(Re-) imagining the 'Self' of Ontological Security

Vieira, Marco

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(Re-)imagining the 'Self' of Ontological Security: The Case of Brazil's Ambivalent Postcolonial Subjectivity

Marco A. Vieira
University of Birmingham, UK

Abstract
In this article, I critically engage with and develop an alternative approach to ontological security informed by Jacques Lacan's theory of the subject. I argue that ontological security relates to a lack; that is, the always frustrated desire to provide meaningful discursive interpretations to one's self. This lack is generative of anxiety which functions as the subject's affective and necessary drive to a continuous, albeit elusive, pursuit of self-coherence. I theorise subjectivity in Lacanian terms as fantasised discursive articulations of the Self in relation to an idealised mirror-image other. The focus on postcolonial states' subjectivity allows for the examination of the anxiety-driven lack generated by the ever-present desire to emulate but also resist the Western other. I propose, therefore, to explore the theoretical assertion that postcolonial ontological security refers to the institutionalisation and discursive articulation of enduring and anxiety-driven affective traces related to these states' colonial pasts that are still active and influence current foreign policy practices. I illustrate the force of this interpretation of ontological security by focusing on Brazil as an example of a postcolonial state coping with the lack caused by its ambivalent/hybrid self-identity.

Keywords
ontological security, postcolonial subjectivity, Brazil

Extrait
Dans cet article, je m'attache à faire une étude critique et à développer une approche alternative de la sécurité ontologique informée par la théorie du sujet de Jacques Lacan. Je défends la thèse selon laquelle la sécurité ontologique est liée à un manque, c'est-à-dire au désir constamment frustré de donner des interprétations discursives significatives à son propre soi. Ce manque est la source d'une anxiété qui se manifeste comme un élan affectif et nécessaire du sujet vers la recherche continue, mais élusive, d'une cohérence du soi. Je théorise la subjectivité en termes

Corresponding author:
Marco A. Vieira, Department of Political Science and International Studies (POLSIS), University of Birmingham, Muirhead Tower – Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK.
Email: m.a.vieira@bham.ac.uk

lacaniens comme un ensemble d'articulations du Soi discursives et fantasmées qui ont partie liée à l'image miroir renvoyée par un autre idéalisé. Se concentrer sur la subjectivité dans les États postcoloniaux permet d'étudier ce manque créateur d'anxiété qui est causé par le désir permanent d'imiter, mais aussi de résister à cet « idéal d'ego » que représente l'autre occidental. Je propose donc d'examiner l'assertion théorique suivante: la sécurité ontologique postcoloniale fait référence à l'institutionnalisation et à l'articulation discursive de traces affectives durables, nées de l'anxiété, qui sont liées aux passés coloniaux de ces États toujours actifs qui influencent des pratiques actuelles de politique étrangère. J'illustre la puissance de cette interprétation de la sécurité ontologique en prenant le Brésil comme exemple d'État postcolonial devant faire face au manque causé par son identité pour soi ambivalente/hybride.

Mots-clés
sécurité ontologique, subjectivité postcoloniale, Brésil

Resumen
En este artículo abordo y desarrollo críticamente un enfoque alternativo a la seguridad ontológica delineada por Jacques Lacan en su teoría del sujeto. Argumento que la seguridad ontológica se asocia a una falta; esto es, al deseo siempre frustrado de construir interpretaciones discursivas significativas sobre uno mismo. Esta falta genera angustia, la cual funciona como impulso afectivo y necesario del sujeto hacia una continua, si bien esquiva, búsqueda de autocoherencia. Teorizo acerca de la subjetividad en términos lacanianos como articulaciones discursivas imaginarias del Yo, en relación con un otro que es una imagen especular idealizada. El hecho de centrarse en la subjetividad de los Estados poscoloniales permite examinar la falta impulsada por la angustia, generada por el constante deseo de emular, pero también por el deseo de resistencia al «ego ideal», representado por el otro occidental. Propongo, entonces, examinar la afirmación teórica acerca de que la seguridad ontológica poscolonial se refiere a la institucionalización y a la articulación discursiva de marcas afectivas impulsadas por la angustia que son perdurables y que están relacionadas con el pasado colonial de estos Estados, y que a su vez se encuentran aún activas e influyen en las prácticas actuales de política exterior. Pongo de manifiesto la importancia de dicha interpretación de la seguridad ontológica al recurrir al caso de Brasil como ejemplo de un Estado poscolonial que debe lidiar con la falta causada por su identidad híbrida/ambivalente.

Palabras clave
seguridad ontológica, subjetividad poscolonial, Brasil

Introduction

In this article, I critically engage with and develop an alternative approach to ontological security informed by Jacques Lacan's theory of the subject. I argue that ontological security relates to a 'lack'; that is, the always-frustrated desire to provide meaningful discursive interpretations to one's Self. This lack is generative of anxiety which functions as the subject's affective and necessary drive to a continuous, albeit elusive, pursuit of self-coherence. In this sense, I theorise ontological security in Lacanian terms as fantasised interpretations of the Self in relation to an idealised mirror-image other. The focus on postcolonial states' subjectivity allows for the examination of the anxiety-driven lack generated by the ever-present desire to emulate but also resist the 'ego-ideal'[1] represented by the Western other.

I am interested in the subjectivity of postcolonial states because of their ambivalent/ hybrid self-understandings as members of an international society still dominated by the cultural values and identity markers associated with Western coloniality, in which colonised peoples were perceived as inferior and in need of permanent tutelage.[2] I propose, therefore, to explore the theoretical assertion that the ontological security of postcolonial states is the result of the institutionalisation and discursive articulation of enduring and anxiety-driven affective traces related to these states' colonial pasts that are still active and influence current foreign policy practices. This core theoretical claim is intended as a heuristic device to empirically examine the single case of Brazil. However, I believe it could be productively expanded to the examination of a considerable number of other postcolonial and non-Western states.

In her seminal book, Ayşe Zarakol has persuasively argued that societies in three non-Western states, Turkey, Japan and Russia, are psychologically driven by a shared sense of ontological insecurity resulting from a historically situated process of international stigmatisation.[3] She draws together the notions of 'stigma' and 'modernity' as the dominant cultural, social and material criteria of civilisation and progress that have historically established a hierarchical international order of 'superior' insiders and 'stigmatised' outsiders.[4] As a critical elaboration on Zarakol's original insight, in this article I aim to further theorise and empirically investigate the psychological residual effects, at the state level, of what she has astutely identified, at the structural/symbolic level, as the 'larger normative context of international stigmatisation'.[5]

Yet, my conceptualisation of postcolonial ontological (in-)security is primarily entangled with the signifier of race, which I take as the key ordering principle of 'coloniality' rather than 'modernity'. In my view, the established/outsider dynamic of stigmatisation delineated by Zarakol does not sufficiently incorporate the international racial hierarchies that have profoundly shaped the psyche of postcolonial states.[6] Furthermore, unlike her empirical interest in former non-Western empires, I engage here with the subjectivity of postcolonial states that have experienced direct and sustained colonial domination by Western European powers. I focus the analysis on the emotional trauma resulting from the unique condition of colonial subjugation which, notwithstanding some very interesting parallels, is significantly different from Zarakol's conceptual discussion of the stigma associated with defeat and the loss of empire by Turkey, Japan and Russia.

1. Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, and London: MIT Press, 2007), 24.
2. On the notion of coloniality, see for example, Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–32 and Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
3. Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
4. Ibid., 54.
5. Ibid., 57.
6. Zarakol applies Nobert Elias' established/outsider distinction to explain how established Western states make non-Western states feel as if they were outsiders, leading to self-stigmatisation. Ibid., 10–11.

The present study's focus on ontological security is due to being originally an approach grounded in psychoanalysis, therefore theoretically equipped to deal with questions regarding the link between the affective and discursive dimensions of subjectivity. Interestingly, however, this link has been largely neglected in most of the ontological security literature in IR.[7] Therefore, by taking a Lacanian approach to ontological security, my contribution is to unfold a productive and unexplored path to the examination of subjects' emotional attachments to particular self-identifications, which is also an important gap in the IR literature on social constructivism.[8]

The analytical focus is on the historically situated affective sources and discursive processes of identity construction among elites who claim to speak on behalf of the Brazilian state and who are placed in dominant 'subject-positions'[9] within its institutional foreign policy apparatus. Following a process of bureaucratic consolidation initiated in the 1930s, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry (commonly known as Itamaraty) gradually became, and still currently is, the dominant institutional framework for the production and socialisation of Brazil's international autobiographical narratives.[10] According to Janice Bially Mattern, political actors' attempts to rhetorically lock-in and perpetuate existing identities are a form of 'power enacted through the narrative gun'.[11] The case of Brazil is noteworthy because of the diplomatic elites' autonomy to construct and enact the 'narrative guns' of foreign policy making. These have creatively articulated a hybrid postcolonial self-understanding, merging Western and non-Western identity markers, yet favouring the former, as the significant desired other.

Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's critical sociology, I assume the state not as a unitary and reified entity but, instead, as historically constituted by dynamic relations between multiple fields of socialised subjectivities and 'habituated practices'.[12] Brazil's foreign policy establishment could be understood as one such 'dominant field' of the Brazilian

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7. Important exceptions include, Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Badredine Arfi, 'Fantasy in the Discourse of Social Theory of International Politics', *Cooperation and Conflict* 45, no. 4 (2010): 428–48; Charlotte Epstein, 'Who Speaks? Discourse, the Subject and the Study of Identity in International Politics', *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011): 327–50; Ty Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

8. For a still up-to-date critical assessment of constructivist attempts to integrate emotional phenomena into IR, see Andrew A. Ross, 'Coming in from the Cold: Constructivism and Emotions', *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 2 (2006): 197–222.

9. Epstein, 'Who Speaks?', 328.

10. Brent Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

11. Janice Bially Mattern, 'The Power Politics of Identity', *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 3 (2001), 352.

12. By adopting Pierre Bourdieu's interpretation of *habitus* and the *field*, I avoid in this article a discussion of state's personhood and the agency-structure dichotomy. For well-established examples of this ontological position in the discipline of International Relations (IR), see Vincent Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities',

state's institutional apparatus. In this regard, it is important to clarify that, according to the ontological position taken here, states possess emotional/psychological properties only insofar as collective affective experiences of individuals have been discursively articulated, codified and routinised into social/institutional structures of the state and the concurrent foreign policy practices of governments. The continuity assumption relates to the residual affective dimension (or subconscious drivers), which I argue have significantly influenced Brazil's journey of self-understanding as an independent national formation. My argument theoretically assumes that the anxiety-laden condition of colonisation has left profound traces in the postcolonial subject's consciousness, which have been articulated into foreign policy discourses past and present.[13]

The method used here is based on the re-organisation and re-interpretation of a well-documented vocabulary uttered by foreign policy elites and intellectuals since independence to describe Brazil's postcolonial national ethos; but one that is incorporated into a rigorously discussed theoretical framework. This methodological approach is intended to contribute to the critique and further development of ontological security theory in conjunction with an empirically grounded interpretation of postcolonial subjectivity. In this sense, historical evidence of Brazil is introduced to illustrate the article's core theoretical assumptions and to support the plausibility of the theoretical approach offered.

I begin with a theoretical/conceptual exploration of the relationship between emotion, subjectivity and ontological security. I take a Lacanian approach to subjectivity, largely in terms of his conceptualisation of 'anxiety', 'lack' and the 'mirror stage' in the subject's psychic development, as a way to conceive an original interpretation of ontological security. Then, I offer a theoretical reconstruction of postcolonial subjectivity centred on ambivalence/hybridity between being and not being Western/modern. I suggest that this largely affect-induced ambivalence has been discursively translated into postcolonial states' self-biographical narratives and embedded into foreign policy. Finally, I illustrate the force of this reinterpretation of ontological security by focusing on Brazil as an example of a postcolonial state coping with the ontological anxiety caused by its hybrid postcolonial subjectivity.

What Does Emotion Mean to Ontological Security?

An increasing number of scholars have been concerned with the role of emotions in international relations. The scholarly interest in emotions has led to important theoretical inroads in arguing, for example, that emotions are constitutive of identities,[14] cognitive

International Organization* 62, no. 2 (2008): 257–88, Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power', *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 225–58 and Rebecca Adler-Nissen, *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

13. Vivienne Jabri, *The Postcolonial Subject: Claiming Politics/Governing Others in Late Modernity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 5.

14. Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, 'Theorizing Emotions in World Politics', *International Theory* 6, no. 3 (2014): 491–514.

beliefs and a necessary element of rationality.[15] Most empirical analyses and theoretical/conceptual engagements have focused on the role emotions play in terms of actors' reactions to (and interpretations of) international events. In the ontological security literature, emotions have also taken centre stage in empirical descriptions of individuals' and groups' lacking of a stable sense of self, leading, for example, to emotional distress and ontological anxiety.

Yet, emotion has no explicit function or independent ontological status in theoretical treatments of ontological security in the IR literature. In particular, ontological security authors, notwithstanding the framework's origins in psychoanalytical theory, have largely neglected Lacan's seminal view on the emotional appeal of discursive signifiers, which he understood as continually failing attempts of stabilising one's Self. Through a Lacanian lens, therefore, I believe one can unfold a productive and unexplored path to the examination of subjects' dynamic attachments to particular self-identifications.

Ontological security approaches to international relations largely draw on Ronald David Laing's original insight in psychoanalysis,[16] and Anthony Giddens' later usage of the term in his social theory of structuration, which claim that individuals need stable self-conceptions and are attached to daily routines as a way to deal with uncertainty in their lives.[17] These everyday practices function as psychological antidotes enabling meaningful agency and self-understanding in the face of otherwise unbearable existential anxieties. In the conventional sense, therefore, ontological security relates to the individuals' psychological ability to sustain a coherent and continuous sense of who they are.

Unlike Laing's focus on individual psychology, Giddens' contribution was to more clearly establish the intersubjective link between self-reflective individuals and the social structures they produce and participate in. These social structures are constitutive of shared conventions and social attitudes/norms which individuals need to rely upon in order to sustain their ontological security. He argues that 'what makes a given response "appropriate" or "acceptable" necessitates a shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality'.[18] The framework of reality, or social structure, engenders 'basic trust', which, in turn, allows individuals to coherently perform tasks, make decisions and also consciously reflect upon the ontological adequacy of their own autobiographies.[19] Lurking on the other side of these ontologically protective 'reality frameworks' is 'the prospect of being overwhelmed by anxieties that reach to the very roots of our coherent sense of 'being in the world'.[20]

15. Jonathan Mercer, 'Human Nature and the First Image: Emotion in International Politics', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9, no. 3 (2006): 288–303.

