Conclusion: Bursting the Bubble – Brazil’s Failure in Africa

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Lusophonia only goes so far. Given Brazil’s exceedingly early and long connection to Africa, its strong seventeenth- to nineteenth-century commercial relations with West and Central Africa, and the reality that fully half of Brazil’s twenty-first-century population derives from Africa (a heftier proportion than in the United States), South America’s largest nation should be expected to play a major role in developing and uplifting today’s Africa. Further, given Brazil’s economic alliance with South Africa through BRICS and its position as a formidable Portuguese-speaking country, Brazil in its national self-interest (and in the post-coronavirus era) should be expected to help propel, if not help to foster, a political and social renaissance in southern Africa.

Instead, since the end of the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010), Brazil has abandoned any attempt to use its position as a middle power to guide Africa, to set an example, to exert influence, or – even in the Lusophone arena – to assume the posture of a benevolent elder brother dispensing wisdom and experience. Indeed, since Lula’s era, if not well before, Brazil has focused almost exclusively on exploiting Africa’s oil, coal, and other minerals; on exporting sugar; and on enabling the kleptocratic tendencies of a series of Lusophone autocrats, especially in Angola and now in Mozambique. Moreover, Brazil does too little to depress a thriving narcotics trade between South America and West Africa and thence to Europe. There is much that Brazil could do to help Africa advance and mature along lines demanded and guided by Africa. But there is no political will in Brazil to embark on such endeavors, and revelations about Brazil’s promotion of corruption in Africa under President Lula will make Africans, and some Brazilians, wary.

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1 Resource Extraction and Industrial Development

Brazil’s direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa has always been but a small fraction of its total overseas investment. Its trade with all of Africa only amounted to 3.4% of all overseas trade in 2019, reaching a total of about US$9 billion. Sub-Saharan Africa’s share was even smaller. In 2017, exports to that part of the continent totalled only US$4.7 billion. Imports from the same subregion amounted to US$2.2 billion. Angola, Nigeria, and South Africa were the major players. Brazil primarily exported manufactured goods, sugar, and meat. Imports from sub-Saharan Africa to Brazil consisted primarily of petroleum, coal, and iron ore (World Bank 2017–2018). Indeed, as Adriana Schor’s chapter in this book shows, nearly all of Brazil’s imports from Africa consist of oil, with price rises reflected in and accounting for the surges during and just after Lula’s era. Export increase numbers were more real, however, largely sugar sales to Angola and Nigeria and electronics and other manufactured goods to South Africa. Beef sold well, too. But the volumes of both imports and exports peaked when Dilma Rousseff was president and have declined precipitously in the contemporary period.

Brazil’s commercial and economic relations with Africa are thus today of little importance either to Brazilian exporters or to the three countries in Africa (Angola, Nigeria, and South Africa) where Brazilian-African trade is concentrated. Schor calls the overall trade integration between Brazil and Africa “extremely shallow.” Despite BRICS, despite the Lusophone concord, and despite its deep historic connections and its steady import of slaves, Brazil has effectively turned its back on Africa – even (or especially) in the commercial sector.

Brazil’s biggest industrial enterprises still have significant interests in Africa, especially in the three nations that Schor shows are significant, but those commercial interests are fairly minor in terms of overall Brazilian trade with the world and even with regard to the economies of those countries themselves. Beyond Angola, Nigeria, and South Africa, plus Ghana, Brazilian-African economic and trade relations are nugatory. Petrobras pumps oil in Angola and Nigeria and has searched or is searching for petroleum and natural gas in Benin, Gabon, offshore Mozambique, Namibia, and offshore Tanzania. Petrobras also owns filling stations in Angola. But Petrobras’ main focus nowadays is domestic and is likely to remain so in the coming years.

