

# WHAT IS THE MAINSPRING OF THE BRICS? A CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to answer the question “what is the *raison d’être* of the BRICS?” from a constructivist analysis. Firstly it is presented the history of the BRICS objecting the revelation of its importance in the international system. Then are presented the BRICS’ summits, from the first one in 2009 to the last one in 2012. Next it is drawn a brief profile of each group member at the same time that are raised the main hypothesis of their motivations and interests in joining the BRICS. Secondly are presented the main concepts of IR Constructivist Theory as it is pointed out the relevance of this theory in the academic community. After a brief introduction of general concepts, specific concepts of Wendt’s Constructivism such as “IR cultures” and “levels of internalization” are explained. Thirdly the concepts of Constructivist Theory are related to the BRICS’ summits at the same that a brief constructivist analysis of the present historical context is presented, and also a few reasons that motivate conflicts or cooperation between States in the international system are indicated. Finally are presented the final remarks. Accordingly to what was analyzed it is possible to explain BRICS’ mainspring through two different perspectives, one that emphasizes a Lockean culture in which the BRICS emerges as an instrument of balance of power; and other that emphasizes a Kantian culture in which the BRICS emerges as an instrument of world peace.

Keywords: BRICS. International Relations (IR). Constructivist Theory. Constructivism. IR Cultures. Wendt.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The present work is a constructivist analysis of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) from the creation of the group in its first summit in 2009 to the fourth summit in 2012.

By constructivist analyses it is meant the identification of processes that motivated both creation and decision-making in the group through the concepts of the constructivist theory of International Relations (IR).

One of the main problems relating the studies of the BRICS is defining its kind and nature as an actor of international relations. The BRICS has not indeed a constitutive treaty, meaning it does not have the legal status of a international organization (IO). Thus the group is at the margin of public international law. But to understand it is necessary to somehow classify it in the international system (IS) or this research will deal with an organization alien to the system, which compromises critical analysis. Authors such as Fillingham (2012, p. 1) and Stuenkel (2012, p. 1) have been utilizing the term “alliance” or “political group” when referring to the BRICS. Alliance can be defined as

an agreement between States (...), explicit, (...) to watch out for certain future behavior or contingency (...), being essential that the event in which such behavior is expected is uncertain (...), (so) an alliance is a promise (...) that comprehends an assistance in the event specified in the (alliance's) treaty (...), (being such) promise mutual (...) and inserted in the sphere of national security (BERGSMANN apud REITER, et al, 2001, p. 20).

This concept is extremely important to understand the BRICS since it is essentially political and very broad; only the last element cannot be applied to the object under study. Thereafter it will be adopted Bergsmann's concept of alliance in this article since it would be incorrect to study the BRICS as an IO.

Considering Bergmann's terms quoted above, the main question in this research emerges: what is the *raison d'être* of the BRICS? And answer to this question might account the role this group intends to play in the IS.

Analyzing the BRICS' summits it can be noted a cooperative disposition in

the group at the same time there is a declared interest of restricting IOs already consolidated in the IS such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO)<sup>2</sup>, inter alia; as well as global decision-making forums such the G8<sup>3</sup>.

Both economic and demographic weight of the BRICS' countries make it a relevant actor in the IS<sup>4</sup> so, in order to comprehend the current international political scenario, studying it is very important. The main focus in this article is a political analysis of the BRICS under an academic perspective, thus the constructive theory of IR serves as a theoretical support.

In the next chapter the history of the BRICS is presented with the objective of revealing its importance in the IS, also it is draft a brief profile of each group member. After that the main concepts of constructivist theory of IR are presented, noting the relevance of this theory in the academic community, and later specific concepts of Wendt's constructivism are shown. Subsequently the concepts of constructivist theory are related to the BRICS' summits, as well as it is made a concise constructivist analysis of the IS. Finally, are presented the final considerations.

## **2 BRICS: brief history**

The acronym that names the group first appeared in a 2001 paper signed by Jim O'Neill, Head of Global Economic Research for the American financial conglomerate Goldman Sachs. The paper defended a reorganization of world

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<sup>2</sup> The World Trade Organization (WTO) was created in 1995 to supervise and arbitrate international commerce. Since September 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 Brazilian ambassador Roberto Carvalho de Azevêdo took office as the organization's Director-General. (Source: World Trade Organization).

<sup>3</sup> Originally called G7, it is a group formed by the world's seven biggest economies accordingly to the GDP of 1977 plus Russia, which joined in 1991. The group meets annually in a forum to discuss global policies in many areas, but especially in economics. (Source: G8 Information Centre).

<sup>4</sup> In 2011 the BRICS' countries represented 17,38% of the world's GDP and 41,7% of the world's population. (Sources: IMF e U.S. Census Bureau).

policymaking forums, due to the importance of the BRIC<sup>5</sup> countries in the international system (IS) (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 1).

Politically however, the BRIC was only born in 2009 when the presidents of Brazil, Russia, India and China met at the city of Yekaterinburg, Russia. The first BRICS summit had an impact on global politics, since it followed the 2008 financial and economic crisis when there was profound unsureness of the liberalization of international financial markets. Following the prevalent critical view of the international financial system (ACEMOGLU, 2009, p. 5) the BRIC leaders asked for more representation in the international financial institutions and a more stable, predictable and diversified monetary system. They also pointed out that the poorest countries were the most affected by the crisis and made a joint statement regarding Global Food Security.

The second summit happened in 2010 and took place in the city of Brasília, Brazil. In the statement the countries announced their satisfaction in the replacement of the G7 by the G20<sup>6</sup> as the main forum of global economic coordination. The group also asked for reforms in the Bretton Woods<sup>7</sup> institutions, reminding the legitimacy deficit of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The rest of the statement is very broad and concerns general global issues.