16. Ronald David Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).

17. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

18. Ibid., 36.

19. Stuart Croft and Nick Vaughan-Williams, 'Fit for Purpose? Fitting Ontological Security Studies "into" the Discipline of International Relations: Towards a Vernacular Turn', *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no.1 (2017): 5.

20. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 37.

In the IR literature the conventional focus on ontological security has been on either internal processes of discursive self-articulation of national biographies[21] or externally induced processes of identity creation and maintenance.[22] It has been applied to a wide range of different research questions in international relations, including, for example, the motivations behind participation in military humanitarian intervention,[23] the reasons why states become drawn into unending conflictual relations,[24] why they create and maintain international institutions[25] and security communities,[26] how trauma and memory are implicated in the production of international politics,[27] and how/why groups develop and attach themselves to religious and nationalist narratives/ideologies. [28]

Jeff Huysmans, who first introduced the ontological security concept to critical security studies, analytically separates daily security from ontological security. The former relates to strategies of physical survival in relation to identifiable threats whereas the latter concerns the ability to cope with existential uncertainty 'by fixing social relations into a symbolic and institutional order' therefore 'making life intelligible'.[29] Huysmans defines ontological security as an 'ordering activity' or one's capacity to 'manage indeterminacy'.[30]

In contrast to some recent ethical/political critiques of the concept, [31] for Huysmans ontological security does not necessarily mean a process of closure, as a way to (often violently) exclude the undetermined/unfamiliar 'Other', but the setting up of malleable 'life strategies' to cope with existential anxiety.[32] If one accepts this position, ontological

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21. See for example, Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations.*

22. See for example, Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341–70.

23. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations.*

24. Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics'.

25. Marco Vieira, 'Understanding Resilience in International Relations: the Non-Aligned Movement and Ontological Security', *International Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2016): 290–311.

26. Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, 'From Fratricide to Security Community: Re-theorising Difference in the Constitution of Nordic Peace', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 16, no. 4 (2013): 483–513.

27. Alexandria J. Innes and Brent Steele, 'Memory, Trauma and Ontological Security', in *Memory and Trauma in International Relations: Theories, Cases, and Debates*, eds. Erica Resende and Dovile Budryte (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 15–29.

28. Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religion Nationalism: Self, Identity and the Search for Ontological Security', *Political Psychology* 25, no. 4 (2004): 741–67; Brent Steele, 'Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War', *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 519–40; Jelena Subotić, 'Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (2016): 610–47.

29. Jef Huysmans, 'Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier', *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998): 242.

30. Ibid., 245.

31. See for example, Chris Rossdale, 'Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security', *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 369–86.

32. Huysmans, 'Security! What Do You Mean?', 243.

security can also be about accepting and creatively accommodating difference and ambivalence. Yet as sensible as his approach is, Huysman's theorisation does not sufficiently deal with the question of what actual function existential anxiety (or what he calls 'angst') has in the actor's operation of ontological security.

Huysmans, and the broader scholarship on ontological security, assumes that subjects only 'exist' through either single or multiple discursive representations of their selves that aim to demarcate the inside from the outside.[33] However, this ontological position does not incorporate the mechanism of emotional identification I theorise in this article. As a general case, the ontological security literature has thus far failed to investigate the role of 'anxiety' as a form of unconscious and pre-discursive energy (or stimuli) that pulls together and animates the process of discursively constructing and sustaining one's self-understanding.

In this regard, by mobilising Lacan's social-psychoanalytic approach, I conceptualise 'anxiety' *as a productive emotional force and core psychological ingredient, even necessary condition, for structuring one's subjectivity*. It bears some resemblance to Brent Steele's position, which acknowledges (albeit does not substantively engage with) 'anxiety' as the emotional motor of agents' ever-frustrated desire for ontological security. He argues that 'anxiety surrounds our sense of Self; agents are never ontologically secure. But they try and they constantly attempt to get to a more anchored position from which their decisive actions have meaning'.[34]

While exploring postcolonial subjectivity in the case of Brazil, my contribution therefore is to theoretically develop the assumption that ontological security relates to an anxiety-driven, fantasised[35] construction of the Self. That is, a lack constituted by the always-unresolved and endless pursuit of discursive master signifiers that would purportedly capture the subject's core existential meaning.[36] A sense of 'enjoyment' derives from this illusory promise of fullness, through discursive attachments to symbolic representations.[37] As Solomon points out, according to Lacan,

> When the subject approaches that which it believes will make it whole, it realizes that the imagined wholeness does not live up to the promise of the fantasy. That is, paradoxically, the

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33. For a comprehensive overview of the latest developments in ontological security research in IR, see Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, 'An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Securities in World Politics', *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2016): 3–11.
34. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 48.
35. Lacan's conceptual engagement with the notion of fantasy is significantly different from more colloquial definitions of the term. For him, fantasy means the (largely discursive) frame through which the subject is able to pursue the desire for self-understanding ('wholeness') though it is never realised; hence a fantasy. See Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, 37. On Lacan's notion of 'fantasy' and ontological security, see also, Jakub Eberle, 'Narrative, Desire, Ontological Security, and Transgression: Fantasy as a Factor in International Politics', *Journal of International Relations and Development* (online first). Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41268-017-0104-2. Last accessed June 26, 2017.
36. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).
37. Ibid., 73.

closer the subject gets to enjoyment, the more desire fades and the more anxiety sets in, since only through desire we have subjectivity.[38]

I suggest that the most basic psychological mechanism constitutive of postcolonial subjectivity relates to the anxiety associated with this ever-frustrated belief in (and pursuit of) a complete sense of selfhood.

To further clarify these ideas, it is worth looking at how the subject's anxiety-driven desire for wholeness is expressed in what Lacan calls the 'imaginary' and 'symbolic' dimensions of human subjectivity.[39] The imaginary element of subjectivity relates to the most basic building block in the constitution of the subject's imaginary identity (ego) through the identification with an idealised image of a superior other. As elaborated below, this psychological process of self-identity construction takes place in the 'mirror-stage' of a child's development and it has profound implications on the subject's self-perception and engagement with the world outside of his or herself. It is in the imaginary dimension that the anxiety-laden lack is introduced and becomes the subject's unconscious motivational force in its pursuit of ontological security.[40]

However, this process of imaginary self-identification is played out and intrinsically connected to a pre-existing symbolic order from where subjects permanently draw the master signifiers (ideals, values, conventions and meanings articulated in language) they desire to embody, emulate and obey as a way to sustain an illusory sense of psychological stability. According to my Lacanian-inspired interpretation, this broader system of signification, anchored on the idea of Western civilisational and racial superiority, is the core source of symbolic identification that unstably sustains postcolonial states' ontological security.

