

A N N A L E S
UNIVERSITATIS MARIAE CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA
LUBLIN – POLONIA

VOL. XXVIII, 2

SECTIO K

2021

Jagiellonian University

PIOTR TOPÓR

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9589-3443>

topor.piotr@gmail.com

Review of: Monika Sawicka, *Brazylia w systemie międzynarodowym: Role średniego mocarstwa nowego typu [Brazil in the International System: The Roles of an Emerging Middle Power]*, Universitas, Kraków 2020, pp. 360

The contemporary international order is in a phase of evolution, with the so-called emerging powers (including China, India or Brazil) aiming to play an increased role in international relations, both at the regional and global levels. The volume under review, *Brazil in the International System: The Roles of an Emerging Middle Power* by Monika Sawicka, analyses Brazil's foreign policy in the period between 2003 and 2014. This monograph is an abridged version of a doctoral dissertation in political science defended at the Jagiellonian University in 2018, whose author is a specialist in the Latin American region, with a particular focus on Brazil's foreign policy.

The analysis of Brazilian foreign policy in this publication predominantly covers the presidencies of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2014), and is driven by the strengthening of Brazil's international status within that period. The author also includes references to more recent events in Brazil's domestic politics, especially in the summary, which follow the election of a far-right candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, as the President of Brazil in 2018. The volume consists of an introduction, five chapters and a summary. The structure of this publication is logical and typical of research in the field of international relations, with the first part devoted to theoretical considerations (chapters I–II), preceding the analytical sections (chapters III–V).

Brazil, once defined – alongside China, India, and Russia – as an “emerging power”, is a popular research subject in both Polish [e.g. Gawrycki 2013] and

international literature [e.g. Burges 2017]. In order to introduce a new perspective into the subject, any political scientist specializing in this area of study has to refer to theoretical concepts that have not been used in this context before. Sawicka achieves this goal by conducting her analysis through a combination of the theory of international roles and the middle power concept.

In the first chapter (*On Roles and Identities*), the author describes the development and application of the role theory, originating from sociology, in international relations studies. Therefore, social constructivism, which is heavily influenced by the study of social symbolism and intersubjective identity, is presented as a theory of international relations used in this analysis. In the second chapter (*Status*), the author examines the notions of “status” and “position” of states in international politics, referring to the concept of middle power and defining Brazil as such a state. Due to its fast economic growth as a developing country, the size of its population and cultural identity, Sawicka argues for Brazil to be included in the group of “emerging middle powers”, which in contrast to the “traditional middle powers” (such as Australia or Canada) adopt an ambivalent attitude towards globalization and seek to reshape the liberal international order. Throughout the publication, it is consistently argued that the roles conducted by Brazil in international politics justify a perception of this country as a “new type” of middle power.

It is important to point out that international relations scholarship is characterized by the division of research into many levels of analysis (the level of international system, the level of domestic politics, and the level of individual units), which are often treated separately. For example, the theory of international politics introduced by Kenneth Waltz, known as “structural realism”, tends to focus on the level of the international system, while the so-called foreign policy analysis (FPA) focuses on the domestic level of a state (internal political institutions or the character of political leaders as the source of foreign policy). Instead, the role theory is considered by some authors as an approach that can lead to the integration of different theoretical approaches at multiple analytical levels [Breuning, Thies 2012]. Although the scope of the issue in question exceeds the volume of the monograph reviewed, the research by Sawicka should be considered as a valuable confirmation of this thesis. On the one hand, by referring to the material potential (territory, GDP, population, or military capabilities) of Brazil as an emerging middle power, the author places this analysis within a spectrum of the evolution of the international order in the 21st century. At the same time, a constructivist analysis of Brazil’s foreign policy, through references to identity, social values, or the “epistemic community of foreign policy”, reveals a strong focus on the internal sources of the foreign policy decision-making process. By doing so, the author goes beyond a monocausal explanation of Brazil’s foreign policy on either the external or domestic level and combines both perspectives into a convincing theoretical framework of analysis. This is not only a valuable approach *per se* to the prominent topic, but can also constitute a starting point for broader research, e.g. on the mechanisms of the decision-making process

in the Brazilian political system based on the “foreign policy theories” created within the FPA.

