

# The BRICS and the Transformation of Global Governance

## A Decolonial Perspective

**Siphamandla Zondi**

Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa

---

### **Abstract**

*What is the agenda of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) platform? And what is its potential for transforming global governance towards one that works for all, especially in the developing world? In response to these questions, this paper suggests that we place BRICS within the context of debates in the global South about global alternatives, including critical perspectives on globalisation, which is the context that shapes our perspective on global governance. The paper uses a decolonial analytic lens, which privileges historical continuity and structural-agency analysis, to identify key nodes of the South ideal for alternative globalisation to guide our analysis in response to the question: Does BRICS have the potential to contribute to transforming the system of global governance? After suggesting ways of understanding the problems of global governance and globalisation, the paper presents four critical steps towards a new global governance system that BRICS might consider in catalysing the global reforms expected.*

### **Introduction**

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – the so-called BRICS countries – are among the fastest growing economies in the world on average, especially in the first five years of BRICS' emergence. As a result, they accounted for about 60 per cent of global economic growth by 2015. Their share of growth in global trade was in line with that of the developing world. BRICS account for about 40 per cent of the global population, which is a major source of economic strength in a changing global economic environment. Two key BRICS member states are in the UN Security Council, invested with the power of critical decision making about strategic world issues. All BRICS countries participate in the Group of Twenty (G20), which emerged during the global financial crisis as the premier platform for international economic cooperation, as power shifted from the Group of Eight and later the Group of Seven (G8 and G7) to a more inclusive coordination between

old centres of global power and emerging powers. The BRICS occupied a strategic position in this re-alignment of global forces, pregnant with potential to drive global reforms in a manner that achieves the age-old dream of a world for all, a better life for all.

At its very inception, the BRICS declared their support for global reforms. At its founding summit in Ekaterinburg in June 2009, Brazil, Russia, India and China, then known as BRIC, announced their support for the G20 to coordinate improvement in global governance – in place of the G8, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and international finance institutions. BRIC called for serious reforms of these finance bodies, principally the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and pushed for strong developmental outcomes in the Doha round of negotiations under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation. BRIC also called for stronger efforts to cushion poor countries from the vagaries of global economic crises, including development and financial assistance, debt relief, market access, and technology transfer. It expressed the principle of common but differentiated principles when it argued that the developed world carried a greater share of responsibility for dealing with these issues and the implementation of sustainable development commitments.

The concept of common and shared prosperity expressed the idea of a better world than the one produced by the victors of the Second World War: it found expression in the idea of collective self-reliance; development; economic and industrial development; the right to development; the new international economic order; and alternatives to structural adjustments, among other ideas from the global South since 1955.

There are good reasons why there will always be a large group of nations that are discontented about their integration into the global system of economy, culture, security and politics. The process by which this global system and its various orders came about is fundamentally unjust, because it was designed, managed, led and governed by a few Western nations to the disadvantage of the larger group of nations. The global system was designed from the coloniser's model of the world (Blaut 1993). It was not an inclusive process seeking to benefit all the peoples of the world, but a process brought about by the globalisation of Western imperialism, coloniality and modernity, in which 'others' were forced, cajoled and later 'invited'.

In this sense, the problems of globalisation go beyond the way it has benefitted some more than others. The problems also relate to the very making of the global, alongside the international, as an asymmetrical system of power extended over the globe. That many 'emerging economies' have assumed a greater role in – and more benefits from – a globalised economy, does not mean globalisation has ceased to privilege one part of the world as its centre over others. China is set to become the biggest economic power globally, and other emerging economies are leapfrogging established Western economies, but this will not change the underlying logic of globalisation as a fundamentally colonial/neocolonial project. This underlying logic needs to be de-imperialised and decolonised.

This paper contends, therefore, that BRICS' efforts to design a new global governance should entail more fundamental transformation than merely reforming institutions and adjusting some rules. It argues that BRICS must ask a new and honest set of questions about the current system of global economic and political governance, questions that should unmask its fundamental injustices in order to lead the world towards a commonly made, commonly governed system where no

one region holds the hegemony over the system, but it is wholly owned by the whole world, one way or the other.

To substantiate this argument, this paper begins by explaining briefly a fundamentally South-centric reading of the problem with the making of the global. The paper will then conclude with suggestions on BRICS interventions towards the transformation of the global and global governance on the basis of true justice, fairness and equity for all in the world, a world for all.