These processes of self-identity creation and maintenance at the imaginary and symbolic levels are discursively articulated in both the individual and institutionalised self-narratives of postcolonial states and in routinised/habituated practices within the international institutions they have collectively created such as, for example, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In this respect, the missing link in my previous work on the NAM, understood as a source of ontological security to its members,[41] was a theorisation of the emotional (desire/anxiety) dimension of ontological security, which binds together and animates collective self-identity narratives. In doing that here, my intention is to understand postcolonial agency in a single case by connecting the anxiety-permeated 'lack' experienced by postcolonial states with its translation into habituated discourses and foreign policy practices.

38. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, 49.
39. Although in this article I only focus on the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic', Lacan's late theory of the subject is also centred on the dimension of the 'real', Lacan, *Ecrits.* For an in-depth discussion of Lacan's subject of the 'real', see for example, Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*.
40. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
41. Vieira, 'Understanding Resilience in International Relations'.

A Lacanian Reading of Postcolonial Subjectivity

In this section, I explore the theoretical claim that postcolonial subjects are motivated by an unconscious and anxiety-motivated desire (in a Lacanian sense of the term) to imitate/replicate a 'mirror image' representing their former colonial masters. The mirror stage is the original instance formative of the image of the subject's 'I' in relation to a projected and idealised 'other'. We enter the symbolic order of culture, language and meaning already with an idea of an imaginary self that takes place in the 'mirror stage' of an individual's psychological development.[42] In my interpretation, the empirical substantiation of postcolonial states' ontological security derives from the multiple narrative self-articulations representing and demarcating this ambivalent, lacking subjectivity.

Lacanian theory also suggests that the subject is never fully unified into an individual ego at the 'imaginary' level. Instead, the always-illusory achievement of ontological security is dependent upon continuously embracing external identifications at the collective-level symbolic order. This means that the psychological dispositions of the colonised subject I discuss below are rooted in historically situated and wide-ranging processes of establishing and expanding a colonial hierarchy of power.[43]

The body of postcolonial theory interested in the psychologically disruptive impact of colonialism/coloniality on individual subjects offers an appropriate entry point to my Lacanian approach to postcolonial ontological security.[44] Homi Bhabha, for example, focuses on the particular ambivalent nature of postcolonial states' subjectivity.[45] Bhabha coined the term 'colonial mimicry' to explain the postcolonial subject's desire for a 'reformed, recognizable "other"' *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*'.[46] The ambivalent/hybrid vision of the colonised self that is 'almost the same, but not quite' is a 'writing', a form of discursive representation which places the postcolonial subject unstably in-between the West and the non-West.[47] Following from this idea, one could argue that postcolonial states have engaged in practices of imitation or mimicry of their projected colonisers' others according to what they considered the desired yet not fully achievable standards of Western modernity. This would allow them some enjoyment through the fantasy of discursively filling the existential lack/anxiety generated by colonial assimilation and acculturation.

Franz Fanon's theorisation of colonialism's impact on the psyche of the colonised also helps to elucidate the Lacanian schema of the present analysis. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon suggests that the subjectivity of the colonised was constructed through a politics of white assimilation leading to the fragmentation of the colonial subject. The colonised subject must wear a white mask whose imposition produces a deep sense of self-doubt,

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42. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981).
43. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism', 215–16.
44. For an interesting distinction between postcolonial and decolonial intellectual practices, see Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues', *Postcolonial Studies* 17, no. 2 (2014): 115–21.
45. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 122.
46. Ibid., 122.
47. Ibid., 181.

humiliation and, ultimately, ontological insecurity. Continually perceived as the shadow of the white coloniser, the colonial subject accepts and internalises a sense of inferiority.[48]

In the book, Fanon reveals the trauma of (mis-)recognition he experienced when a white boy, startled by his presence, shouted 'look, a negro!'. In his words, 'my body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day'.[49] To mobilise my Lacanian-inspired approach, in Fanon's scene, the boy's reaction exposes the racist socio-symbolic order in which colonialism is built and the existential anxiety/'lack' it instils in the colonised subject by violently rendering in vain its ontological security-seeking attempts to embrace the desired white/western 'master signifiers'.

W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of double consciousness further extricates the affective mechanism of the 'mirror image' I propose in this article as way to understand postcolonial ontological security. In his seminal auto-ethnographic book *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois coined the concept to explicate the emotional/psychological strain experienced by African Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including his own, of feeling as if their identities were split between 'white American' and 'black African' signifiers. Du Bois defines 'double consciousness' as 'a peculiar sensation […] this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, […] of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'.[50]

For the black subject, the white other serves to define everything that the self desires, yet, in the process, empties the original signifier of blackness. The irreconcilable distance between these two opposed imagined selves generates unsettling anxiety, and even trauma, such as in the experience described above in Fanon's encounter with a white child. This anxiety-laden desire for the 'racial identity' of the colonial master is embedded in the social-symbolic order of (post)coloniality or, in Du Bois words, in the 'colour-line' organising principle of global relations.[51] In this sense, racism, as a global and hegemonic system of social and political practice, has enabled the deformation, splitting and even destruction of pre-colonial self-conceptions given the negative assumptions and open hostility of the coloniser towards their biology and culture.

Ashis Nandy's focus on the historicity of postcolonial consciousness offers further analytical purchase to my Lacanian approach to postcolonial ontological security. For him, cultural ethnocentrism and the racist worldview that underlies Western colonialism survived after postcolonial states' political independence in the 'minds of men', in terms of the widespread internalisation, among both coloniser and colonised, of what the author calls the adult-child paradigm.[52] From the perspective of the theoretical approach offered here, this historically situated process in the development of postcolonial states' subjectivity can be understood in terms of an early 'mirror image' encounter between the

48.   Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 1986).
49.   Ibid., 110–13.
50.   W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York and Avenel: Gramercy Books, 1994), 44.
51.   W.E.B. Du Bois, ed. Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: the Essential Early Essays* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 111–15.
52.   Ashis Nandy, 'The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age, and Ideology in British India', *Psychiatry* 45, no. 3 (1982): 201.

colonised's still unformed 'ego' and the coloniser's 'alter'. Through the encounter, the postcolonial subject incorporated European colonial attitudes whereby the colonised is not seen as an individual autonomous and functional entity but represented as, for example, a collective uncivilised mass[53] or a child in a very early stage of cognitive development.[54] This means that the historical practices of European colonialism resulted in the global production and representation of colonised subjects as Europe's exotic, inferior, silenced and subaltern others.[55]

By engaging with the notion of 'coloniality', Anibal Quijano also locates the psychological outlook of the former colonised peoples in the 'symbolic order', as a product of Western colonialism. According to him, 'there was produced a new mental category to codify the relations between conquering and conquered populations: the idea of 'race', as biologically structural and hierarchical differences between the dominant and the dominated'.[56] In this sense, the postcolonial subject is the discursive reflection of opposed and unstably connected West/non-West identity signifiers.

Notwithstanding clear differences in their accounts of the postcolonial subjects' psychological contours, these authors have identified and conceptualised the existential lack, and ensuing anxiety, resulting from the postcolonial subjects' original mirror identification with an alleged superior coloniser other and their associated self-assigned inferior location in the symbolic order of (post-)coloniality.

Through the above-discussed mechanism of affective identification-imitation, traversing the imaginary and symbolic dimensions of postcolonial subjectivities, I argued in this section that postcolonial ontological security refers to subjects' anxiety-driven management of an existential lack. In the following discussion, I contend that ontological security-seeking processes of self-identification with the coloniser other at the imaginary and symbolic levels have been articulated into national autobiographical narratives and incorporated into durable and habituated foreign policy practices of the Brazilian state. As demonstrated next, in the case of Brazil, my Lacanian approach to postcolonial ontological security allows for the productive examination of foreign policy discourses and practices since the acquisition of independent nationhood.