Vale, the big mining company, successfully digs up 4000 tons of low-quality coal an hour near Moatize in central Mozambique. It ships most of what it mines to China and Brazil via an especially reconstructed rail line that transits Malawi to the Mozambican port of Nacala. This is Vale’s largest undertaking outside of Brazil; in Mozambique, Vale is a major employer and investor, but alleged abuses of African labor and the displacing of existing villagers have not endeared Vale – or Brazil, for that matter – to local communities near Moatize. Vale also used similarly questionable tactics to secure a bauxite concession in Guinea and to mine copper and cobalt in Angola and to explore for nickel. Given its major troubles at home, however, for the time being, Vale cannot confidently look expansively to Africa.
As Danilo Marcondes’s chapter on health cooperation explains, Vale’s financial support was critical in establishing a pharmaceutical manufacturing enterprise in Maputo, initially to produce antiretroviral medicines to remediate the HIV/AIDS epidemic in southern Africa and later to introduce a range of useful remedies to the African market. At first, however, the facility in Maputo merely packaged basic retrovirals that had been produced in Brazil. Only in 2015 did original production occur in Maputo. More recently, as the Brazilian products were superseded by more modern treatments for HIV/AIDS, the pharmaceutical facility has begun manufacturing a broader range of medicines, including some for TB and malaria. As Marcondes indicates, cooperation between Mozambique and Brazil in this medical area, began in earnest during Lula’s presidency and encouraged by him, constituted an unusually valuable contribution to Africa by Brazil’s Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ – Fundação Oswaldo Cruz) and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC – Agência Brasileira de Cooperação).

The Odebrecht construction company, South America’s largest, is the focus of Alencastro’s chapter. The firm has operated in Africa since the 1980s. It built a big dam near Malanje in Angola and that country’s first shopping mall in Luanda. It also constructed residential condominiums in that city, worked together with Petrobras to install oil and gas facilities, built a dam in Botswana, erected fuel terminals in Djibouti, and serviced oil wells in Gabon. Interestingly, Barnaby Dye’s chapter shows how Odebrecht sought to erect dams in Tanzania to no avail. But, as Alencastro documents, Odebrecht is more significant for the way it (as a major construction and industrial enterprise) helped to corrupt and to operationalize corruption and kleptocracy in Angola under the regime of President José Eduardo do Santos (1979–2017) – all the while seamlessly injecting Brazilian methods of corruption into the Angolan body politic. Alencastro demonstrates, further, that Lula and Odebrecht worked hand-in-hand to profit from Angolan sleaze; he shows that control of Brazilian foreign policy under Lula was leased to Odebrecht, especially in Angola and Equatorial Guinea. As Alencastro’s chapter articulates:

Odebrecht could influence Brazilian positions in countries where it held significant interests, such as Argentina or Peru. But the company was only one stakeholder among several. When it came to Angola, Odebrecht dominated the discussion. Nobody could match its knowledge of the ground and its capacity to delineate a clear strategy (Alencastro 2020, “Corporate Presidentialism,” quoting a Brazilian diplomat).

Camargo Corrêa, another Brazilian construction firm, erected social housing in Ghana and Angola and strung power lines in the latter country. It was involved in a hydroelectric project along the Zambezi River downstream from the massive Cahora Bassa Dam in Mozambique. Andrade Gutierrez, another Brazilian builder, helped establish harbors, housing, and sanitation projects in Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Mozambique. Benco Energy agreed to build a 700-megawatt, gas-fired, electricity-generating plant in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, but it was never completed. Meanwhile, O Boticário, a cosmetics company, is among the medium-sized enterprises that have established themselves in Angola. Others own supermarkets,
manioc processing facilities, and ceramics factories and grow flowers. Dwarfing them all is Marcopolo, one of the largest bus body fabricators in the world. It has a major factory near Johannesburg.

Yet, despite all of this industrial energy emanating from Brazil, today, the nation’s industrial and agroprocessing talents are focused inward and toward improving export marketing in the Americas, Europe, and China. Africa plays (and will continue in the immediate future to play) a distinctly tertiary role in the generation of Brazilian GDP absent unexpectedly and currently unavailable political leadership and action.

2 The Narcotics Trade

That said, the trade story has a further dimension. Brazil is involved, as well, in a major clandestine export endeavor. Brazil facilitates the transatlantic smuggling of cocaine and other narcotics from and across its northeastern region to the very weak narco-state of Guinea-Bissau and onward to Europe. An even more major shipment center is found in the port of Santos. That trade persists, less with the connivance of the Brazilian government writ large than with the covert cooperation of some of its regional military, harbor, and aviation authorities.