In 2011 the group met again, this time in the city of Sanya, China. This summit featured the joining of a new member, South Africa, change the acronym from BRIC to BRICS. The admission of South Africa had political motivation since South Africa has a much inferior economical weight compared to the group's other countries. According to statements by the foreign ministers of Brazil and China the admission of an African country to the group aimed to press for a

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<sup>5</sup> Here it is used the acronym BRIC without the letter "S" in the end. The acronym "BRICS", with the letter "S", is only used in reference to the group after the joining of South Africa in 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Group formed by the world's twenty biggest economies accordingly to the GDP of 2008. (Source: G8 Information Centre).

<sup>7</sup> The Bretton Woods agreements, signed in the United States of America in 1944, structured global economy after World War II, creating institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the GATT. (Source: The Bretton Woods Committee).

reform in the international financial system and increase the democratization of global governance<sup>8</sup>.

The BRICS joint statement once again exceeded the field of economics and went into many global governance issues. In more specific issues the group pointed out that the volatility of the international prices of commodities<sup>9</sup> puts in risk the recovery of global economy. Besides, the BRICS once more demanded for reforms in the IMF.

The 2012 summit in New Delhi, India, represented a possible step towards the institutionalization of the BRICS. The Master Agreement on Extending Credit Facility in Local Currency was an initiative to enable the group's countries to trade using their own currencies and by so decreasing the costs in these transactions. Besides, the Delhi Declaration, a document issued at the end of summit, defines the BRICS as a "Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity"<sup>10</sup>, defining development, reform in the international financial system, combating poverty and eradicating starvation as the main goals of the BRICS.

Until now it was presented the origin of the BRICS and what the group has been debating in their summits. However sensitize the reader to the countries that compose the BRICS, a more detailed analysis of each group member is necessary.

## 2.1 BRAZIL

Since the beginning of its republican period Brazil ambitions the role of a "great country" in global issues; a role that many Brazilian statesmen understand to be "natural" due to the country's great geographic extent, numerous population and abundance of natural resources (LIMA and HIRST, 2009, p. 43).

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<sup>8</sup> Fonte: Portal Brasil.

<sup>9</sup> "Commodities" are marketable items in brute state or products of basic commercial importance such as coffee, cereals, cotton, etc., which prices are controlled by international stock exchanges.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

Brazil actively participates in the regional integration process in South America as a member of important organizations such as the Mercosul<sup>11</sup> and the Unasul<sup>12</sup>. At the same time the country also claims a bigger role in IOs such as the UN, where it craves for a permanent seat in the Security Council (LIMA and HIRST, 2009, pg. 45).

Brazilian foreign policy through the years has trying to conquer the country's international independence at the same it avoids conflict with its northern neighbor, the United States (LIMA and HIRST, 2009, p. 62). With a US\$ 2.4 trillion GDP (WORLD BANK, 2011) Brazil has the second largest economy in America (surpassed only by the American economy with a US\$ 14.9 trillion GDP).

Domestically, it is important to mention the role of the Itamaraty in Brazilian foreign policy, an institution that according to Lima and Hirst (2009, p. 48) possesses "considerable domestic legitimacy" in its function. The efforts of Brazilian diplomacy through the years allow Brazil to have a prominent position in organizations such as the UN and the WTO today. At the same time, however, the country struggles against enormous structural and institutional difficulties that compromise the global power status craved by its leaders; (HURREL, 2009, p. 41; LIMA and HIRST, 2009, p. 73). The role of Brazil as a regional leader is undeniable; nevertheless its agro-export based economy is highly dependent on the international prices of commodities; the country's infrastructure is deficient and insufficient to sustain a big industrial development; the "Brazil cost" is high due to inefficient government institutions and very high tax rates; the country's consumer market is promising and the increase in income has been constant, but social inequity is still an enormous challenge to be overcome.

In the BRICS Brazil is the representative of Latin America. Being a historically peaceful country Brazil believes to be able of performing the role of an

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<sup>11</sup> The Southern Common Market (*Mercado Comum do Sul* in Portuguese) was created in 1991 to establish a free trade zone among its members. Its actual state is of a custom union. (Source: Mercosur).

<sup>12</sup> The Union of South-American Nations (*União de Nações Sul-Americanas* in Portuguese) was created in 2008 to be a broad zone of integration in South America, establishing a custom union, common security and monetary policies and an area of free movement of persons. (Source: Unasur).

intermediary in the BRICS, meaning an actor capable of narrowing the relations between the group's members.

## 2.2 RUSSIA

Differently than Brazil and India "Russia is not an emerging power in the conventional meaning of the expression" (MACFARLANE, 2009, p.98). Indeed the country craves to conquer its former global power position, lost after the downfall of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980's. Hurrell (2009, p.11) argues that since the 1980's Russia's reality has been "decay and power dissolution" and its foreign policy is focused in containing the loss of its influence zone inherited from the soviet era.

For many years Russia was the center of one the poles in the Cold War's<sup>13</sup> bipolar system. The dissolution of the Soviet Union led by Gorbachev at the end of the 1980's was not able to avoid the shrinking of Russian economy to almost half of its size in the previous decade<sup>14</sup>, and also did not avoid the loss of important commercial connections with its neighbors, leading Russia to an economic and social crisis in the 1990's (MACFARLANE, 2009, p. 77). Besides, the aggressive policy by NATO<sup>15</sup> since the 2000's also meant a significant loss of political and military influence by Russia in the former soviet nations<sup>16</sup>.

Another serious problem faced by Russia is the Islamic separatists groups in border regions. However the war against these groups led to a narrowing between Moscow and Washington (MACFARLANE, 2009, p. 90), especially in the UN, whose Security Council has been an important instrument in Russia's foreign policy.