## **The point of departure: On the geography of reason**

To understand the BRICS' commitment to the high politics of global reform and the expectation that it will become a catalytic actor in transforming global governance, we must clarify our approach to the subject. No one argues on anything from nowhere. The idea of a free-floating signifier, a thinker who thinks from a position claimed as 'objective' is an illusion. Thinkers do not place on the table the issues that they respond to but derive them from history and context (time and space). The priorities for us today in relation to thinking about solutions and finding innovative ways to achieve greater benefits for our society are not matters we arrive at artificially: they are handed down to us by the history we have emerged from. For this reason, what the global South ends up prioritising as its crucial objectives in the process of making a better world for all possible, arises from a prior condition that was not of the South's making: marginalisation, domination, denigration, oppression and peripheralisation. This prior condition is one of a 'world for some' into which others were initially forced through dispossession, enslavement, colonisation, genocide and other forms of violence. Now they are being invited and cajoled into this world. It is the prior condition of a world in which the global South remained outsiders even after taking membership, a world that peripheralises them, their cultures, their languages, their ways of being, their economic interests and their worth. This is the coloniser's version of the world. This is the most obvious manifestation of global coloniality as an underlying logic of the modern world system and its constituent parts, including global governance.

This prior condition entails the centring of one province of the world – Western Europe and its diaspora in North America and Oceania, a white province – while peripheralising the rest of the continents and regions of the world. It is a condition marked therefore by the dominance of a small privileged geopolitical centre where the system was conceived and where critical decisions about the global system continue to be made. It is a condition that gives Western Europe and North America the unearned privilege to lead decision making about what to do with the global and its crises, including the current global economic crisis, and then invite others onto platforms such as a G20 for buy-in or to define the parameters of the reform of international financial institutions (IFIs). It is a condition that enables this small province of the world to reserve the privilege of naming the heads of two crucial IFIs – the World Bank and the IMF.

This prior condition is fundamentally a structural distortion of what the global means in practice. It contradicts what the global would entail in the minds of global South nations and thinkers: an inclusive, shared space where all prosper in the spirit of collective self-reliance and solidarity – and no one is left behind. It is a structure of economic, political and cultural power that is

asymmetrical and hierarchical. As Ramon Grosfoguel<sup>1</sup> has illustrated, the global that colonial and imperial powers constructed from the late fifteenth century onwards was one marked by multiple hierarchies that intersected one another, as black feminists would call it, reinforcing one another in a manner that created a wholly unequal world of economies, nations and states. Globalisation or global capitalism is but one of nine intersecting hierarchies that emerged over time in the making of global coloniality. This world is European, capitalist, statist, Christian, patriarchal, white, heterosexual and male in its character. It is important to quote him at length regarding this structuring of the global into entangled hierarchies that continue to scaffold the world that this modern man invented.

The making of this world involved multiple forms and types of violence as part of what has been aptly termed the dark underside of Euro-American modernity.<sup>2</sup> It required genocides on all continents because no people would willingly surrender their sovereignty as a people to the lordship of other human beings who claim superiority merely on the basis of their race, religion, culture and military prowess. Where peoples of regions outside Europe resisted, they were killed, maimed, jailed, banished from their places, forcibly dispossessed of sources of their sovereignty and claims to human dignity, and were transformed into subjects or objects. Frantz Fanon, according to Lewis R. Gordon,<sup>3</sup> suggests that the making of this condition we now have to respond to require the drawing of linear lines dividing humanity into a zone of beings with the privileges of human rights and dignity, on the one hand, and a zone of nonbeings with limited or no human rights and dignity on the other. This produced what has been termed a world without others, a world that excludes others, forcing them to lose themselves in order to re-appear within the system. This disciplining power of the civilisation that occupies the centre of this world led to competition – or to clashes among civilisations – instead of a dialogue of civilisations.<sup>4</sup>

The position of free-floating signifier is an illusion. Thinking from the periphery forces the thinkers of the South to engage in combative terms with cognitive and epistemic injustice – alongside historical, cultural, political, economic, ecological and other forms of injustice that form their experience of the world produced via slavery, imperialism and colonialism. Even as they seek to understand the subject matter at hand, they have to be aware of – and combat – these interlocking layers of injustice that persist in spite of the many post- periods: post-imperial, post-colonial, post-Cold War, and so forth. Mafeje<sup>5</sup> suggests, therefore, that to speak authentically from our position on the periphery about the conditions in the world and our position in it is to engage in the negation of prior negations. The making of the centre that excludes created conditions for rejection of exclusion, demands to be included, or calls for a new order of things in which all enter as equals.<sup>6</sup> Questions of world transformation become appealing, not because they sound nice, but because they offer the prospect of looking for alternatives to current haunting predicaments.