According to the UN’s Office on Drugs and Crime, seizures of Brazilian-supplied cocaine and heroin in West Africa increased tenfold between 2005 and 2009, totaling 260 tons over the period (UNODC 2013). In the current decade, shipments of seized narcotics along the same route increased significantly in Europe and Africa. In 2019, the likely amounts of cocaine coming out of Santos by container (hidden under other goods, of course) and by air from Belem, Recife, and Bahia probably amounted to more than 100 tons. Although this only represents about 15% of South American cocaine destined, via Brazil, for Africa and Europe, such trafficking has added measurably to growing personal drug consumption in Guinea-Bissau, Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, and Senegal, as well as crime in such countries (Stargardter 2020; LaSusa 2016).

Much of the cocaine originates in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. It then transits to Venezuela or Brazil. Marijuana in quantity enters Brazil from Paraguay and exits to West Africa en route to Europe. From northeastern Brazil, most of the trafficking is by air in executive jets, as clandestine cargo in commercial scheduled aircraft, and occasionally by ship. Some of this traffic goes via Angola and Nigeria, but the purely illicit air maneuvers are directed mostly to Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal. Long-established Brazilian gangs are heavily involved. At one point, they controlled thirty-four domestic border crossings, plus Santos. At the African end of these transport routes, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Islamic State, and Iranian-backed Hezbollah elements are involved. Profits from these extensive trafficking ventures (which Brazil could halt relatively easily) support Islamist terrorist groups, even Boko Haram.
In this context, Guinea-Bissau stands out as a small, weakly governed, corruptly led, porous state only 3000 km from Recife. Coastal Guinea-Bissau in part incorporates eighty or so uninhabited, lightly patrolled and monitored offshore islands. Its politicians are easy to traduce. In consequence, ten or more tons of cocaine pass through Guinea-Bissau every year, their value roughly equalling Guinea-Bissau’s entire annual GDP (The Economist 2019). Over the last two decades, much of the electoral campaigning of Guinea-Bissau’s competing military and political elites has been funded by drug cartels from South America.

Elsewhere in Africa, Senegalese police discovered large amounts of cocaine stashed in automobiles imported by ship from Brazil. Equally critical caches have been found in port and air arrivals in Cape Verde and Guinea. Behind much of this trafficking is the First Command of the Capital (PCC – Primeiro Comando da Capital) gang of São Paulo. It may have been the cartel that employed an ingenious method of attaching pods of cocaine secretly to the undersides of transatlantic ships and then hiring divers to retrieve them in Africa or (more often) Europe (The Economist 2019).

Brazil, clearly, is a much more significant player in the illicit drugs trade than is usually acknowledged. Arguably, too, Brazil’s (illicit) profits from narcotics smuggling to Africa now contribute more to GDP than almost any other (licit) trade activity with Africa. President Bolsonaro campaigned in 2018 on an “end corruption” platform. But the clandestine trade to Africa continues, just as crime levels remain steady at home in Brazil.

3 Lula’s Initiatives

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, Brazil engaged in technical cooperation with a few African countries. It also concerned itself with Africa diplomatically. But it was not until the end of the twentieth century, after sufficient progress socially and economically at home, that Brazil felt itself in a position to look across the ocean to Africa.

Lula tried to make Africa much more relevant to Brazil and Brazil greatly relevant to Africa. He sought to make Africa more central to its national foreign policy concerns and wanted Brazil to become a big economic and political player on the African scene. Lula paid state visits to twenty-nine countries on twelve separate occasions. He sanctioned the opening of nineteen of thirty-seven embassies in Africa. (Eighteen African nation-states opened their own embassies in Brasilia during the same period, bringing the total of African missions in Brasilia to thirty-four. That number has now been reduced to thirty-two.).

President Lula also inaugurated a series of collaborative scientific projects with Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, São Tomé and Principe, and South Africa. These initiatives were intended to draw heavily on Brazilian expertise, train local scientists, offer university technical and scientific training to undergraduates and graduates from Portuguese-speaking African countries, and send teachers from Brazilian
universities to Africa. His administration promised to work jointly with African health ministries to help combat HIV/AIDS, waterborne diseases, and malaria.