Summarizing, Russia has its strategy focused in maintaining its actual power and recovering the power lost after the end of the Soviet Union. The

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<sup>13</sup> The "Cold War" is the historical period from 1947 to 1991 when the IS was divided between two large spheres of political, economic and military influence: the capitalist sphere led by the United States, and the socialist sphere led by the Soviet Union (USSR).

<sup>14</sup> Nowadays Russia's GDP is US\$ 1.8 trillion (WORLD BANK, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an organization created in 1949 to guarantee the mutual defense of the States allied to the United States during the Cold War.

<sup>16</sup> Many countries neighbors of Russia joined NATO after the year 2000.

Russian government is pragmatic and is aware of its limitations. At the same time the country is a permanent member in the UN's Security Council and is one of the few States which possesses nuclear warheads. An alliance such as the BRICS benefits Russia by approaching the country to partners such as Brazil, India and South Africa, which had never been traditional partners of Russia. In such a pragmatic view of foreign policy, the BRICS can be interpreted as a way of affirming the importance that Russia still has in global politics.

### 2.3 INDIA

In the last few years India progressed from a radical third-worldish rhetoric to a more pragmatic and flexible speech (NARLIKAR, 2009, p. 102).

India vindicates its claim for more participation in global decision-making forums in its geographic and demographic weight, and its economic development. India's GDP is US\$ 1.8 trillion (WORLD BANK, 2011).

Narlikar (2009, p. 107) points out that India became an active participant in IOs such as the UN and the WTO, where the country tries to play the role of the "voice of the voiceless" (NARLIKAR, 2009, p. 122). India claims for a permanent seat in the UN's Security Council and in the WTO it was an important leader during the negotiations of the G20. At the same time India faces profound social issues domestically: social inequity and high levels of poverty (TARIQUE, 2011, p. 6).

The search for autonomy and independence has always been constant in Indian foreign policy<sup>17</sup>. According to Hurrell (2009, p.31) the relations between India and the United States have always been difficult and did not improve with time. Nuclear tests made by India in 1998 were not welcomed by the American government, and the "war on terror" initiated by American president George W.

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<sup>17</sup> The creation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1955 in the city of Bandung, Indonesia, by Indian Prime-Minister Nehru and others Heads of State was a landmark in the assertion of an independent foreign policy by countries that, during the Cold War, did not have any interest in being part of neither the American or the Soviet influence zone.



Bush in 2001 put even more distance between them, while it approached Washington to Pakistan<sup>18</sup>.

To India the BRICS is a way of asserting its recent-earned global power status, at the same time it allows the country in distant regions barely explored by its foreign policy. It is worth remembering that besides the BRICS India narrowed its relations with Brazil and South Africa through the IBSA<sup>19</sup>. Besides, having powerful neighbors such as China and Russia, the BRICS might be seen by Indian leaders as a possibility of “bringing these neighbors to our cause”, meaning convincing them that its development is not a threat.

## 2.4 CHINA

With a US\$ 7.3 trillion GDP (WORLD BANK, 2011) China is the most powerful economy among the BRICS' countries, and the world's second most powerful (surpassed only by the American economy).

Relations between China and the US' superpower is crucial for Chinese foreign policy, as pointed out by Foot (2009, p. 145). Chinese-American relations are constantly debated between Chinese officials and scholars, however there are criticism regarding the difficulty of Chinese officials in asserting a coherent foreign policy capable of dealing with the present unipolar world order (FOOT, 2009, p. 145).

In global governance issues the UN has a central role in Chinese foreign policy. Foot (2009, p. 147) points out that China and Russia are the only emerging countries with world power status in the UN, due to its veto power in the Security Council. At the same time Beijing shows to be favorable to a reform in the Council, since it could make the Council even more legit and able before the international community (FOOT, 2009, p. 147). In the WTO, however, China shows little interest, being actually demanded by Brazil and India to be more engaged in this organization.

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<sup>18</sup> Relations between India and Pakistan are tense since their independencies in 1947.

<sup>19</sup> The India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) was created in 2003 as a way of creating an economic, political and cultural exchange between these three countries.

In regional economic cooperation organizations, however, China stands out. Along with Japan and the Republic of Korea the Chinese have taken the lead in organizations such as the APEC<sup>20</sup> and the APT<sup>21</sup>. China is also a member of the SCO<sup>22</sup>, along with Russia and other Central Asia countries.

To Chinese foreign policy the BRICS might be seen as a possibility of gaining more allies to the country's ascension to the position of superpower in the IS. The deconstruction of the image of a threatening China has been constant in Beijing foreign policy for the last few years, and the BRICS means a friendly way for China approaching different cultures and regions in the globe.

## 2.5 SOUTH AFRICA

With a US\$ 408.2 billion GDP (WORLD BANK, 2011) South Africa is the biggest economy in Africa. However its economic strength is considerably smaller compared to the other BRICS' countries<sup>23</sup>.

South Africa's foreign policy between 1945 and 1990 was totally bound to the maintenance of the apartheid regime<sup>24</sup> (BAHIA, 2000, p. 116) that lasted until 1994. Despite the "evil heritage" of the apartheid regime, the former white elite left the country with a "diversified industrial park, a modern financial and capital market system and technologic development in some areas" (BAHIA, 2000, p. 145).

Regionally, joining the SADC<sup>25</sup> in 1994 was an important step taken by the South African government towards cooperation, as well as joining the SACU<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a forum created in 1989 to promote economic cooperation between countries the Pacific region in Asia, Oceania and America.

<sup>21</sup> The Asean Plus Three (APT) is a forum created in 1992 to foster the trade of manufactured goods between nations in southeast Asia.

<sup>22</sup> The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was created to promote economic, military and cultural cooperation between Central Asia countries.