Sources of Brazil's 'Self'

In this section, I examine Brazil's most salient national self-conceptions, which have been discursively articulated by domestic political actors from political independence in 1822 to the period of Lula da Silva's two terms in office from 2003 to 2010. What I call national self-conceptions are the elite-driven intellectual processes of discursively articulating and

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53. Jabri, *The Postcolonial Subject*, 14.
54. Nandy, 'The Psychology of Colonialism', 203.
55. See for example, Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, eds., *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); and Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).
56. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism', 216.

institutionalising Brazil's postcolonial national identity. The transposition of the state's dominant self-conceptions into foreign policy narratives is conceptualised here in Lacanian terms as a useful fantasy created to cope with the 'lack' generated in the diplomatic elites by Brazil's perceived inferior civilisational position in the socio-symbolic order it had just entered as an independent postcolonial state.

Drawing from the previous theoretical discussion, I empirically investigate Brazil's ambivalent discursive articulations of 'racial hybridity' as a core master signifier underpinning the state's national psyche. According to the argumnt put forth here, these are temporally-situated ontological security-seeking moves to accommodate elites' anxieties over Brazil's self-inflicted status as an 'inferior other'. I claim that this is originated in the 'mirror-stage' imaginary dimension of Brazil's emergence as a postcolonial subject. Yet, Brazil's discursive sources of self-identification, in relation to its always-incomplete pursuit of Western civilisational standards, are drawn from the broader symbolic order of Western postcoloniality. In this sense, my Lacanian-inspired ontological security framework interrogates the emotional-psychological aspects of Brazil's foreign policy making. It therefore contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how anxiety-led processes of self-identity construction are linked to, for example, Brazil's longterm association with Portuguese colonialism, its reluctance to join the NAM, and later – with Lula da Silva – Brazil's focus on closer cooperation with non-Western states, particularly in Africa.

In what follows, I address three distinctive historical junctions of Brazil's 'lack'. I firstly present negative hybridity as the original discursive articulation of Brazil's postcolonial ego in the process of entering the symbolic order. The point here is that the Eurocentric order of the 19th century enabled the manifestation in Brazilian elites of a sense of existential anxiety/insecurity associated with their country's perceived peripheral position in the racial hierarchy of international relations. I then historically detail versions of positive hybridity, which were dominant in Brazil for most of the 20th century, as a response to structural changes in the symbolic order of coloniality. This is followed by the examination of Lula da Silva's fundamental psychological reckoning with Brazil's anxious and lacking Self in the early 21st century. The discursive representation of Brazil's lack shifts here from the previous fantasised view of Brazil as a racially mixed and tolerant nation to the open acknowledgement of racial inequalities in the country and the foregrounding in foreign and domestic political discourses of Brazil's black/African identity markers.

From Negative to Positive Hybridity: Understanding Brazil's Narrated 'Self'

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Brazilian social thinkers, largely under the influence of theories of 'scientific racism', interpreted the impact of Portuguese colonialism on Brazil's national ethos in highly negative terms; as an incomplete, racially inferior and unfinished example of Western modernity. They promoted the racial whitening of Brazil's degenerated mixed race population through large scale white European immigration as a solution to the problem of Brazil's backwardness.[57]

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57. See for example, Nina Rodrigues, *As Collectividades Anormaes* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1939) and Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna, *Raça e Assimilação* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1938).

Interestingly, these authors' sceptical assessment of Brazil as a racially impracticable nation reveals a particular attempt to represent a lack; in terms of their understanding of Brazil's postcolonial condition as a permanently frustrated desire for a Western signifier that they wish to embrace as their own but which is never fully achievable. However, the focus of the desired other is not the former coloniser, Portugal, but towards more advanced representations of Western culture and race. Indeed, for many classic Brazilian thinkers, Brazil's backwardness was the historical effect of having had a coloniser itself racially mixed and in the periphery of Western modernity.[58]

The sense of inferiority generated by a permanently frustrated desire to reproduce Western cultural attitudes and racial physiognomies shaped diplomatic attitudes in the early history of independent Brazil. The 19th century's diplomatic intelligentsia envisaged Brazil's future through the 'mirror image' of the Western European (France and Britain, in particular) and, increasingly, North-American civilisations.[59] From independence to the initial decades of the 20th century, successive Brazilian intellectuals and foreign policy makers displayed an unmitigated reverence towards Europe and then the United States, as the desired 'mastersignifiers' of Brazil's 'incomplete' Self. [60]

Joaquim Nabuco, prominent Brazilian intellectual and Brazil's first Ambassador to the United States in 1905, actively promoted the abolition of slavery and its replacement by European migration as a way 'to bring to the tropics a Caucasian blood stream that is vivacious, energetic and healthy so that we can absorb it here'.[61] As one of the key designers of Brazil's modern diplomacy, Nabuco envisaged a foreign policy centred on close cooperation with the perceived main beneficiary of European modernity, the United States, which he described as an 'immense moral influence in the march of civilization'.[62]

Similarly, José Maria da Silva Paranhos Jr., the Baron of Rio Branco, Brazil's Foreign Minister from 1902 to 1912, promoted an 'unwritten alliance'[63] with Washington, but also acknowledged that it was '[Europe] who created us, who taught us; from her we

58. Sérgio Tavolaro criticises this body of intellectual work for relegating Brazil to a position of 'semi-modern limbo' and essentialised 'peripherality', Sergio Tavolaro, 'Existe uma Modernidade Brasileira? Reflexões em Torno de um Dilema Sociológico Brasileiro', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 20, no. 5 (2005): 22.

59. Leslie Bethell, 'Nabuco e o Brasil entre Europa, Estados Unidos e America Latina', *Novos Estudos* 88 (2010): 73–87.

60. Brazil's nationalisation as an imagined community has been the result of the gradual, albeit forceful, imposition of a totalising set of identity signifiers upon other domestic groups whose national identity claims were made invisible. For more on this, see Laura Lima, *Worlding Brazil: Intellectuals, Identity and Security* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015). On the notions of 'nationalisation' and 'imagined communities', see respectively, Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism' and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

61. Nabuco cited in Lima, *Worlding Brazil*, 32.

62. Nabuco cited in Tereza M. Dulci, *O Pan-Americanism de Joaquim Nabuco e Oliveira Lima* (paper presented at the VII Annual Meeting of the National Association of Researchers and Teachers of the History of the Americas, Campinas, Brazil, 10–13 October 2006), 4.

63. Bradford Burns, *The Unwritten Alliance: Rio Branco and Brazilian American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

relentlessly received support and example, the clarity of science and arts, the commodities of industry and lessons of progress'.[64] The imaginary dimension of Brazil's subjectivity is displayed by Rio Branco's mirror-image approach towards his choice of diplomatic appointees abroad. Thomas Skidmore notes that 'as foreign minister, he followed a "white only" policy in recruiting diplomats…he preferred the tall, blond, handsome types such as Joaquim Nabuco'.[65]

In relation to the symbolic order register of subjectivity, it is interesting to note that, prior to taking up the role of foreign minister, Rio Branco had spent almost 30 years in the racially conscious Europe of the late 19th century where, as Brazil's highest representative, he experienced and absorbed first-hand the dominant pseudo-scientific theories of white racial superiority. The legacy of this anxiety-driven interpretation of Brazil's inferior status vis-à-vis the West has had profound and lasting socio-psychological implications for its self-understanding as an independent political community.