President Lula’s foreign minister Celso Amorim was even more active in Africa, making sixty-seven visits during the same years and receiving forty-seven leaders from twenty-seven of sub-Saharan Africa’s forty-nine countries. Together, they revitalized and/or inaugurated the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS – Zona de Paz e Cooperação do Atlântico Sul), the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP – Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa), the Africa-South America Summit organization, and the India/Brazil/South Africa (IBSA) Forum. Pedro Seabra’s chapter on Brazil’s role in Africa shows how Brazil replaced Portugal as the main financier of the CPLP and what that meant for strengthened relations with Africa.

Lula’s motives were more than altruistic. He sought vigorously to mobilize support behind his quest to obtain a permanent seat for Brazil on the UN Security Council and to bring prestige to himself and to Brazil. He also profited from Odebrecht’s corrupt activities in Angola.

Following Lula’s instructions, Brazil’s National Development Bank (BNDES – Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social) began disbursing grants and loans in the US$3 billion range to Africa from 2007 onward. BNDES financed Odebrecht’s projects. Likewise, ABC and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA – Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária) backed initiatives across the continent. The latter even opened an office in Ghana.

Starting in 2007, EMBRAPA promoted the growing of soya in selected African savanna environments. In particular, in cooperation with the Japanese aid agency, its so-called ProSAVANA Program tried to replicate Brazilian successes with soybean cultivation. Its biggest arena of activity was the Nacala Corridor region that runs through Mozambique from Malawi. Laura Waisbich’s chapter details in particular how Brazilian civil society opposition grew toward this program. EMBRAPA also – shades of David Livingstone – introduced cotton cultivation in the same area, along the Zambezi River. Notwithstanding potential harmful environmental consequences, it also assisted in the expansion of cotton production, planting several varieties in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Togo.

Simultaneously, with BNDES credit lines, Brazil tried to employ its longstanding expertise to encourage the production of biofuels in Angola, Ghana, Mozambique, and Nigeria. Ghana subsequently sold ethanol to Sweden. There was talk of helping Malawi do the same, but as with so many of these schemes, Brazil was unable to propel even a few selected African countries effectively to replace expensive fuel imports with fuels derived from abundant agricultural products and their waste. Likewise, an innovative effort to adapt Brazilian agro-genetic experimentation to help Cameroon use manioc and moringa leaves to feed chickens (for meat and eggs) occurred, but to little lasting effect.

Under Lula, Brazil additionally sought to improve security operations in several key African countries. Toward the end of Lula’s administration, and afterward, his defense ministers paid a significant number of visits to Africa. They signed cooperative military agreements with Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau,
Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, São Tomé and Principe, Senegal, and South Africa and negotiated one with Algeria. The ministers and their successors also arranged to send defense attaches to eight African countries, a process that is examined in detail in the chapter by Pedro Seabra and Danilo Marcondes.

Ministerial travels into Africa presaged increasingly important cooperation between the Brazilian navy and its less advanced African counterparts. Port visits were symbolic, but more useful to Africa was the training provided by the Brazilian navy to their African counterparts in Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Namibia, where naval operations were much more rudimentary than in Brazil. Brazil also attempted, as Seabra’s own chapter shows, to intervene diplomatically and effectively to restore stability to Guinea-Bissau in the wake of a coup and the arrival of an Angolan peacekeeping force backed by Portugal but opposed by Nigeria (on behalf of ECOWAS). In this case, West African interests triumphed, and Brazil was largely ignored in the aftermath.

One of Lula’s great achievements for Brazilian social betterment was the creation of Bolsa Família, a cash support program for poor citizens. It is recognized globally as an innovative initiative capable successfully of combating the effects of joblessness and social anomie. Lula tried to promote this cash transfer scheme as a useful way of alleviating Africa’s deep wells of poverty. But it never caught on in Africa, possibly because of the prevalence of corruption and bureaucratic capacity problems in many of the Lusophone and Francophone countries targeted by Brazil. Brazilian officials also noted, not least in African Lusophone nations, an evident distrust of social mitigation initiatives that were broad-based. Moreover, introducing a secure safety net along Bolsa Família lines was anathema in countries where the entire concept of a social safety net was novel.