<sup>23</sup> When South Africa was invited to join the group O'Neill criticized the decision. But at a conference in South Africa in 2013 he changed his mind (PEYPER, 2013)

<sup>24</sup> The apartheid was a segregationist state policy implemented by the South African government in 1948 after the National Party won the general elections in that year. Only after intense international pressure the South African government abolished the segregationist laws in 1994.

<sup>25</sup> The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) is an organization created in 1980 to promote economic and social development of Southern Africa.

(BAHIA, 2000, p. 153). In the African Union<sup>27</sup> South Africa also stands out. As Nibishaka (2011, p. 7) points out, the country assumes the leading role without any contest. The country's economic development and peaceful transition model post-apartheid are inspiring to other African countries.

Globally South Africa is looking for a leadership role among developing countries, and more specifically among African countries. As a member of the G20 South Africa joined Brazil in the quarrels at the Doha Development Round<sup>28</sup>, with both urging for a liberalization of international agricultural commodities trade. In the UN however South Africa's role is discrete. Despite the country's plead for urgent reform in the Security Council, South African interest in Peacekeeping Missions by the UN<sup>29</sup> is little and conditioned to its own national interests (WIHARTA, MELVIN and AVEZOV, 2012, p. 15).

South Africa is a considerable less powerful country compared to its partners in the BRICS. The country's importance resides in its geographic localization. Being the most influent country in Africa its admission in the BRICS is due to the group's proposal in reforming current global institutions. To South Africa joining the alliance means a great possibility of recognition as a regional leader.

After this introduction of the BRICS and its members the Constructivist Theory of IR will be presented, since it is going to be the theoretical model for further analysis in this article.

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<sup>26</sup> The Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) is the world's oldest custom union still active. It was founded in 1910.

<sup>27</sup> The African Union (AU) is an international organization created in 2002 to replace the Organization of African Unity (OAU). All African countries are members, with the only exception of Morocco. The organization has many goals, but generally their objective is to promote peace and security; to eradicate starvation, AIDS and poverty; to accelerate economic development; and to establish more cooperation between the peoples of Africa.

<sup>28</sup> The Doha Development Round is a forum of negotiations in the WTO whose objective is to establish common trade rules among all State-members. The Round was initiated in 2001 and has not yet ended until the conclusion of this article.

<sup>29</sup> The UN's Peacekeeping Missions are operations under a mandate issued by the organization's Security Council; their goal is to maintain peace and international security.

### 3 THE CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

The constructivist theory of IR is considered today a protagonist in debates among scholars of the discipline. Nogueira and Messari (2005, p. 164) state that “no literature review minimally acceptable in the field of International Relations (...) can allow itself to leave aside Constructivism”, and also point out that eminent authors in the field such as Katzenstein, Keohane, Krasner and Walt, to name a few, protrude the importance of the theory.

The first works of the constructivist theory of IR were published at the end of the 1980's. Nogueira and Messari (2005, p. 162) define the theory's basic premise: “we live in a world we build, in which we are the main protagonists and which is a product of our choices”. Thus the constructivist authors reject the basic premise of classical IR theories which assume an ontological antecedence of the system's structure over the system's actors, meaning that for those theories the actors that compose the international system (IS) are conditioned by the system's structure. According to constructivists, however, structure and agents<sup>30</sup> are co-constructed, meaning that there is no ontological antecedence of neither one or the other (NOGUEIRA and MESSARI, 2005, p.163).

Jackson and Sorensen (2003, p. 341) say there are four common elements in all constructivist theories of IR, namely: (I) international relations consist of thoughts and ideas and not only of material power and conditions; (II) common intersubjective creeds between people constitute the central ideological elements of the theory; (III) common creeds compose and express people's interests and identities; and (IV) the theory must ascertain the means in which these relations are formed and expressed.

According to element (I) constructivists reject the materialism of classical IR theories, especially Neorealism, which analysis is totally centered in physical capacities of States in the IS (military capacity, economical capacity, geography, human resources, etc.), undervaluing the ideological element. Indeed for the

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<sup>30</sup> Constructivist authors usually call “agents” what classical authors of International Relations call “actors” (NOGUEIRA and MESSARI, 2005, p. 162).

constructivists “physical resources are worthless without the intellectual component, without it (the resources) are just (inanimate) things” (JACKSON and SORENSEN, 2003, p. 343). But that does not mean constructivists deny the material element in international relations; for most of them the relation between materiality and ideology is co-constructed, meaning there is a relation of mutual construction between both aspects, being not possible to establish an ontological antecedence<sup>31</sup>.

According to element (II) “the existing reality of a nation is expressed by the evidence of a common creed among its population which composes together a national community with its own distinct identity” (JACKSON and SORENSEN, 2003, p. 343). In an international community common creeds between agents have the same role, because only its existence allows the creation of an international identity. For constructivists “no elaborate ideological structure exists on its own” (JACKSON and SORENSEN, 2003, p. 344), in other words, it is the common creeds that validate ideas, norms and shared ideas among agents of the international community, and for most constructivist authors, especially Kratochwil, the analysis of these creeds and the speeches that validate them should be the main concern of constructivist theory.

Element (III) relates to the former and protrude the role of the analysis of speech and/or of the co-constitution of structure/agents. That means that even if all constructivist authors agree that the ideological element must be the center of theoretical analysis, not all of them agree with the approach to be used in such analysis. Nogueira and Messari (2005, p. 167) highlight three authors: Kratochwil, Onuf and Wendt, and explain the converging and diverging points between them. For Kratochwil the analysis of speech should be the main object of analysis by the researcher (NOGUEIRA and MESSARI, 2005, p. 170; and JACKSON and SORENSEN, 2003, p. 345). Wendt, on the other hand, highlight the co-constitution of structure and agents from the creation of common creeds, meaning he does not protrude speech but the interaction between the agents

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<sup>31</sup>For Kratochwil, however, there is an ontological antecedence of ideology over materiality (NOGUEIRA and MESSARI, 2005, p. 171).

themselves and between agents and structure. His argument is that international relations still remain “state-centric”, for him “to deny the centrality of States would be to produce theory about something other than International Relations” (NOGUEIRA and MESSARI, 2005, p. 179). Onuf agrees with both Kratochwil and Wendt. He argues that common creeds (Onuf prefers the term “rules”) are located between agents and structure, allowing it “to perform simultaneous functions between both parts” (NOGUEIRA and MESSARI, 2005, p. 172). Common creeds determine the agents’ actions at the same time that they are constructed by the agents themselves.