The global financial crash of the 1930s, followed by the devastation of the Second World War, which fundamentally shook the symbolic order of coloniality, triggered the psychological need to re-accommodate Brazilian elites' fantasied identification with their ideal Western other. In this sense, Brazil's desire to find symbolic identifications as a way to manage existential anxiety, hence ontological security, was channelled through the discursive construction of Portuguese colonialism as a positive and unique symbol of Western modernity.

The Brazilian writer, Gilberto Freyre, particularly his 1933 book *Casa Grande e Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves), was the most powerful intellectual conduit for this new interpretation of Brazil's self-identity.[66] Freyre's theory of *lusotropicalismo* postulates that Brazil's experience with Portuguese colonialism, largely in relation to Portugal's unique aptitude to cultural integration and racial miscegenation, created in Brazil 'another West', 'different and better than Europe and the United States'.[67]

This paradigm was further reinforced by the publication of Sergio Buarque de Holanda's *Raízes do Brazil* (Roots of Brazil), in 1936. Holanda coined the notion of *homem cordial* (cordial man) to claim that Brazil's national psychology is based on particular coexistence norms related to cordiality among different social and ethnic/racial groups.[68] Lima observes that Freyre's and Holanda's ideas 'provided a solution to the racial conundrum that had pervaded social theorizing in the previous decades'.[69]

From the early 1950s, leading Brazilian foreign policy elites incorporated into foreign policy thinking the positive hybridity national ethos initiated by Freyre and Holanda. This was reflected upon, for example, sympathetic views and actual political support towards Portuguese colonialism in Africa. Brazilian diplomats discursively articulated a

64. Paranhos Jr., cited in Dulci, *O Pan-Americanism*, 3.
65. Thomas Skidmore, 'Racial Ideas and Social Policy in Brazil', in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 12.
66. Jerry Dávila, *Hotel Trópico: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 12.
67. Ibid., 13.
68. Lima, *Worlding Brazil*, 38.
69. Ibid., 38.

Freyre-inspired ideology of *lusotropicalismo* grounded on a fantasised myth of Brazil as a successful early example of Portugal's benign form of colonialism.[70] Unlike previous interpretations of Portugal's colonial backwardness, Brazil is now presented as a successful and unique experiment with 'racial democracy', in contrast with the Anglo-Saxon model of 'superiority based on skin pigmentation'.[71]

In the context of the Cold War, the master signifier of Brazil's anxiety-driven lack is expressed in terms of using *lusotropicalismo* to assert a unique Western/Iberian identity that set Brazil closer to an idealised, even superior, Western other and further apart from other Asian and African postcolonial states.[72] In other words, the desire to be recognised as a distinct member of the select group of Western states is expressed through the Brazilian diplomatic elites' mystified idea of Brazil's unique contribution to modernity as a result of its Portuguese colonial heritage based on racial tolerance. From the early 1960s, with decolonisation ideas gaining pace in Asia and Africa, Brazil sought closer relations with other Third World states, particularly in Africa. However, notwithstanding the emergence of competing discursive articulations of Brazil's desired place in the emerging Third World symbolic order, Brazilian diplomatic elites were still firmly committed to the idea of Brazil's postcolonial exceptionalism.

Remarkably, Brazil has never joined the most emblematic Third World institution: the NAM, officially established in 1961. The symbolic structure of normative ideas, which I argue elsewhere,[73] provided NAM members with a sense of belonging and ontological security, in the otherwise anxiety-charged international environment of the Cold War, failed to attract and re-shape, to the same extent, Brazil's postcolonial self. Rather than fully embracing either Third World/black or Western/white signifiers, Brazil's 'fantasised' self-narrative of a mixed race and tolerant nation swayed its foreign policy to a different role, as a 'bridge' between, what former Brazilian foreign minister Afonso Arinos described in 1965, as a 'racial curtain' separating the West and the Third World.[74]

Under authoritarian rule, in the 1970s, ruling foreign policy elites' identification with the 'master signifier' of *lusotropicalismo* led to the increasingly awkward position of the no longer sustainable defence of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. This was clear during the month-long visit of the Brazilian foreign Minister, Mario Gibson Barboza, to the continent in late 1971, when his anti-colonial rhetoric, primarily aimed at winning over potential economic partners, generally fell on deaf ears as a result of African leaders'

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70. Rafael Leme, *Absurdos e Milagres: Um Estudo da Política Externa do Lusotropicalismo (1930–1960)* (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 2011).
71. De Menezes cited in Dávila, *Hotel Trópico*, 8.
72. During the Asia-Africa Bandung Conference of 1955, the main precursor of the NAM, Arlindo Souza argues that behind the scenes Brazilian diplomats displayed an uncompromising pro-Western, anti-communist and 'orientalist' attitude towards other participants gathered in Indonesia, Arlindo Souza, 'O Orientalismo no Lusotrópico Americano: Perspectivas Brasileiras sobre a Conferência de Bandung' (PhD diss., Fluminense Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, 2011), 198.
73. Vieira, 'Understanding Resilience in International Relations'.
74. Arinos cited in Dávila, *Hotel Trópico*, 4.

suspicions over Brazil's warm relations with Portugal and Apartheid South Africa.[75] In keeping with my Lacanian approach, this period in Brazil's process of managing its post-colonial ontological security is epitomised by the growing inconsistency between Brazil's desired positive hybridity self-identification as 'another West' and the consolidating de-colonial symbolic order of the 1960s and 1970s.

In terms of early post-Cold War diplomatic narratives, Brazil re-articulated and adapted the meaning of 'positive hybridity' signifiers to the emerging Western-led symbolic order that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the waning of the Third World movement from the 1980s. The new foreign policy language of autonomy through participation denoted Brazil's distinctive capacity to build trust relationships as an important diplomatic asset while facilitating the implementation of the standards and processes set by the Western powers and their institutions. In this regard, Brazil's accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1998, following 30 years of consistently denouncing it as an unacceptable attempt to further institutionalise the Cold War's power structure,[76] was one of the most important symbols of Brazil's reformed process of identification with the signifiers of the newly reconstituted Western-liberal symbolic order.

I argued above that, following independence from Portugal in 1822, Brazil's quest for ontological security should be understood as intrinsically connected with political elites' attempts to discursively accommodate/stabilise the anxiety-laden 'lack' generated by their perceived inferior status vis-à-vis the West. These narrated fantasies around the myth of postcolonial racial/cultural hybridity, which have over the decades produced an illusory, albeit necessary, sense of ontological security, have shaped Brazil's self-perception and resulting foreign policy ideas.

Positive Hybridity as a Reconstituted 'Master Signifier'

In 2003, the election of Luis Inácio (Lula) da Silva heralded a drastic discontinuity in Brazil's pattern of rule by privileged, often Western educated, political elites. I argue in the remainder of this article that, in this new political environment, Brazil, for the first time since independence, confronted and deliberately tried to overcome the residual affective heritage of its frustrated pursuit of a mirror-image self-perception in relation to Western civilisational/racial standards.

