Alcançar esse alto status internacional, no entanto, não depende apenas de aspirações, mas de percepções intersubjetivas de Estados já estabelecidos como grandes potências. A ascensão do Brasil está ligada não apenas aos seus atributos de poder, mas em como o país é percebido pelos outros. Este artigo avança no estudo do status do Brasil ao analisar as imagens do país segundo as percepções da comunidade de política externa dos membros permanentes do Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas. Ele contribui para o estudo de relações internacionais ao abordar a relação entre imagens e o nível de prestígio de uma nação. O artigo argumenta que o conhecimento sobre o Brasil é limitado mesmo entre as elites globais e está associado principalmente a estereótipos superficiais.

Palavras-chave: Status; imagens; estereótipos; entrevistas; marca país; prestígio

Resumen

Brasil siempre está soleado: imágenes, estereotipos, ignorancia y el status internacional del país

Brasil es un país emergente con gran potencial y ambición de convertirse en importante actor de la política mundial. Sin embargo, alcanzar alto status internacional no depende solo de aspiraciones, sino de percepciones intersubjetivas de estados ya establecidos como grandes potencias. El ascenso de Brasil está vinculado no solo a sus atributos de poder, sino también a cómo los demás perciben el país. Este artículo avanza en el estudio del status de Brasil mediante el análisis de imágenes del país según las percepciones de la comunidad de política exterior de miembros permanentes del Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas. Contribuye al estudio de las relaciones internacionales al abordar la relación entre las imágenes y el nivel de prestigio de una nación. El artículo argumenta que el conocimiento sobre Brasil es limitado incluso entre las élites globales y se asocia principalmente con estereotipos.

Palabras clave: Status; imágenes; estereótipos; entrevistas; marca nacional; prestigio

Résumé

Le Brésil est toujours ensoleillé : images, stéréotypes, ignorance et status international du pays

Le Brésil est un pays émergent avec un grand potentiel et l'ambition de devenir l'un des principaux acteurs de la politique mondiale. Cependant, l'obtention de ce statut international élevé ne dépend pas seulement d'aspirations et attributs de pouvoir, mais de perceptions intersubjectives d'États déjà établis en tant que grandes puissances. Cet article avance l'étude du statut du Brésil en analysant les

DANIEL BUARQUE

images du pays selon les perceptions de la communauté de la politique étrangère des membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies. Il contribue à l'étude des relations internationales en abordant la relation entre les images et le niveau de prestige d'une nation. L'article soutient que les connaissances sur le Brésil sont limitées même parmi les élites mondiales et sont principalement associées à des stéréotypes superficiels.

Mots-clés : Statut ; images ; stéréotypes ; interviews ; image de marque nationale ; prestige

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