There would be no need for the people and nations of the South to demand global transformations, including changes to global governance, were it not for the prior condition of global mal-governance, the domination of the system of economic governance by the West. The reality of concentration of power in the global North, in spite of the emergence of the global South, defies logic because it is not an outcome of objective realities in terms of economic growth, technological developments, size of population, political influence, and so on, but a privilege handed down to the white world. The massive arrival of former colonies in the UN-based international system has

not led to the fundamental transformation of the system to reflect their arrival. The phenomenon of emerging markets has not altered the management of global economic governance. The massive increase in the influence of the global South in global affairs has not led to adjustment of the decision-making systems to reflect these new realities; but has continued to reflect the will and interests of the victors of the Second World War.

Therefore, the demands for global transformation arise from the reality of global coloniality and the aspiration for a new post-colonial, post-imperialist and transmodern world, a world for all. The calls for a complete revamp of the global system of governance are driven by the need for basic rights such as equality, justice and fairness. They are informed by a wish among blacks to displace and replace the dominance of the white middle class. They want to end the deceit, the masking of the coloniality of global power under such clichés as a liberal democracy, human rights, ethics and morality.

## Contending with globalisation

Without this methodological adjustment, it is difficult for an observer to understand the emergence of BRICS and the expectations that it becomes a platform for global transformation. It would not be natural to place this demand on BRICS based on a history of critical voices in the global South linking global governance with globalisation, which has worsened problems of inequality, poverty and unemployment for the most part. It is not the truth for everyone, but it is for those seeing the glorified process of globalisation from the perspective of its victims, the viewpoint of the losers, the vantage point of the marginalised. This means the South realises that the globalisation of economic, political, cultural and epistemic systems further entrenches the colonial logic of global power asymmetry – by deepening the levels of marginalisation for the global periphery while increasing benefits for the already privileged centres of global power, with only a few exceptions to the trend, such as China.

The idea is therefore that the South must find ways of participating in globalisation in a manner that undermines the logic of racist hierarchy and helps lead to greater redistribution of power and value across the world. The idea is therefore not to pretend that globalisation could be ignored, but that the South could exercise a kind of agency to transform the entire project in the interests of a world for all, a multipolar world.

In the 1970s, key voices in the South argued for a new international economic order marked by the logic of development at the centre – because this was seen as placing the well-being of ordinary people at the heart of decisions about the direction of the world. They argued for a new world order underpinned by horizontal relationships between the global North, whose development has depended on the underdevelopment of Africa, leading to what Samir Amin calls maldevelopment on the world scale.<sup>7</sup> This political economy is of necessity a by-product of the expansion of coloniality/modernity – in the form of a multiplicity of hierarchies that got replicated everywhere that Euromodernity reached since the late fifteenth century. These hierarchies are most obvious in political-power relations that have former colonies on the periphery of institutions of global power controlled by former imperial powers, institutions in which major decisions on world affairs are

made. But it is also evident in other vertical relations such as between the Christian worlds and others, whiteness and other forms of identity and power, heterosexual worlds and others, patriarchal worlds and others, and capitalist world systems and other systems.<sup>8</sup>

For instance, some have called for 'delinking' with the global system of capitalism, suggesting the socialist alternative, on the basis that this system was the underlying crisis behind social and political crises the South experienced.<sup>9</sup> Others, such as Leopold Senghor, argued for socialism with authentically African features.<sup>10</sup> This idea of rebellion against global capitalism is still in progress, having been tried in various alliances and platforms with very little cohesion among them. It has been delayed partly due to the mechanisations of the dominant global powers with influence on decisions and governance in former colonies, partly also by weaknesses among those pushing for change.

Groups have organised themselves in the past few decades to participate in protests and networks of solidarity that generally do not reject globalisation per se, but demand forms of globalisation that enhance democratic inclusion, justice for all, fairness for all and representation of all. They essentially reject the globalisation that emerged from the march of Western modernity, globalisation in the interest of the rich few and at the expense of the poor majority. They are anti-capitalist, anti-corporatisation.<sup>11</sup>

Though informed by the experience of the South and often led from the South, the anti-globalisation movement draws from a variety of peoples in the North as well.<sup>12</sup> In many cases, local-level, traditional resistance to the impacts of globalisation: erosion of the ecosystems; disappearance of forests; loss of jobs; banal abuse, exploitation and violence, have evolved into national campaigns and further into international networks challenging the current model of globalisation. These form part of longstanding resistance to the current model of the world with its colonial modes of power, being and subjectivity: what Blaut<sup>13</sup> calls the coloniser's model of the world. These reject the illusions of this model: the illusion that liberalisation and privatisation lead to economic growth; the myth that multinational corporations are engines for growth for everyone; the dream that markets fix the problems they create, including poverty on the periphery, liberty experienced as oppression, sovereignty experienced as domination, shared prosperity that manifests as super exploitation, and development that is in fact underdevelopment.