Finally, according to element (IV) constructivist theory protrude the means in which the common creeds and ideologies are created and disseminated between the agents. In the case of international community constructivists highlight the international institutions, because it is in them that international creeds, rules, norms and laws are created; the same way that from the discussions inside these same institutions that rules are validated, revalidated or repelled by the agents.

One of the most disseminated constructivist ideas among scholars is Wendt’s statement that “anarchy is what States make of it”. Classical theories of IR say that the IS is an anarchic system, meaning there is no power above the agents capable of restraining their actions. According to Jackson and Sorensen (2003, p.346) Wendt believes that “anarchy is not a kind of external reality that dictates a logic of analysis”, or in other words “there is not a system of States independent of the practice of States, but there are neither States independent of the rules by which they recognize themselves” (JACKSON and SORENSEN, 2003, p 347). Thus as expose Jackson and Sorensen (2003, p. 347) if the prevailing ideology between States in the IS is a ideology of mistrust, self-help and politics of power they are going to direct their actions and speeches towards a security dilemma in which the constant probability of conflict will reduce the possibility of cooperation between States. However if the prevailing ideology is one of trust and mutual help their actions and speeches will be directed towards cooperation since the convergence of interests practically eliminate the possibility

of conflict. It follows that States are not “enslaved” by anarchy in the IS, they can change the system’s structure accordingly to their interests; the constructivist theory even admits the possibility of States give up their sovereignty and create a non-anarchic structure. Since the IS is socially constructed its rules are not immutable and can be altered at any moment.

For this article it was chosen the constructivist theory especially due to its opening to a process of change in the IS, as much as to its opening to ideas from other theories (especially Wendt’s constructivism). To answer the question that motivates this article some of Wendt’s premises are going to be used. For the author international relations are anarchic, however anarchy does not have its own logic, “only three different ideal instances through history – the Hobbesian<sup>32</sup>, the Lockean<sup>33</sup> and the Kantian<sup>34</sup> cultures” (COPELAND, 2000, p. 189). According to Wendt international relations can be either cooperative or conflictual, that would depend on the predominant culture in most States and institutions of the IS.

According to Copeland (2000, p. 194) Wendt defines that in a predominantly Hobbesian culture States identify themselves as enemies and there is a predominance of mistrust and conflict in international relations; violence is the basic tool to assure the survival of the State. This was the predominant culture in the IS until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In a predominantly Lockean

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<sup>32</sup> Arising from Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), English philosopher. In his main work *Leviathan* (1651) he argues that the State rises from a Social Contract in which all citizens give up their right to use force so that only the Sovereign, in the role of head of State, can claim such right. For Hobbes all human relations are conflictual since every individual only looks after its own interests; without a coercive force more powerful than the individuals (such as the State) there would be permanent war. Realist authors of IR use many of Hobbes’ concepts in their analysis.

<sup>33</sup> Arising from John Locke (1632 – 1704), English philosopher. Locke is considered the “Father of Classic Liberalism”. For him the State rises from a Social Contract in which the citizens elect a higher power to defend their right to private property. According to him human relations can be either conflictual or cooperative; they are conflictual because individuals are always going to defend themselves when their rightful property is threatened; and cooperative because by reasoning individuals can recognize that their gains through cooperation are greater than through competition. Liberal authors of IR use many of Locke’s concepts in their analysis.

<sup>34</sup> Arising from Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), German philosopher. In his work *To Perpetual Peace* (1795) Kant argues that the objective of relations between States should be the construction of a peaceful global society. For that he lists a number of general rules that should be followed by all States, as well as some of the means necessary to reach this peaceful global society. Classic Liberals or Idealists authors of IR used many of his concepts in their analyses, but after two World Wars in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Kantian philosophy became discredited as being utopic. More recently, however, Liberal and Constructivist authors of IR are recurring more and more to Kant in their analysis.

culture, on the other hand, States identify themselves as competitors that may eventually recur to violence to defend its interests, there is still a predominance of conflict in this culture, however States also cooperate when their gains through cooperation surpass their gains through competition. This is the predominant culture in international relations since the Westphalia Treaties in 1648. And in a predominant Kantian culture States understand that they must cooperate towards world peace, because only in peace human beings are capable to live wholly. This culture only emerged recently between very few democracies and is just starting to be internalized by the agents of the system.

Wendt, according to Copeland (2000, p.195), also defines that these three instances have three different levels of internalization by the agents of the IS. In the first level the agents only adhere to a culture after coercion; in the second the agents identify the culture as legitimate norm, however only adhere to it looking for its own interests; and in the third level the agents already internalized the culture as being legitimate, meaning that “it became part of what they are”. Only in the third level that a culture really “constructs” the States of the IS.<sup>35</sup>

In the next chapter everything that has been seen so far, the BRICS and the Constructivist Theory, will be related. It will be attempted to contextualize the group in the IS, analyze its actions and answer the article’s main question according to constructivist premises.

#### **4 THE BRICS IN THEORY AND IN REALITY**

According to Copeland (2000, p. 194) Wendt argues that a Kantian culture of international relations have recently emerged between some democracies. It means that some countries identify themselves as friends in international relations, trusting that both are engaged in one common goal: world peace.

