

## Brazilian Engagement in Africa\*

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(Stolte, Christina. *Brazil's Africa strategy: role conception and the drive for international status*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2015)

From presidential misconduct to the Rio Olympics and the Zika virus outbreak, Brazilian political and economic issues have been making headlines all over the world. As interest in Brazilian politics and economics grows, Christina Stolte's book, 'Brazil's African Strategy: Role Conception and the Drive for International Status', comes at an excellent time to explore Brazil's growing and ever-changing international status.

Stolte (2015) focuses on three important aspects of Brazilian foreign policy and international relations. She begins her book with an overview of the change in power and strategies utilized by all states within the global system and the decrease usages of all forms of power to gain status. Stolte (2015) then highlights how and why Brazil has used Africa to increase its position in the international community. Stolte (2015) argues that Brazil's engagement in Africa is motivated by the desire to increase its international status by using political and economic aid to Africa.

In this review, I will highlight the unique methodological approach used by Stolte (2015), as well as the book's impact on understanding strategic motives that nations may have for engaging in Africa. I propose that though Stolte (2015) does an excellent job introducing a new motive for state behavior (the seeking of international status), the breadth of the study is too small to make status-seeking a concrete foreign policy analysis or international relations theory.

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(\*) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1981-382120160003000007>

Stolte (2015) organizes her book by building upon the foundation of the global system, then focusing on Brazil's place within the system. She defines international status and the difference between power and status by arguing that "power is based on capabilities, status is based on a role and set of special rights and duties that is tied to social position" (STOLTE, 2015, p. 28). Using this understanding of status, she explained which mechanisms, what she calls "status-seeking strategies", states use to achieve tincreased international status. To construct and define these status-seeking strategies, Stolte (2015) utilizes the Social Identity Theory (SIT), which says that actors prefer to associate with actors and/or groups of higher status because actors want a positive social identity (ELLEMERS, 1991). This allows Stolte (2015) to construct the three status-seeking strategies of social mobility, social competition and social creativity.

The book also chronicles Brazilian social identity and status from the beginning of the republic to the first term of President Dilma Rousseff. The author highlights how each change in Brazilian social identity or foreign policy is connected with a new status-seeking strategy by showing that "Brazil increasingly turned to a North-South discourse, presenting itself as a member of the global South and denouncing imbalances in power and wealth within the international society" (STOLTE, 2015, p. 73). This explanation of change in strategy is then used to show how engagement in Africa is another tactic used by Brazilian state to achieve greater international status. "Engaging in key areas of international development, such as agriculture, health, and energy policy also has raised Brazil's international profile as a country that offers solutions to global problems" (STOLTE, 2015, p. 112). The author illustrates how Africa has been an excellent landscape to display Brazilian developmental power.

Stolte (2015) covers the motives for Brazil's status-seeking and what strategies they used to increase their international status, then explains why Brazil specifically chose Africa as its staging ground for its rise in the global system. She argues that "the continent has seemed to promise great opportunities for Brazil to gain international economic presence with facing strong competition from industrialized countries" (STOLTE, 2015, p. 140). She argues that though Brazil cannot compete with industrialized countries outside Africa, Brazil has resource and economic advantages to compete instead of Africa. Also, Stolte argues (2015), Africa can be a support base for Brazil globally, in particular with the UN, and security issues in Africa allow Brazil to make itself appear as a Great Power country. For these reasons, Stolte argues (2015) that Brazil chose to engage

Africa, and she concludes that "the involvement in Africa has been at the heart of Brazil's status-seeking strategy of asserting itself as a rising power of the South and has provided for status-enhancement in various ways" (STOLTE, 2015, p. 158).

The methodology used by Stolte (2015) is unique in the field of foreign policy analysis (FPA) and international relations. When analyzing the motives of nations in certain foreign policy decisions, most FPA focuses on power or the gaining of power. But Stolte (2015) provides a unique perspective by saying that emerging economies are status-seeking. While this is an interesting approach to FPA and international relations theory, the author misses an opportunity in the introduction to explain how status-seeking strategies are different from a nation utilizing soft power. While the differentiation between the two concepts becomes clearer in chapter 03, the author could benefit from highlighting that soft power is not another term for status, especially since there is a section on the difference between power and status. Though this book falls under the same heading as Chris Alden's 'China in Africa and China and Mozambique: From Comrades to Capitalists' (co-authored with Sergio Chichava) books, Stolte's (2015) methodology and theoretical framework is unique.

The usage of SIT to construct her theoretical framework is a bold move. Stolte (2015) argues that using this psychological theory is permissible because the anthropomorphization of nations has been used by realists, constructivists and other schools of international theory. Though this is true, it does not get to the heart of why SIT can be utilized in international theory and FPA. What the author fails to highlight is that SIT covers a wider variety of behavior and decisions made by nations. Though Stolte (2015) goes through great effort to explain SIT and status-seeking strategies according to SIT, she misses the opportunity to explain how SIT fills in gaps missed by other theories. This is an opportunity for Stolte (2015) to highlight an important strength in her book. This is a single case study of status-seeking in Brazil, exploring status-seeking as a motive for foreign policy decisions and state behavior, but the book could benefit from including another emerging economy to better explore status-seeking behavior, and Stolte (2015) herself recognizes this as an area in need of further research. Since status-seeking as a motive for behavior is a fairly new theory, the book would be enhanced by a small section using another case.

The arguments of this book contributes to the understanding of emerging economies like BRICS choosing to engage Africa, but the arguments could be deepened by

expanding the focus to include other countries. For example, the author briefly touches on Chinese engagement in Africa. This section could be greatly expanded upon to examine whether China utilizes similar strategies as Brazil, which would improve Stolte's arguments (2015) that show status-seeking as a motive for engagement in Africa and foreign policy decisions. The author emphasizes the foreign policy of the Lula administration throughout the book, which is key to Brazil's involvement in Africa, but it is not the totality of Brazil's status-seeking strategy. Stolte (2015) should have emphasized a wider cross-section of Brazilian political history to show status-seeking and the status-seeking strategies that were utilized, which would have better supported her theory of status-seeking as a motive.

Overall, this book offers a unique perspective for understanding foreign policy decisions and emerging economies' engagement with Africa. Christina Stolte has done an excellent job of introducing status-seeking as a new motive for state behavior and foreign policy decisions, and explaining why Brazil is engaged in Africa and how status is a big motivator for Brazilian foreign policy and international relations. However, the size of the study is too narrow to conclusively say that status-seeking is a definitive motive for international status. More scholarship needs to be produced on the subject, though Stolte's work (2015) is an excellent contribution to this nascent field of study.

Revised by Lindsey Silva

## References

ELLEMERS, Naomi (1991), *Identity management series: the influence of socio-structural variables on strategies of individual mobility and social change*. Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. 134pp.