Nevertheless, in the post-Lula era, Brazil was persuaded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the British Department for International Development (DFID) to join forces to battle poverty and enhance gender equality in Africa’s low-income countries. UNDP and DFID wanted Brazil’s International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG – Centro Internacional de Políticas para o Crescimento Inclusivo) and its Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA – Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada) to design social protection measures for African women, especially in Nigeria, and to find ways to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health outcomes in Mozambique. Cash transfers to strengthen social protections, the Brazilian method, were meant to be central to both of those developmental initiatives.

4 After Lula

President Lula’s focus on and approach to Africa fell away after he left office. President Dilma Rousseff, his handpicked successor in 2010, significantly reduced all of Brazil’s foreign engagements, especially those concerning Africa. Even so, despite this conscious pulling back from Africa to focus domestically, she tried
episodically to promote Brazilian business interests during several visits of her own to the continent in 2013. Her approach was more pragmatic than her predecessor’s and a reflection of her personal priorities as well as vanishing national financial resources. She signalled to Brazilian development agencies that they should focus in future more on China and Europe and on the near abroad in what then was Mercosur.

Nevertheless, in one particular approach to Africa, she sought to boost Brazilian businesses’ industrial outreach to Africa by offering to cancel or restructure nearly US$1 billion worth of debt owed by a dozen African nations. The primary beneficiaries were intended to be oil- and gas-rich Republic of Congo, copper-dominant Zambia, and Tanzania. Those owing smaller amounts, but also benefitting, were Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, the DRC, São Tomé and Principe, Senegal, and Sudan – a mélange of small and large nation-states with which Brazil under Lula once had dealings. The debt cancellations legally made it possible under President Dilma for Brazilian corporations to invest in the petroleum and mineral resource opportunities then available in Africa. But few did. Moreover, civil society in Brazil criticized the actions as giveaways to dictators (Rossi 2013). Moreover, China steadily overcame whatever advantage Brazilian businesses had in winning mineral concessions from African governments.

Additionally, President Dilma greatly reduced development expenditures on Africa from US$20 million in 2010 to US$3 million in 2013 (Renzio et al. 2014). Meanwhile, however, trade finance support was being sustained, at the rate of about US$500 million yearly (Rossi 2013).

In the military sphere, little by way of training and South-South cooperation was accomplished during Dilma’s presidency and, thereafter, under Presidents Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro. Nevertheless, there were frequent, if often unsuccessful, negotiations between a range of African countries and Brazil for the sale of military aircraft (the Embraer-built Tucano and Super Tucano), the purchase of ships and patrol vessels, and the export of a range of small arms and light weapons. Some important transactions occurred, but as Seabra and Marcondes discuss, there were innumerable disappointments occasioned by bureaucratic delays in Brasilia and in such countries as Nigeria, by UN sanctions in such places as Cote d’Ivoire, and by Brazilian civil society objections to arms transfers that could be used to repress civilians in Tanzania. From a Brazilian military-industrial perspective in 2020, there remain abundant opportunities that were never pursued or fulfilled.

It is in peacekeeping more than military armament supplies, however, that Brazil shines. In addition to its long UN peacekeeping leadership in Haiti, Brazil has supplied the top generals of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) since 2013. Additionally, Brazil’s Army Jungle Warfare Training Center (CITS – Centro de Instrução e Treinamento de Selva) teaches MONUSCO’s Force Intervention Brigade. Seabra and Marcondes do not say, however, whether it has been MONUSCO’s mandate, or its leadership, that has inhibited an effective response to warlord vigilante depredation in the eastern Congo and whether Brazilian lack of leadership caused MONUSCO’s inability (or refusal) to prevent deadly hostilities there, especially amid the Ebola epidemic.
5 Lava Jato and Beyond

President Dilma’s impeachment in 2016 coincided with Brazil’s retreat into itself after Judge Sérgio Moro and his prosecutorial allies began disclosing the extent to which Odebrecht, Petrobras, and a raft of prominent politicians had profited massively from corrupt contracting schemes. The Brazilian state, long accustomed to wholesale corruption at the state and national level, was nevertheless astounded from 2014 by tales of fraud and peculation that became the dominant tale of the era, with reverberations in every institution at every level. Moro, later justice minister in the Bolsonaro administration until April 2020, sought to upend the political impunity that had long protected the nation’s political class. He even sentenced Lula, beloved by a multitude of Brazilians, to a long sentence in prison (subsequently sustained by the southern states appeal court and the Supreme Court).