However a Lockean culture still dominates international relations (COPELAND, 2000, p. 194), meaning States generally cooperate only looking for

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<sup>35</sup> For a critique of Wendt’s theory read Copeland (2000, “*The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay*”).



its own benefit and violence still is tolerated in some cases. Cooperation is desired in this culture, because an environment of order stimulates commerce and economic development, while in a conflictual environment human life suffers (LOCKE, 2007, p.132). Thus States have been resorting more frequently to international law and global institutions to resolve its quarrels.

On the other hand, it cannot be stated that a Hobbesian culture has disappeared from international relations. Indeed some States openly identify themselves as enemies, not looking for any alternative other than military power to overcome their quarrels. In this cases violence becomes the preferential instrument of foreign affairs, contradicting the predominant culture in international community.

Note that in international relations there is not still a consensus between agents of which is the best form of action in their foreign affairs. All States say they look for peace, nevertheless they recognize some obstacles that must be eliminated so that their notion of peace can be reached. These different forms of action by agents in the resolution of their conflicts, sometimes peaceful and prioritizing diplomacy, sometimes violent and prioritizing military action, supports Wendt's statement that "anarchy is what States make of it".

In his essay "To Perpetual Peace" Kant (1795, p. 6 and 7) argues that for world peace to be reached it is necessary that all States in the international system (IS) are republics<sup>36</sup>; that a political entity superior to States be established; that relations between States are grounded in cosmopolitan law; that no State may interfere by force in the constitution of another State; that permanent armies are extinguished; that an IS of credit dependent on the currency of one State or of a small group of States is not established; among other conditions.

After World War I some States tried to put in practice some of Kant's ideas. In his "fourteen points for peace" American president Woodrow Wilson included many of these ideas, and it was from them that organizations such as the League of Nations in 1919 and the United Nations in 1945 emerged. Cooperation

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<sup>36</sup> Presently most authors use the term "democracies" instead of "republics".

between States via institutions began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>37</sup>, but after the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they've grown in number, especially after the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1955.

Regional organizations for cooperation, development and contestation of Bretton Woods' financial institutions became numerous throughout the Cold War, at the same time African and Asian countries conquered their independence and were trying to develop their economies, South America was longing for political and economic autonomy and Europe was attempting to restore its prominent position in the IS, lost after the World Wars. From these movements emerged organizations such as the Mercosul, Unasul, African Union, ALADI<sup>38</sup>, APEC, APC, SCO, European Union, among others. As seen in Chapter 2, global organizations like the UN and the WTO became priorities in the foreign affairs of many countries, what reinforces the argument that there is an increasingly search for diplomatic and consensual resolution for controversy between agents of the system.

The democratic ideal has been one of the factors that contributed to the decrease of armed conflicts between States. Defenders of this thesis argue that there has been not one conflict between democracies throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (VILLA and TOSTES, 2006, p. 71). Indeed the Kantian idea that it is necessary that all States have a people's government for global peace to be achieved is becoming more and more internalized by agents. At the same time, the growing number of alternatives for the constitution of regional monetary funds independent of the American dollar correspond to Kantian proposal that peace is not possible as long as there is an international system of credit dependent in only one currency and one State.

But even with all these efforts armed conflict remains very present in international relations. Recently the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, in 2001 and 2003 respectively, Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, India and

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<sup>37</sup> The first ever International Organization was the *Comission Centrale pour la Navigation du Rhin*, created in 1815.

<sup>38</sup> The Latin American Integration Association (or *Associação Latino-Americana de Integração* ALADI, in Portuguese) was created in 1980 to promote regional integration in Latin America.

Pakistan are at war since the independence of both countries in 1947; at the same time Israel and Iran seem to be closer and closer of an armed conflict and the same happens between the two nations in the Korean peninsula. Intrastate ethnical and political conflicts in the Middle East and in Africa constantly cross States' borders and reverberate in neighbor nations. Simultaneously the financial crisis in the United States in 2008 showed that global financial system still depends too much on American economy and on the dollar, and that financial security of the United States still is paramount for the maintenance of world economic order. Indeed international and global organizations and regimes have not yet been capable of transforming the anarchic world political order into something else.

Copeland (2000, p. 207) argues that a Kantian cooperation as defined by Wendt is unlikely to happen in an anarchic IS, because that would be an imprudent policy. Even if a State cooperates only pursuing collective interests and world peace it has no guarantees that its neighbors will do the same.

It's concluded that even if the Kantian culture has become more internalized by agents of international relations it still is far away from becoming the dominant culture. Thus in the actual system a Lockean culture still prevails, and in moment of political crisis this culture recedes to Hobbesian culture.

However, as seen in Chapter 3, for the constructivist point of view reality is co-constructed by ideas and actions, by agents and structure. So the internalization process of a culture is long and happens in phases (COPELAND, p. 206), meaning the substitution of one culture by another does not happen immediately in the system, indeed is through a mutual influence by agents and structure that a particular culture is more or less internalized by both agents and structure. The ideal of peace is influencing the agents of international relations and more frequently they discuss its importance and the necessary measures to make it real. The predominance of a particular culture depends on how agents interpret the relations happening inside the structure (COPELAND, 2000, p. 206).

In this sense it is important to recapture the meaning of alliances assigned in Chapter 1. Back then it was defined that the BRICS was at the margin of public

international law and could not be classified as an organization with legal status; to solve the problem the BRICS was attributed a political-military concept and now it is necessary to adapt such concept to the constructivist theory.

According to the definition by Bergsman (apud REITER, et. al., 2001, p. 20) what motivates States to create alliances is uncertainty and mistrust. At the same time alliances do not create legal obligations to its members, meaning there are not legal consequences if one of the members leaves the group, at the same time the BRICS cannot be legally liable for its acts<sup>39</sup>. An international organization, on the other hand, is “made of its own permanent and independent organs responsible for managing the collective interests and capable of expressing a juridically will distinct from its members” (HEREDIA apud VELASCO, 1999, p. 37), meaning its actions must respect the international legal framework and in the case of not respecting it the organization is adjudged by the International Court of Justice<sup>40</sup>.

