Over the past decade, Brazil emerged as an economic power and an important player in global politics. Political and economic analysts prophesied that the country is finally approaching a promised future, while they continue to offer a set of conditions for that. This paper aims to analyze the emancipatory possibilities and implications of the reinvention of Brazilian identity as a powerful country of today. I argue that the narratives on Brazil's new temporal and spatial position as a member of an empowered global South are informed by a narrow conceptualization of power that overlooks the compromises and exclusions that anticipate the inclusion of the 'global south' in the global politics. Drawing on a broader notion of power as a productive force that sets the conditions for the constitution of subjects in space and time, I will reflect on the limits of the geopolitical thinking that has informed the debate on the emergence of Brazil as global player and the Brazilian campaign for a new economic geography. I discuss the possibilities that the new temporal and spatial position opens up for different subjectivities and new futures.

Keywords: Brazil - Geopolitical Power - Discourse - Future - New Economic Geography

Introduction

The continental size of the country, the stability in relation to its borders since the political independence in the nineteenth century, the use of a single language and the distance from points of tension in the international scene are all elements that justify the interpretation of Brazil as having an incredible potential that was never fully realized. In this paper, I discuss the slogan 'Brazil, the country of the future' in relation to the recent debate on Brazil's emergence to the future, or to the global stage as a challenge to the status quo.

The Worker's Party is governing Brazil since 2003 (Lula da Silva was the president for two mandates, and then Dilma Rousseff took over in 2011), and from the moment Lula became the president, he started a campaign for a reform of multilateral institutions and the construction of a new world order in which the gap between rich and poor could disappear.
During his mandate, Brazil sustained considerable economic stability and growth, being recognized by scholars, think tanks, journalists, economists and politicians as a successful and resilient country, when compared to other countries where the effects of the financial crisis were devastating.

Lula was associated with a number of audacious speeches and initiatives, and an unshakeable confidence that the time for Brazil to assume its preeminent place in global politics had arrived. This paper starts to analyze the discursive formations that enabled Brazil to claim a new geopolitical position for itself and the limitations of the campaign for a new geography of world economy, based on a 'southern' coalition against the domination of the rules of international market by the North.

**Brazil: the country of the future presents**

Since the publication of *Brasil: um país do futuro* (Brazil, the country of the future), in 1941, written by Stefan Zweig, an Austrian who immigrated to Brazil escaping from Nazism, this title became a slogan of Brazilian political identity that is visited and revisited by sociologists, anthropologists, and mainly by politicians and economists. Initially meant to express Zweig's astonishment at Brazil's natural and social resources endowments and a positive expectation about Brazil's future, it was then linked to the (self-)deprecating proverb "Brazil is the country of the future, and always will be", that expresses both the recognition of Brazil's potential and the frustration about its non-realization.

The slogan was created in the mid-twentieth century, but not long after Brazil's independence, Brazilian government already represented itself as a big country that was entitled to a preeminent position in international politics. In 1908, Brazilian ambassador Joaquim Nabuco delivered a speech before the Spanish club of Yale University entitled *The
spirit of Nationality in the History of Brazil. In this occasion, he asserted, "Brazil has always been conscious of its size and has been governed by a prophetic sentiment with regard to its future" (Nabuco, 1908).

As the world's fifth largest country, with the fifth biggest population (IBGE, 2013), a GDP of $2,252,664 in millions (World Bank, 2012), the stability of its borders, and its biodiversity, the country is frequently defined as naturally endowed with the resources to assume its role of 'big' country in the shaping of the international order (Lafer, 2000, 208; De Lima, 2006, 21), or more recently referred to as the sleeping giant that might be awakening to "finally fulfill its long-unrealized potential as a global player" (De Onis, 2008, 110).

Lafer (2000) and De Lima (2006) point out that Brazil has been historically integrated to the international system as an active member of international institutions since the nineteenth century. Brazil was a belligerent country in the two world wars, it was present at the Paris Conference in 1919, it was a member of the League of Nations from 1919 to 1926, it is one of the founding fathers of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and participated in the meetings that resulted in the creation of the multilateral order after 1945, what include its role as a founding member of the United Nations. However, the country was never in a position to influence the rules that guide the relations between states and to challenge the normative framework constituted by the so-called great powers.