Car Wash (Lava Jato), as the string of corruption cases were known, turned both the remaining and compromised political leadership inward. Brazil ceased attempting to play a major role internationally, even within the more and more irrelevant BRICS consortium. Most of all, the post-Car Wash period coincided with several years of severe recession; Brazil suffered economically because of the corruption that Moro and others had exposed and because of the reluctance of foreign and domestic investors to believe strongly in Brazil’s future.

Bolsonaro’s election in 2018 compounded Brazil’s misery, soon followed in 2020 by the eruption of a coronavirus that Bolsonaro called a “measly cold.” Bolsonaro battled with the Congress and with his ministers. Finally, the firing of his first health minister (and the rapid resignation of the second) and the resignation of Moro plunged Brazil into crisis. The onset of the devastating coronavirus and Bolsonaro’s declining popularity once more turned the nation inward and firmly away from Africa in mid-2020.

Additionally, as Alencastro shows, Odebrecht was central both to corruption in Brazil (in Latin America writ large [Rotberg 2019] and in Angola). Car Wash, and the resignation of dos Santos himself in 2017, undermined Odebrecht completely as President João Lourenço’s successor regime upended the dos Santos family fortunes and ended Odebrecht’s contribution to amassing those riches. Overall, Brazil’s influence in Africa – no matter how nefariously advanced – took a series of deadly turns from which it has hardly recovered.

6 The Future Has Possibilities

Brazil in a post-Bolsonaro era could again play a role in Africa befitting a prosperous middle power. That presumes that post-Bolsonaro and post-coronavirus Brazil resumes a path of economic growth based on reformed governance and an uplifted body politic. But like so much in the 2020s globally and in South America, the resumption of political, social, and economic stability and growth depends very
largely on the rise of political leaders of integrity and vision. Only with the re-emergence of a responsible leadership cadre dedicated to the public rather than personal interest can Brazil transform its current political malaise into a leadership for good (Rotberg 2012). When that happens, Brazil will again be able to reprise a Lula-like role in Africa but without the corruption that prevailed in Brazil’s dealings with the continent.

The opportunities are real and significant, especially within the Lusophone arena. After all, Brazil is modern and wealthy per capita compared to nearly all of sub-Saharan Africa’s polities. That subregion’s need for massive uplift, especially as its population surges from 1.3 billion to 2.7 billion in the next thirty years, is real (Rotberg 2020a, 2020b). Brazil has the capacity to assist sub-Saharan Africa to strengthen a physical and social infrastructure that is now weak, to stimulate agricultural productivity, and to improve its manufacturing capabilities. Brazil also has managerial experience and expertise that could benefit Africa; Brazil has dealt effectively with many of the problems with which one after another African country now contends and will contend for the next several decades.

Brazil has a notable comparative advantage with Lusophone countries in Africa. China admittedly has a powerful economic and recent historical edge (e.g., it is improving São Tomé and Principe’s port and airfield), but linguistic affinity will enhance Brazil’s competitive potential if it chooses to spread its skills, competence, and soft power capabilities in that direction. Brazil also needs to sponsor academic attention to Africa in its own universities. There were only two research centers on Africa in Brazil in 2020, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul) and at University of São Paulo (USP – Universidade de São Paulo).

The Lusophone family in Africa, where a rejuvenated Brazil could someday play a vigorous political role and compete with the Chinese economically, consists of two categories of countries. There are four classically corrupt kleptocracies which could be assisted to upgrade governance and return to probity: Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. Then, there are the two democracies: Cape Verde (which could teach Brazil how to run a beneficent state) and São Tomé and Principe, another reasonably well-run small entity.

Angola has reformed itself in mighty ways under Lourenço. He is trying to recover the vast wealth that his predecessor and his predecessor’s children stole from the Angolan state. But his pursuit of the dos Santos family hardly means that Angola has abandoned the avarice that punctuated its earlier autocracy and still prevails. At one point, when oil extraction meant colossal wealth, nearly all of it was skimmed by ruling elites (including Lourenço, then a minister). Little dripped down to the mass of people within the nation. Brazil could now assist the Lourenço regime to continue reforming, to reduce kleptocratic takings, and to strengthen good governance. A reformed and resurgent Brazil (after Bolsonaro) could prove a powerful model for the new Angola and for other Lusophone nations.