The option for a non-institutionalized form of organization is at least partially due to uncertainties between the group members themselves. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in 2012 that “the process of institutionalization (of the BRICS) must progress only if the natural conditions for it are mature and compatible with the level of preparation of the participants in the process”. Lavrov did not make clear which are the “natural conditions” for the institutionalization of the BRICS, nevertheless the mistrusts between group members lead them to a cautious policy that prioritizes national interest.

Another consequence due to the option for an alliance refers to the reaction of the United States of America towards BRICS. According to an interview given in 2011 by the former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In a legal point of view actually, the BRICS is unable to produce any act because it does not even exist. A possible breach of international laws and norms by the BRICS could implicate, theoretically, a legal sanction to its members individually but not the group as a whole.

<sup>40</sup> The International Court of Justice is the main judiciary organ of the UN, both being founded together. The Court adjudges legal disputes between States and International Organizations that has an international legal status.

<sup>41</sup> Secretary of Defense of the United States of America from 2011 to 2013. He was also Director of the *Central Intelligence Agency* (CIA) between 2009 and 2011.

we are living in a world in which there are emerging powers, countries like China, Brazil and India, without obviously mentioning Russia and others, that offer a challenge to us not only to try to cooperate with them but also to have the assurance that they will not weaken instability of the system.

The Secretary of Defense did not use the term BRICS, however he only mentioned nations that belong to the group, with the exception of South Africa. It was seen in Chapter 2 that relations between the BRICS members and the United States are paramount in their foreign policies, indeed none of these countries try to fix a policy of confrontation with the Americans, not even Russia.

On the other hand the non-institutionalization of the BRICS could also be due to the fact of its novelty in the IS. Maybe the group closer to the BRICS in nature in contemporary relations is the Non-Aligned Movement, however that group has a very different proposition than the BRICS'.

In Chapter 3 the basic elements of the Constructivist Theory of IR were seen: (I) the existence of thoughts and ideas and not only material forces and conditions in international relations; (II) the centrality of common intersubjective creeds between agents; (III) the common creeds compose and express the interests and identities of the agents; (IV) the Theory must highlight the means in which these relations are formed and expressed.

In the case of the BRICS specifically, the thoughts and ideas were motivational forces at least as important as the material conditions, if not more important, for the constitution of the group. O'Neill's report justified the importance of the BRICS in the IS due to the material attributes of these States. Even knowing and acknowledging their own importance it was that report that motivated these specific countries to group. The symbolic aspect cannot be denied either, O'Neill's report entitled "*Build Better Global Economic BRICs*" clearly made a pun with the word "*bricks*". Indeed it can be concluded the group emerged from both its material capacities and the symbolic role it can play in the building of a better global economy.

From this symbolic factor emerges the second element of the constructivist theory. These countries united themselves because they believe that together

they can change global economic order. It is uncertain if the BRICS was created from a Kantian or Lockean perspective of international relations (this matter will be probed later in this article), but what is certain is that these countries share the creed in the transformer potential of the group; if they don't, they would have not united. O'Neill's report alone did not create the BRICS, the creation was only possible from a joint action by the constitutive agents.

Common creeds are central in the constitution of a group such as the BRICS. According to the third element of the theory are the creeds that determine the actions of the agents and at the same time are their actions that construct their common creeds, meaning each one of the BRICS countries individually believed that the group had potential to become an alliance, but this alliance only became real at the moment they had the attitude to talk about its creation. It is important to highlight that in the specific case of the BRICS, however, this process remains unfinished since the group still is under construction.

The means in which the creeds are created and spread among the agents is the fourth element of the theory. In the case of the BRICS these means are the annual summits held by the group. At the same time the members of the BRICS share a creed in the importance of the group and in the necessity of changes in global institutions, they do not have consensus about what must be done and how.

In the first summit the BRICS was created and several topics regarding global governance were discussed; in the official document of the second summit the group mentioned an even larger variety of topics. The amplification of the spectrum of acting possibilities of the BRICS caused a limitation to the effectiveness of its actions. In the first summit the group was capable to issue a joint statement with factual proposals regarding a specific subject, Global Food Safety, but in the second summit only a declaration of interests was issued.

In the third summit there was no progression towards an institutionalization of the group, neither there were more concrete actions regarding changes in global economy; nevertheless this summit marked the membership of South

Africa. The admission of this new member is paramount to understand the creeds and ideas that co-constitute the BRICS.

The founding members of the group are the same listed by O'Neill in his report. The material element utilized in the report was directly related to the economic weight of these countries. The author chose Brazil, Russia, India and China to compose the group due to their importance in global economy; even other material elements mentioned in his report such as energy resources, demography, military capability, etc., are related to the economical element. In other words, O'Neill affirms that the BRICS' countries are important because they are becoming rich countries. Under this argument, however, the admission of South Africa makes no sense. As seen in Chapter 2 the economic weight of South Africa is considerably inferior compared to the other BRICS countries. The justification of South Africa's membership is that the country is Africa's biggest economy, meaning due to material factors (especially political, economic and geographic). At the same time it is justified by the declared intention of the BRICS of making global forums and institutions more democratic. So to maintain the creed that group exists to democratize global politics an African member was necessary.