Despite the historical membership and participation in global forums, the debate on the emergence of Brazil as an economic power that legitimizes the recognition of its geopolitical relevance is associated with the last decade. As Roett (2010) emphasizes, “Brazil’s emergence as a player in international affairs is of recent vintage” (149). It must be noted here that being historically an active member of international institutions and claiming for a particular position based on a certain self-representation is different from becoming a global player, recognized by others and able to influence the normative framework.
In his visit to Brazil in 2011, Barack Obama told a cheering audience in Rio de Janeiro:

For so long, Brazil was a nation brimming with potential but held back by politics, both at home and abroad. For so long, you were called a country of the future, told to wait for a better day that was always just around the corner. / Meus amigos, that day has finally come. And this is a country of the future no more. The people of Brazil should know that the future has arrived. It is here now. And it’s time to seize it. / Now, our countries have not always agreed on everything. And just like many nations, we’re going to have our differences of opinion going forward. But I’m here to tell you that the American people don’t just recognize Brazil’s success — we root for Brazil’s success. As you confront the many challenges you still face at home as well as abroad, let us stand together — not as senior and junior partners, but as equal partners, joined in a spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect, committed to the progress that I know that we can make together. (Applause.) I'm confident we can do it.

What did it mean to hear from Barack Obama that the future of Brazil had arrived and that American people recognized Brazil's success? These statements about the ‘future’, or about the authority of some to recognize Brazil’s temporal stance are rarely problematized. In 2012, there are a number of publications in newspapers and economic reports revisiting the definition of Brazil as 'the country of the future'.

Andrés Velasco, former finance minister of Chile and visiting professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, wrote an article to project-syndicate.org entitled Brazil, Country of the Future No more? in which he analyze Obama's declaration. He argues that there are some facts to support the notion of Brazilian realization of the future. Looking back at the past events, he identifies the democratic government, Brazilian participation at much-publicized BRICS Summits, the fast recovery of Brazilian economy during the last financial crisis, the attractiveness of capital, and stable macroeconomic situation. On the other hand, he understands that there are still the questions of how much how fast and for how long Brazilian economy can grow.

Velasco contends that there are still reforms to be made, such as freeing up resources for public investment, where 'progress' has been slow. He argues that Brazil must build new
roads, ports, and airports, create new exports and higher-paying jobs. At the end, he contends that "Brazil will be the country of the present and the future" if successfully implementing these reforms to further modernization.

At the end of the same year, an article was published at The Economist entitled "Will Brazil remain the country of the future?" In this article, Brazilian and Mexican economies are compared. Future is again defined by productive capacity and the answer to the question in the title of the article is: it depends on how Brazil can grow economically. It is worth noting that economic growth is split into three categories: human capital, physical capital, and total factor productivity, suggesting a condition for progress that necessarily involves the transformation of societies in a productive mass.

BBC News also featured an article entitled Brazil: No longer 'country of the future', written by Silvia Salek. She highlights the fact that Brazil had overtaken UK in 2012 as the sixth-biggest economy in the world. Brazilian resilience against the financial crisis is interpreted as Brazilian 'good fortune'. She asserts that despite its 'lower-than-expected' economic growth since 2011, the old tag of "country of the future - and always will be" is "starting to sound less of a joke and more like a promise to be fulfilled".

According to Salek, some signs that Brazil is closer to the fulfillment of the promise are: Brazilian consolidation as an agricultural superpower, the payment of its debt to IMF, the discovery of massive oil reserves in the Atlantic and the more assertive diplomacy. With Brazilian confidence reconstructed through its economic development, Brazil "start to break through the stereotypical image when it was often seen by others as only being the land of football and samba" (Salek, 2012).

There are a lot of assumptions in these articles that can only be identified through the destabilization and de-naturalization of the meanings ascribed to the concepts that constitute these analyses, like 'future' and the relationship between temporality and the normative
framework that is assumed. Economists embody the role of fortunetellers, as they know the future, they know what the approaching of the future looks like, and they are able to tell if these emerging economies are closer or farther from the future by looking at specific signs.

The connection between geography and history has been taken for granted in the 'prophecies' about Brazil's future and diagnoses about its current position in time. Being in the future is associated with standing out as a global power. Power is in the future, shared by people in the future. Temporal and spatial categories are often used interchangeably in the old and new analysis about what/where the country in relation to what/where it should be. The 'rise' or 'emergence' to its (almost) 'future' or (almost) position of 'global player' are informed by a conventional understanding of geopolitics that reduces the possibilities of politics and history to determined representations of space.