Likewise, Brazil has continuing economic interests in Mozambique, and in a weaker but increasingly corrupt state under President Filipe Nyusi, Brazil might be able to help wean the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO – Frente de
Libertação de Moçambique) party and Nyusi and his cronies away from plunder and graft. Brazil’s military and special forces could assist Mozambique in repressing an incipient Islamist insurgency in the Cape Delgado region of the nation’s north. Brazil could play a major role in reforming Mozambique if its own political standing at home were secure.

Guinea-Bissau is both a harder and easier case. Harder because it has never experienced sustainable democratic rule or good governance. Harder, too, because Guinea-Bissau is an entrapped narco-state, the recipient of nightly incoming flights filled with illicit narcotics en route north. Beyond drugs, Guinea-Bissau has almost nothing except cashews on which to found an economy or to base improved governance. But, the situation is also easier, because Brazil could, if it wanted to exert itself, take on Guinea-Bissau as a difficult but tractable experiment of reform. Brazil (if reformed) could show Guinea-Bissau how it could remake itself into a better-governed nation.

Equatorial Guinea joined the CPLP, though Spanish-speaking. Brazil was a major advocate of Equatorial Guinea’s inclusion because of its oil, prospective business opportunities, and the expansion of the Community. Indeed, Brazil brought Equatorial Guinea into the Community based on what turned out to be some spurious promises and despite the furious opposition of Portugal (Seabra’s chapter conveys the details). Despite Brazil’s role in this important recognition and legitimization of Equatorial Guinea’s kleptocracy, the Obiang family dynasty has hardly repaid Brazil’s embrace with meaningful reforms, any diminution of its oppression of the mass of its inhabitants, or any reduction of corrupt dealings. Equatorial Guinea is hardly susceptible to outside remaking. And since Brazil confiscated Vice President Teodoro Obiang’s US$15 million watch collection and US$1.5 million in cash when he flew to Rio de Janeiro in 2018, there is hardly any concord between Brazil and its sometime national protégé (Rotberg 2020b).

Cape Verde is one of the best governed of the nations of the African Union. It has ranked among the top-five best-run African states since the creation of the Index of African Governance in 2007 (Rotberg 2020a). In the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, it also ranks highly as the forty-first least corrupt country in the world and third in rank in Africa after the Seychelles and Botswana. São Tomé and Príncipe is not so highly regarded, but it is democratic, bankrolled recently by China, and a steady performer on all indexes and scales. In 2019, the Corruption Perceptions Index ranked it sixty-fourth, ahead of Senegal, Argentina, Hungary, and South Africa.

Once Brazil takes its place in the UN and across world order as a robust middle power concerned to assist Africa and especially Lusophone countries and has buried its governance skeletons at home, Brazil should be able to provide valuable assistance and guidance to those Lusophone and other countries that need it badly. Africa will benefit for at least several more decades from the kinds of guidance only a confident middle power that has itself dealt with issues of transition from authoritarianism to democracy and from awkward to responsible leadership. A country such as Brazil that copes with urban sprawl and crime, that has provided robust educational opportunities and improved its public health capabilities, and that has faced down corruption, will have much to offer to a variety of sub-Saharan African
polities as they attempt to recover and grow after battling and surviving the coronavirus pandemic. Brazil, in many resilient ways, has much to offer to Africa that will be valuable as the countries of the subcontinent try to eke out a demographic dividend from its population explosion and as so many of its constituent parts shift from being rural to being overwhelmingly urban. Brazil underwent a similar transformation many decades ago. To play this important role in Africa, however, Brazil will need to strengthen its own governance and provide leadership of unquestioned integrity and legitimacy. That is a major task for Brazil and, when it is accomplished, potentially of benefit for Africa.

Brazil’s main challenge is to project itself confidently into Africa. If it succeeds, it will be better for Brazil’s sense of itself and for its reputation as a resurgent middle power and potentially better for the Africa with which Brazil is historically and culturally deeply connected.

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