The fourth summit was a mark towards the institutionalization of the BRICS. Instead of a declaration of interests like in the previous summits the Delhi Declaration is a document that reveals concrete proposals for solving problems identified by the group since the first summit such as the Eurozone debt crisis<sup>42</sup>, the Iranian nuclear crisis<sup>43</sup>, development projects for Afghanistan<sup>44</sup>, the implementation of the 2010 Quota and Governance Reform proposal for the IMF, and at the same time these countries presented their own candidates to run for the presidency of the World Bank. Besides the Delhi Declaration the group also signed the Multilateral Letter of Credit Confirmation Facility Agreement between

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<sup>42</sup> Since 2009 some countries in the Eurozone of the European Union showed high levels of debt, forcing them to take drastic fiscal austerity measures.

<sup>43</sup> Since 1979 Iran begin its nuclear program alleging peaceful ends; this is questioned by countries such as Israel, the United States, Russia and France.

<sup>44</sup> Afghanistan was invaded in 2001 by the United States without the approval of the UN Security Council. The military operation has not yet been finished.

their EXIM/Development Banks<sup>45</sup> that allows them to trade among themselves using their own currencies, reducing tariffs.

This agreement marks the first abiding commitment of the BRICS and that is why it is of extreme importance to understand the course the group is taking. To maintain the creed in the BRICS it was necessary a real action or, putting in other words, it was needed a material accomplishment to maintain the creed alive in its members.

From this analysis the final considerations will follow, analyzing the presented data utilizing the article's main question as a conducting wire.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the beginning of the article a question was made: "what is the *raison d'être* of the BRICS?" Considering what has been presented so far by the group so far there is no way to present only one answer to this question.

Through a constructivist perspective two answers are possible and they vary according to one's creed in the BRICS.

Interpreting the BRICS from a Kantian culture point of view the group is an example that this culture is being more and more internalized in international relations. The creed in this case is that the BRICS proposes reforms in global forums and institutions owing to make them more democratic and, by doing so, ultimately reach world peace. The proposal seem utopic, however the evolution of speech in international relations demonstrates that world peace, especially the Kantian notion of the expression, is becoming more and more believable in the horizon. Many of Kant's ideas for peace (KANT, 1795, p. 6, 7, 11, 15 and 20) have left the theoretical field to become effective State policies. The emergence of global institutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the United Nations and the WTO, and of international regimes such as the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, are examples. The admission of South Africa in the BRICS is a strong argument

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<sup>45</sup> In the fifth summit, held in Durban, South Africa in 2013, a proposal for the creation of BRICS' own Development Bank was established. According to the initial project the starting capital of this Bank would be of USD 100 billion.



favoring this interpretation, since that move was mainly motivated by an ideological factor rather than a material one. For the adepts of this interpretation is valid the argument that the Kantian culture is only on its first stages of internalization in international relations.

Mistrust and unpredictability constitute the main elements of the other possible interpretation of the BRICS. It is not possible to affirm that the BRICS has world peace as one of its ultimate objectives. Speeches are not always compatible with State policies and many times they are indeed utilized to outwit the agents' real intentions (COPELAND, 2000, p. 196). In this perspective the admission of South Africa, for example, can be interpreted as a trick: a political maneuver to outwit other States of BRICS' real intentions.

The fact that the Lockean culture is currently the most internalized one in international relations contributes with a distrust that other agents might have towards the BRICS. While the group's countries sustain the argument that in present politics a democratization process of the main global forums is only possible via regional leaderships<sup>46</sup>, their neighbors observe this movement with suspicion. Firstly the BRICS reassures the position of its members as regional leaders; at the same that they seek recognition by the international community of such leadership; secondly the strengthening of the entire region from the strengthening of the leading country is uncertain because that will depend on the disposition of the leader to share or not to share its gains with its neighbors. Thus BRICS can be an instrument for these countries to increase even more their regional power, making their neighbors even more dependent of their leadership. From this interpretation the BRICS is just a manner for its member States to obtain more gains for themselves; hence there would not be a transformer motivation in the group, meaning this would not be a movement of changing the current competitive culture, the Lockean, to a peaceful one, the Kantian; actually the BRICS would only reaffirm the current competitive culture. The fact that the group is currently organized as an alliance sustains this line of thought.

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<sup>46</sup> In the constructivist perspective used in this analysis this occurs essentially due to the fact that the Kantian culture is not completely internalized by either agents or structure.

Finally, a Hobbesian element is present in both hypotheses because clearly there is something which the BRICS oppose to, or as seen in Chapters 1 and 4, there is an “enemy” that motivated the creation of this alliance.

Assuming that the BRICS is idealized under a Lockean culture their “enemy” would be all the other States that compete with them economically, politically, militarily and culturally. The BRICS would be a form of balance of power<sup>47</sup> to control the hegemonic power capable of submitting other States to its own will (in this case the main “enemy” of the BRICS would be the United States of America).

Under a Kantian culture however the “enemy” of the BRICS would be Hobbesian culture of IR itself. As an instrument to build world peace the BRICS would try to eradicate the culture of violence and mistrust in international relations from the transformation of global institutions. Making them more democratic and representing all corners of the globe.

The stage in which the BRICS is at the moment is insufficient to affirm what is the mainspring of the group. It is possible to find some possibilities; nevertheless definitive answers would be premature and risky. This article does not end all possibilities because there other constructivist approaches to analyze the phenomenon. Wendt’s constructivism was prioritized in this analysis, but an approach prioritizing the concepts of Onuf or Kratochwil, for example, would provide profound analyzes with much distinct perspectives than the ones presented here. What the BRICS really is and intends to be still is unknown for both the international community and to its State members. It was seen that through the summits the group has been walking towards more institutionalization, which increases the creed of its members in the importance of the alliance. The next steps of the BRICS are going to determine which role the group has to play in the IS.

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<sup>47</sup> A concept coined by the Classic Realist Theory of IR. It says that States will always try to control the increase of power of their neighbors to avoid the existence of only one hegemonic State in the system. (JACKSON and SORENSEN, 2003, p. 118).

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