Under Da Silva's administration, Brazil deliberately recast early enunciations of positive hybridity by attempting to shed the element of mimicry of Western models, which have characterised previous interpretations of Brazil's role and positions in international relations. Rather than the former fantasised description of Brazil as a unique example of Western, racially mixed and tolerant democracy, Da Silva moved the focus to Brazil's hybrid, even though largely non-Western, black/African, identity signifiers. He acknowledged Brazil's close and constitutive links with Western civilisation, yet proposed a new

75. Ana Ribeiro, 'Aspects in the Construction of Brazil's Transcontinental Lusophonia', *Journal of Southern Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 58.

76. José Augusto Araújo Castro, 'The United Nations and the Freezing of the International Power Structure', *International Organization* 26, no. 1 (1972): 158–66.

attitude based on solidarity with other postcolonial states, particularly in Africa. During a tour of Southern African states, in January 2004, Da Silva stated in the Mozambican capital, Maputo, that,

> Brazilian society was built on the work, the sweat and the blood of Africans, the millions of slaves who were brought to Brazil between the 16th and 19th centuries. For that reason, Brazil is in debt to Africa – a debt which the country intends to repay by strengthening its solidarity and cooperation.[77]

In his second inauguration speech, in 2007, Da Silva affirmed that Africa was one of the cradles of Brazilian civilisation and pointed to historical racial inequality at home as one of his top policy priorities.[78] Da Silva's message evokes a strong emotional reckoning of Brazil's historical experience with blackness through slavery. In this respect, Yvonne Captain observes that with Da Silva 'the dialogue changed from one of the now-discredited concept of racial democracy to one of racial healing'.[79] Da Silva's Foreign Minister, Celso Amorim, who led 60 high-profile missions to Africa, visiting over 40 countries, also articulated a narrative that portrayed Brazil as a predominantly black nation, 'with 76 million Afro-descendants, we are the second largest black nation in the world, behind Nigeria, and the government is committed to reflect this reality in its foreign actions'.[80]

Fanon's and Lacan's insights are useful in understanding Da Silva's attempt to fundamentally confront and reconstitute Brazil's postcolonial subjectivity.[81] For both, the subject's potential for self-creation and agency is found in the space in-between the dominant system of symbolic representations and the incomplete/distorted nature of individual postcolonial subjects.[82] The colonised subject for Fanon is rooted in, albeit never fully determined by its initial condition of wearing a white mask, as a way to have his/her humanity recognised by the coloniser other. Similarly, Lacan's foundational lack is based on the idea that since the subject is unable to ever construct itself fully, there is always a continuous desire for its re-articulation in the ever-present void between the idealised image and its unfulfilled realisation.[83] Drawing on these ideas, I suggest that, unlike the previous periods examined here, Da Silva redirected Brazil's

77. Ernest Harsch, 'Brazil Repaying its "Debt" to Africa'. Available at: http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/january-2004/brazil-repaying-its-debt-africa. Last accessed October 31, 2017.
78. Andre Cicalo, 'From Racial Mixture to Black Nation: Racialising Discourses in Brazil's African Affairs', *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 33, no.1 (2014): 22.
79. Yvonne Captain, 'Brazil's Africa Policy under Lula', *The Global South* 4, no. 1 (2010): 190.
80. Celso Amorim, 'O Brazil e o "Renascimento Africano"', 25 May 2003. Available at: http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/pt-BR/ficha-pais/163-discursos-artigos-e-entrevistas/7553-artigo-do-senhor-ministro-de-estado-das-relacoes-exteriores-embaixador-celso-amorim-no-jornal--folha-de-s-paulo-o-brasil-e-o-renascimento-africano. Last accessed October 31, 2017.
81. For an earlier use of Fanon to interpret Da Silva's foreign policy, see Sean W. Burges, 'Auto-estima in Brazil', *International Journal* 60, no. 4 (2005): 1133–51.
82. Jabri, *The Postcolonial Subject*, 71.
83. Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity*, 35.

anxiety-generated desire for symbolic identifications to the discursive space of Brazil's non-Western African other.

At the imaginary dimension, Da Silva embodies the previously examined postcolonial outlook of the inferior other; a former shoe-shine boy and street vendor, coming from the neglected backlands of Brazil's Northeast, who, nonetheless, managed to reach the country's highest political office. It is reasonable to expect that Da Silva's unique personal experience with successfully breaking free from longstanding stereotypical views in Brazilian society triggered a psychological process of deep existential contestation of Brazil's mirror-image representations of Western/white superiority. At the symbolic level, Da Silva's reconfigured desire for non-Western/African signifiers converged with and was reinforced by the re-emergence of the Third World symbolic order (now rebranded as the Global South) that followed the breakdown of the Western liberal consensus of the 1990s.[84]

This process of re-signification was reproduced into the official foreign policy positions and narratives of the Brazilian state. This was the case, for example, in the intensification and expansion of development cooperation activities, the transfer of financial resources and technology, and the government's emphasis on the international communication and diffusion of Brazil's social welfare programmes, such as the *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) and *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger).[85] Abdenur and Neto argue that in Africa, particularly in Portuguese speaking countries, 'Brazil presented itself as a more sincere partner for cooperation development, devoid of the colonial legacies of Northern aid'.[86]

It is fair to say that, by assuming Brazil's superior knowledge in areas such as tropical agriculture and social welfare, Da Silva's approach has largely replicated the colonial overconfidence of Western modernisation models. Nevertheless, it is significant to the argument developed here that his reformed vocabulary provided an innovative reinterpretation of Brazil's unique experience with nation-building in relation to, yet fundamentally distinguishable from Western models. Da Silva's reformed self-narrative was predicated on the psychologically very difficult task of overcoming hierarchical racial categorisations of 'self' and 'other' that have fundamentally shaped the Brazilian national *psyche* since independence. In this sense, Da Silva and Amorim tried to overcome deeply

84. See for example, Chris Alden, Sally Morphet and Marco Vieira, *The South in World Politics* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2010).

85. Da Silva's attempt with Turkey to reach a compromise in the standoff over Iran's nuclear programme is another example of Brazil's new foreign policy attitude towards non-Western states. Da Silva has also invested in the expansion of Brazil's international relations outside conventional Western power circles through partnerships such as the Union of South American States (UNASUR), the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) and the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) group. For a comprehensive analysis of Brazil's Africa policy under Da Silva's administration, see Christina Stolte, *Brazil's Africa Strategy: Role Conception and the Drive for International Status* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

86. Adriana Abdenur and Danilo M. Neto, 'Brazil's Growing Relevance to Peace and Security in Africa', *NOREF Report* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2014), 3.

institutionalised diplomatic discourses and practices by focusing on healing Brazil's sense of inferiority. In 2010, at the end of Da Silva's second term in office, Amorim claimed that a 'profound transformation in the national collective psychology is underway […] This is a far cry from the self-demeaning mind-set that was so common in Brazil'.[87]