The literature on the emergence of Brazil as a global actor focuses on the domestic and international conditions for a more assertive position of Brazil in global affairs. The studies vary in their optimism in relation to the country's capabilities or willingness to challenge the status quo. However, economic growth is inadvertently set as the condition through which the country seems to approach the time and the space from where it may have the chance to speak of a new world order.

**The New International Economic Geography**

Lula’s anti-imperialistic ideology was explicit in his tone, his emphasis on inequality and his call for a more democratic world order. He reiterated his “life-long commitment to those silenced by inequality, hunger and hopelessness” and cited Franz Fanon on the legacy of the colonial past that determined the kind of freedom decolonization offered to these
people: “If you so desire, take it: the freedom to starve” (Da Silva, 2004, 1; Burges, 2013, 581).

Addressing an audience of 191 Nation-States, Lula reminded them that 125 countries, including Brazil, were subject in the past to the oppression of a few powers that occupied less than 2% of the globe. He acknowledged the advancements towards a postcolonial democratic order, but expressed his view that the configuration of the international institutions still hinders a greater participation of the south in the global economy and political debates.

Lula has emphasized the need for both a conceptual revision and a practical reform of major multilateral institutions (De Lima & Hirst, 2006, 22), such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. A particular concern over the unequal distribution of power and wealth within these institutions resulted in a strong campaign for a democratization of the world order through a reform of these frameworks.

Lula emphasized in his speeches the constitution of a new international economic geography as a way of balancing against the historical hierarchies of the international:

It is essential to carry on building a new world economic and commercial geography which, while maintaining the vital ties to developed countries, allows for the establishment of solid bridges among the countries of the South, which have remained isolated from one another for too long (Da Silva, 2004, 3).

The slogan on the 'new geography for world trade' does not advocate for an isolationism in relation to the 'North', but it calls for an alignment among developing countries that allows them to present a united front against rich countries (De Almeida, 2010, 172), instead of remaining conditioned by rich countries’ predominant views or demands. In this sense, Lula has tried to mobilize the 'developing world' for an agenda that focused on the balancing of 'power'.

The new strategy of Brazilian foreign policy has been to emphasize South-South cooperation, the establishment of new relations with non-traditional partners, and the
formation of coalitions with other developing states. The argument that Brazilian alliances with the Third World is an attempt to reduce the asymmetries in relation to the US and EU while becoming part of an anti-hegemonic counter-power is widely recognized in the literature (Sotero & Armijo, 2007; Vigevani & Cepaluni, 2007, 2009; Cervo, 2010; De Almeida, 2010; Roett, 2010; De Lima & Hirst, 2006; Dos Santos, 2011).

The need for alliances to balance the relations between "North" and "South" also translates into the need for institutions that enable the encounters and the fair negotiation of divergent interests. Cervo (2010) highlights the importance of multilateralism for Brazil's rise to the global stage, but especially for the democratization of the world order. He argues that a multilateral order and reciprocity in all areas - economy, trade, security, environment, health, and human right - ensures that the rules benefit all (11). Multilateralism has existed without reciprocity, in which the asymmetries have favored the dominant countries. Brazil advocates for a reciprocal multilateralism (Cervo, 2010, 11) where the order is not structured for the benefit of the stronger.

Some signs of Brazilian intention to expand its role in multilateral institutions, but also in regional politics and Third World agendas are highlighted: the creation of a South America Community; activist policies and positions in trade negotiations; the formation of South-South coalitions (G20 and the Dialogue Forum IBSA - India, Brazil and South Africa); the promotion of its own candidates to head the World Trade Organization and the Inter-Development Bank, and finally, the campaign for a reform of the United Nations Security Council through which Brazil would be elevated to the position of permanent member (De Lima, 2006, 22). We may also add the formalization of the grouping BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa since 2010), that will hold their sixth summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in July of 2014.
In order to illustrate Brazil's initiative under this new paradigm of shifting the geography of the world trade, the next section discusses the formation and Brazilian leadership of the G20 within the scope of the World Trade Organization.

The Commercial G20

The commercial G20 is constituted by countries from 3 different continents, like South Africa, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Cuba, Egypt, Ecuador, Philippines, Guatemala, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Paraguay, Thailand, Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. The coalition was formed during the Ministerial Meeting in Cancún, in 2003, after another failure of the countries to reach agreement on the larger Doha Round.