The second section of the book (chapters III–V) describes the international roles of Brazil in the period under consideration. In the third chapter (*Brazil as a Coalition Partner in Global Forums*), the author analyses Brazil’s engagement in coalitions (especially that of the Global South states) in multilateral institutions such as G77, G20, WHO, and BRICS. The fourth chapter (*Brazilian Solidarity Diplomacy*) describes Brazil’s role as a donor of development aid in Africa. In the fifth chapter, Sawicka examines the Brazilian role of a mediator in the Middle East (with a special focus on the relations between the West and Iran, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

By selecting these international roles, the author efficiently analyses Brazil’s foreign policy and its activities in the areas of economics and politics. Furthermore, the ambivalence of Brazilian foreign policy is well-outlined. On the one hand, Brazil aspired to become one of the leaders of the Global South, on the other hand, due to its global ambitions, cooperation with other actors (e.g. Russian Federation within the BRICS formula) and engagement in different geographical areas (including the Middle East, which is not a natural area of interest for the South American states) developed during the period studied. Finally, the comparison of the presidencies of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff leads the author to the conclusion that some of the roles played by Brazil have evolved even during the presidencies of Lula and Rousseff originating from the same “political family”. It clearly shows that the roles conducted by a state in international relations are shaped in a socio-political context and can be influenced by several sources. For example, the economic and political crisis which affected Brazil in 2015–2016 reduced the country’s activity on the international scene, which is one reason why this period was largely excluded from this study [p. 15].

Fundamental assets of this part of the publication include the author’s research skills which can be attributed to expertise in the fields of philology and political science. The wide range of the reference sources, including those in the Portuguese language (a 36-page bibliography list and appendices), complemented by field research and content, documentary and historical analysis, guarantee an accurate description of the roles played by Brazil in international relations. The author skilfully refers to the social and cultural sources of Brazil’s foreign policy by drawing on her knowledge of the history and social life of the state analysed. For instance, the parallel between the internal discourse of Brazilian colonial heritage and Brazil’s policy towards Africa is convincingly established. It leads to a precise description, rarely found in sources on this subject, of the specific international roles performed by Brazil in the period 2003–2014.

However, several shortcomings can be found in this publication. The author refers in the title to a division between the “traditional” and “emerging” (or “new type”) middle powers, as popularized by Eduard Jordaan [2003]. Throughout her book, considerations on this theme and the broad argument for Brazil’s inclusion in the latter group of states are the crucial part of the author’s narrative. At the same time,

Sawicka rightly notes in the introduction that in recent years this classification has raised doubts among scholars dealing with middle powers, including Jordaan himself [2017], as to whether this distinction corresponds to reality and is scientifically valid. Therefore, the author states in the introduction that one of the aims of her monograph is to address this criticism [p. 14]. Unfortunately, the topic is barely touched upon at a theoretical level, which should be seen as a missed opportunity for the introduction of a new outlook into this part of the monograph.

Another drawback of the book arises from the theoretical framework used in the research. One of the problems of the role theory in the field of foreign policy analysis is whether it is possible to describe a state's foreign policy in an approximately complex way by using selected case studies (e.g. the role of the mediator in the Middle East). It seems reasonable that the author should, albeit briefly, have defined the other roles that Brazil played in the period between 2003 and 2014, e.g. the role of the leader of regional integration, and, furthermore, indicate why the selected roles are described in greater detail, based on a research gap in literature. It should also be noted that the book replicates the popular trend of failing to include a commentary on the methodology applied in the research in the introduction section.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings do not affect the overall merits of this publication: the combination of the theoretical framework and the research area is, in my opinion, an innovative and valuable contribution to the literature on this subject. Thanks to its broad references to theoretical debates in international relations scholarship and contemporary political events in Brazil, the book can appeal to audiences broader than circles of experts in Latin American politics, such as scholars and observers interested in middle power diplomacy. In addition, this book has an undeniable potential to provide ideas which could be enriched and expanded by the author herself and other researchers at both theoretical and analytical levels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Breuning, M., Thies, C.G. 2012. *Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory*, "Foreign Policy Analysis", vol. 8(1), pp. 1–4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00169.x>.
- Burges, S. 2017. *Brazil in the World: The International Relations of a South American Giant*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Gawrycki, M. (ed.) 2013. *Brazylia jako mocarstwo wschodzące*, Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego, Instytut Studiów Iberyjskich i Iberoamerykańskich UW, Warszawa.
- Jordaan, E. 2003. *The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations: Distinguishing between Emerging and Traditional Middle Powers*, "Politikon", vol. 30(1), pp. 165–181. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0258934032000147282>.
- Jordaan, E. 2017. *The Emerging Middle Power Concept: Time to Say Goodbye?*, "South African Journal of International Affairs", vol. 24(3), pp. 395–412. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2017.1394218>.
- Sawicka, M. 2020. *Brazylia w systemie międzynarodowym. Role średniego mocarstwa nowego typu*, Universitas, Kraków.