One interesting symbol of Da Silva's attempted re-signification of race was with regards to the question of *Quilombos* in Brazil. These were settlements of fugitive African slaves in the hinterlands of Brazil who actively resisted Portuguese colonial rule. In Brazil, *Quilombos* have generally been excluded from official images of what Brazil would like to be identified with. Rather, they have generally been associated with negative racial/social stereotypes and poverty, which were diametrically opposed to Brazilian elites' desired standards of white/Western modernity. Under Da Silva, however, the remnants of *Quilombos* communities were for the first time revered as national treasures and legislation put in place to acknowledge the government's responsibility to protect their land rights and cultural heritage.[88]

From 2011, Dilma Rousseff, Da Silva's chosen successor, carried on, even though much less enthusiastically, the process set in motion in the previous administration of reconstructing Brazil's self-perception in terms of a master signifier associated with its non-Western African roots. In 2015, her foreign minister, Mauro Vieira, observed that 'the relevance of Africa is a defining and unavoidable element for Brazil. Our country is inconceivable without the African heritage, which is a source of pride and core foundation for the construction of a fairer future'.[89] Under much more constrained economic conditions, however, Rousseff had to contend with renewed political opposition coming from conservative elites largely associated with the previously discussed negative/positive hybridity vision of Brazil's self-image.[90]

I argued in this section that, under Da Silva's leadership, Brazil's self-image became associated with overcoming the historical anxiety emanating from discursive articulations of hybridity as signifiers of an illusory desire of being of the West. It was done through discursively refocusing Brazil's positive hybridity as a diplomatic asset, which allows Brazil to 'pursue dialogue with countries of all regions, creeds, colours and backgrounds'.[91] However, unlike the previous periods analysed in this article, the main focus of identification is no longer the West, seen as a mirror image of a desired other, but a reconstructed signifier of Brazil's hybrid, albeit largely non-Western African Self.

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87. Celso Amorim, 'Brazilian Foreign Policy under President Lula (2003–2010): An Overview', *Revista Brasileira de Poliítica Internacional* 53, special issue (2010): 239.

88. Captain, 'Brazil's Africa Policy under Lula', 191.

89. Mauro Vieira, 'Discurso do Ministro das Relações Exteriores durante almoço com Embaixadores do Grupo Africano residentes em Brasília – Brasília, 20 de março de 2015. Available at: http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/. Last accessed October 31, 2017.

90. It is not in the analytical scope of this article to cover the current period of Brazil's foreign policy, suffice to say that in 2016, following Rousseff's impeachment, the new interim administration of Michel Temer, drastically reversed the direction of Lula's and Rousseff's foreign policy by pursuing a realignment with traditional Western partners in Europe and the US.

91. Amorim, 'Brazilian Foreign Policy under President Lula (2003–2010)', 207.

Conclusion

The question of how states create and reproduce national self-identifications has been given substantial attention in the discipline of International Relations (IR). In particular, the ontological security literature has usefully offered various interpretations of the psychological strategies individuals, societies and states adopt to pursue a stable sense of who they are. However, this scholarship, as well as the broader social constructivist IR literature, has thus far failed to fully understand the key role of anxiety in animating ontological security practices of states' political elites. This omission is most noticeable if one wants to apply the concept to empirically grasp processes of national self-identification in the context of postcolonial societies which have undergone the emotional trauma of colonial subjugation, particularly with regards to racial stigmatisation.

Building on Lacan's approach to subjectivity, in this article I have attempted to fill this important gap by examining the theoretical proposition that postcolonial ontological security is the representation of an anxiety-driven lack. In other words, it is an always-incomplete and partial form of self-identification that is periodically challenged, renegotiated and reinscribed. I have focused on anxiety as the core emotional force continuously driving subjects towards discursive master signifiers that would provide an illusory cover to their original lack. In this sense, I have argued that a fantasised form of ontological security is established when the anxious and the narrated selves coalesce into a functional, albeit always incomplete, subject.

I have then engaged with the postcolonial psychology literature as a way to extricate Lacan's mechanism of the mirror image in the construction of postcolonial subjectivity and how it has been reflected upon the 'symbolic order' of Western post-coloniality. The key point of interest here was to examine scholarly interpretations of how the anxiety and trauma associated with the unachievable mimicry/imitation of the white/western other has most fundamentally demarcated the postcolonial subjects' existential lack. This condition was also reproduced in the broader symbolic order through the colonial codification of the world according to hierarchical definitions centred on European modernity as the highest referential of human development. This led to the postcolonial subjects' anxiety-driven desire to constantly assign to themselves discursive meaning according to largely unattainable standards of Western modernity.

Informed by the earlier theoretical discussion, I have then moved to the historical interpretation of Brazil's lack. The case of Brazil has offered an interesting example of postcolonial ontological security whereby intellectuals and political elites have discursively inscribed Brazil's self-images in terms of historically situated narratives of negative and positive racial hybridity, which conventionally favoured Western civilisational standards. I have discussed how some core signifiers of Brazil's socio-racial makeup as a mixed race hybrid entity have been translated into foreign policy narratives and practices.

As a way to methodologically align the Brazilian case with my ontological security framework, I have empirically demarcated transitions in the dynamic discursive trajectory of Brazil's self-narratives from its early years following independence in 1822 to Da Silva's administration, from 2003 to 2010. This strategy has entailed a conceptually consistent analysis of discursive practices that produced and reproduced interpretations of Brazil's 'lack'. These have been conceptualised as:

(1) A lack that has been discursively inscribed as a *negative interpretation of Brazil's hybridity (1822–1930s)*; here my focus was on the elites' core master signifier of Western modernity and the interpretation of Brazil's alleged unviability as a civilised nation given its racially mixed constitution.

(2) A lack that has been discursively inscribed as a *positive interpretation of Brazil's hybridity (1930s–2000s)*; this phase of Brazil's process of self-identification was marked by elites' positive interpretation of Brazil's 'lusotropical' specificity, yet it was still centred on the 'desire' to be of the West, even if different or even better than conventional Western civilisational standards.

(3) The attempt by Da Silva's administration to fundamentally challenge and reconstitute Brazil's lack in terms of reforming positive hybridity signifiers along the lines of Brazil's non-Western, principally African origins (2003–2010).

By looking at the case of Brazil, I have argued that the emotionally-driven process of sustaining postcolonial ontological security cannot be fully understood without the empirical examination of the subject's discursive responses to residual yet active legacies of colonial past experiences defined in this article in terms of the mirror stage moment of a subject's 'coming-into-being'. The examination of Da Silva's two terms in office has also highlighted that the subject's continuous anxiety, while pursuing ontological security through emulating an ideal-West other, can be actively confronted. This points to an interesting, yet underexplored, example of some political actors' capacity to deliberately reflect upon and alter the innermost features of their states' subjectivity, which have historically constituted foreign policy institutions and practices.

Notwithstanding the specificities of the Brazilian case, I believe the novel theoretical insights I have offered here could work as valuable analytical tools in future research projects probing the foreign policy behaviour of other postcolonial and non-Western states. This article's theoretical model could also productively contribute to current critical debates around whether ontological security necessarily entails a process of violent closure by dominant political elites of opposing self-conceptions.[92] It could be done, for example, by using the notion of the anxious/lacking subject as an important psychological cue to interrogate the often conflictual politics of ontological security practices among social fields and agents beyond, albeit in relation to, state-originated sources of self-identification.

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92. See for example, Rossdale, 'Enclosing Critique'.

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