According to data from the MRE (Brazilian External Relations Ministry), the group represents 60% of the world's rural population, 21% of the world's agricultural production, 26% of world's exportations and 18% of world's importations. These countries, led by Brazil, advocate for an ambitious accomplishment of the three pillars of the Doha Round's agricultural mandate: access to markets (tariffs reduction), elimination of subsidies to exportation and the reduction of the domestic subsidies to production.

Some scholars interpret the coalition as a renewal of the "third worldism" of the Cold War, but united around the agricultural interests of developing countries (De Lima, 2005, 20). Others emphasize Brazilian position as a leader of the coalition and an important bridge between "old and new powers" (De Almeida, 2010, Roett, 2010, Burges, 2013). De Almeida (2010) stresses that the commercial G20 created at the Cancun Ministerial Meeting was a "strong expression of Brazilian leadership in trade negotiations, and an alternative to old negotiating schemes" (172).
Burges (2013) notes that Brazil became a key bridge to the South for the US and EU, "organizing and restraining dissenting voices in the South and using an extended process of consultations and policy discussions to discipline dissenting voices that could have created a [...] rupture" (585). De Lima (2005) argues that the G20 exposed the "hypocrisy of the negotiating position of developed countries" (20). Cervo (2010) reiterates that the pursuit of actual interdependence, instead of dependence on the willingness of developed states to play a fair game, is a characteristic of Brazil's international economic relations (11).

According to Celso Amorim, the Brazilian Ambassador leading the negotiations, the G20 was formed when the US and EU were trying to impose an unfair agreement that did not touch upon the issues that could benefit developing countries, while they were demanding disproportionate concessions (quoted in Cervo, 2010, 11). In another moment, Celso Amorim (2006) argued that one could affirm, with no risk of exaggeration, that the G20 changed the geopolitics of the international negotiations on agriculture.

It has been said that the commercial G20 changed the traditional dynamics of the negotiation, and successfully managed to challenge the distortions that result from the practices of developed countries. The developing countries in the G20, despite the fact that they share different interests and agendas, agree that the unwillingness of the developed countries to cooperate and reduce the distortions of world trade in agriculture affect immensely the people living in agricultural communities (Amorim, 2006).

In an interview to The Guardian, Celso Amorim (2005) affirmed that the developed countries "could not afford to keep the inequalities [and] to widen the gap between developing countries and developed countries". To the questions about the lack of compatibility of interests in the group, he answered:

The need to dismantle the absurd subsidies which distort world trade and which create hunger in the third world. We are talking about 60%-70% of mankind, something like
50% of agricultural production. Real reform is what will help countries like Burkina Faso, like Chad [and] Benin.

In 2012, an article published in *Foreign Policy* discussed the role of Antonio Patriota, Brazilian Foreign Minister under the administration of Dilma Rousseff, in the negotiations. David Rothkopf (2012), analyst of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, argued that Patriota was moving beyond the era in Brazil's foreign policy when it was groundbreaking to have the country look outside its region and play an active role in global affairs to a period, not too many years from now, when Brazil, as a country with one of the world's five largest economies and populations, as a world leader in agribusiness and energy, is unhesitatingly assumed to deserve its place at the table.

The most common interpretation of the G20 coalition accepts that the group represents a successful challenge to the United States and European Union, especially after the successful outcome of the Bali Conference at the end of 2013 (See Ranjan, 2014). According to this interpretation, Brazil, as the leader of the group, was able to elevate the 'developing world' to a level from which communication and negotiation with the 'developed world' became possible, what makes the conclusion that the disparities between these two 'worlds' are diminishing reasonable.

**Geopolitical Power**

My argument in this paper is that this optimistic 'reading' of the emergence of Brazil is informed by a narrow conception of power. The re-mapping of the world trade and the more preeminent presence at the negotiation table in multilateral institutions like the WTO does not really challenge the hierarchical structures of the international when we do not take the spatial and temporal categories in the statements about the empowerment of Brazil for granted.
Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew (1992) reminds us that traditionally, geopolitics concerns the “geography of international politics, particularly the relationship between physical environment (location, resources, territory, etc.) and the conduct of foreign policy” (191). Geographers like Ratzel (1940) and Mackinder (1904) developed an understanding of foreign politics that was necessarily influenced and/or determined by the geographical setting. In the first part of the paper, I show that it is this classical understanding of geopolitics that justify Brazil’s understanding of its own destiny as a global player, when we take into account the natural resources and the size of its territory and population. It is through this particular spatial representation that the emergence of the country and idea that Brazil was closer to a position where it was always supposed to be has been naturalized.

The debates about whether or not Brazil is 'there' depart from a set of assumptions about the 'now' and the 'there' without problematizing them. By the same token, Brazil's statements about the 'writing' of a new geography, is held to be non-discursive, "separated from the social, political and ideological dimensions of international politics (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992, 192).

When geopolitics is reconceptualized as a discursive practice, "by which intellectuals of statecraft 'spatialize' international politics in such a way as to represent it as a 'world' characterized by particular types of places, peoples, and dramas (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992, 192), the empowerment of Brazil may be seen as enabled within a field of possibilities and reasoning where the possibility of Brazil's future is actualized.

In the field of possibilities and reasoning for Brazil's emergence to the 'global future', power seems to be conceptualized as both relative and material. In Lula's statements, and from the perspective of Brazil as the leader of the G20 in the
negotiations in the World Trade Organization, the distribution of resources matter as one of the defining principle of power. According to former Brazilian president Lula, power needs to be re-distributed, and by redistribution of power he means the de-centralization of world trade and the de-concentration of wealthy.

Power is also relative, in the sense that Brazil led a coalition of developing countries in order to balance against what they defined as the 'developed world's' determination to maximize their interests in the negotiations at the WTO in detriment of the poorest countries. The effort to balance power within the framework of multilateral institutions means that absolute gains (the liberal institutionalist notion that cooperation can benefit everyone) are not desirable. Considering the disparity between developed and developing countries' positions, any negotiation would only be acceptable to the extent it reduces the gap. And the reduction of this gap of power depends on an unequal distribution that favors the 'developing countries'.

The point here is not to criticize development or the attempt to reduce poverty but to expose the limits of this notion of 'empowerment' by problematizing the spatial and temporal representations that are usually taken for granted in this understanding of power. There are a lot of assumptions in this discourse, like: (1) the future is necessarily achieved through economic growth and modernization; (2) the developing world should focus on its competitive advantage in agriculture and be allowed access to the market in the developed world; (3) countries from the developing world that are able to develop faster are recognized as systemically important actors in negotiations of international rules regarding international economy. The discourse is both reinforcing a certain international division of labor, and the terms of the competition.

What kind of alternative future is written by Brazil? Ashis Nandy (2007) observes that "nothing succeeds like success. It is more difficult to admit that all criteria, except
the ones handed down to us by dominant global conscience, are being either pre-empted or rendered obsolete" (175). Any state of being that is not evolved to its full capacity is defined as incomplete. There is no full existence or hope for success if not through adherence to the accelerated time of modernity and globalization, but "modernity has a meaning only when connected to the concrete contemporary practices of the core" (Luke, 230).

The condition of possibility for Brazil's future is also the condition of its impossibility. The process through which Brazil claims to re-map the world from the South for the South reinforces the link between particular representations of geography and history. They are not drawing any new lines or questioning the old boundaries between powerful and powerless, or future and past. At most, they are coloring an existing map.

As Ó Tuathail (1996) points out, investigating the textuality of geopolitics involves engaging the "historical, geographical, technological, and sociological contexts within which these texts arise and gain social meaning and persuasive force" (57). Before tripling the exports and becoming an agricultural superpower, any claims of authority was not intelligible and Brazilian representatives were just ignored in their spatial and temporal position from where voices do not reverberate. Understanding geopolitics as discourse allows us to ask what rules permit us to identify some statements as true or valid and not others. It seems that the rule to be recognized as a country whose participation in the decision-making process matter is the extent to which the country is associated to what is regarded as a value. It is clear that Brazil did not write the rules for its new positioning in the future or as an important actor of international politics.
The underside of Brazilian geopolitical power is that what led the country to the recognition of its role in global politics returns to the country as an oppressive force. It is in the future and how it is represented that one still finds the possibility for dialogue, negotiation or power. We hear all the time about the current transformations of the world order, as if the expectations about pre-determined associations of space and politics were challenged. However, in these narratives about geopolitical changes, they are not questioning the rules that enable one to create the rules.
Bibliography