When some, like Acharya,<sup>14</sup> have argued for a multiplex world, they envisaged the end of the anomaly of a so-called American or European or Western world. Acharya, like social movements, envisages a collapse of the whole liberal hegemonic order and its underpinnings, an end of normative power that has haunted the world for centuries because its American dimension only begins in the twenty-first century as a build-up on previous ones. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o<sup>15</sup> proposed a 'globalectic' world in which every part of the world would be a centre relative to its context and the world would be organised on the dialectical relations among many centres rather than on the dominance of one centre as in the current model of the world. Samir Amin<sup>16</sup> meditated on this and struggled for the birth of a polycentric world, a socialist alternative based on guaranteed self-reliance among the poor countries, especially in Africa.

These are just a few of many expressions of this wish to transcend the world that emerged from global imperialism through colonialism and slavery. They represent a utopia that many in the global South hope platforms like BRICS will build towards.

These ideas are part of a repertoire of strategies, some in the form of critical thought leadership and others in protests and grassroots action, that serve to disrupt, undermine and force the dominant system of globalisation to yield to demands for justice and fairness. We reject the drawing of hard and fast lines between them as Eurocentric thought does,<sup>17</sup> elevating the academic discourse over subaltern discourses though the two share a fundamental purpose: the transformation of the world. We argue that these visions represent a search for transmodernity, this process of finding a way out of the Euromodern world and its Euromodernity in order to bring about a world for all. A number of thinkers therefore see the agency of the South in the face of globalisation as about acting collectively and severally to end the ills of global modernity as we have known it and achieve justice, equity, equality, shared prosperity, and such principles as subvert the logic of mainstream globalisation.

For this reason, the global South has on many platforms reached consensus that what was needed was a transformation of the global system of governance and its accompanying systems, while being willing to live in the interim with mere reforms to 'improve' conditions in the fundamentally problematic world system. Nyerere<sup>18</sup> referred to four critical conditions that the global South had already developed consensus on in this regard by 1979, namely: the idea was to work towards creating a new international order, including an economic order to replace one where the former colonies were second-class, exploited, trading to disadvantage and underdeveloped. This entailed seeking changes to the structure of global power, including international economic systems in order to enable the South to do economic activities in a fair and just environment. The second was that this was a shared aspiration that made the unity of the global South through the Group of 77 (G77) and other negotiating forums both necessary and inevitable. The third was pooling together the various strands that individual nationalisms had sought to use in order to prosecute this struggle in order to find a broad and inclusive – while being flexible – ideological prism in order to cement the unity of forces for change and minimise internal fissures due to particularities of -isms they employ to prosecute this struggle. Fourthly, the South had agreed that the choice between confrontation and negotiation in dealing with the global North and other forces in favour of the status quo with minor reforms sometimes was a false choice. He explained this as follows:

We have become very apologetic – to our own people and to others. When participating in dialogue, we become apologetic, as if to negotiate is somehow to surrender or to soften about the objective. And if dialogue gets us nowhere we become apologetic about confrontation, as if we were being unreasonable – even irrational and provoking an all-out economic war which we cannot win.<sup>19</sup>

But the South had agreed that all options were on the table – dialogue and confrontation, negotiation and protests – for as long as they would bring about change needed.

These efforts can be called demands for the de-imperialisation, decolonisation, or fundamental transformation of the world. It is about killing dead the ghosts of the empire that continue to haunt the formerly colonised peoples in the aftermath of imperial rule,<sup>20</sup> leading to a sense that the empire itself is not really dead. It makes necessary the demands for localisation, indigenisation, nativism and sovereignty. What Chinweizu<sup>21</sup> describes as the world for all has permutations that

range from the idea of a world of indigenous peoples, the world built on indigenous logics, the world without the West, the other world or the world otherwise, and so forth.

This is about escaping the suffocating omnipresence of the imperial, the global colonial. It is best expressed by the intellectual and policy strategies of social movements and radical civil society that for decades have argued and campaigned for alternative global economic models and as a consequence, an alternative world system. These include such movements as peasant, youth, women and peace movements. The aspiration drives many protests, which have become a common feature on the sidelines of institutional meetings propping up neoliberal globalisation, including the WTO, IMF, G7 and so forth.<sup>22</sup> It is present in alternative platforms like the World Social Forum that demands fundamental change of the world as presented in the World Economic Forum of elites.

An expression of this idea that has carried significant currency in our estimation is one for transforming globalisation while participating in it, resisting while participating, because boycotting to resist imposes risks that do not equal the possibility of progress towards the ideal. It is the subversive option that gives developing countries an opportunity to use the very platforms designed to promote neoliberal globalisation and global coloniality in order to argue for, push for and campaign for change. This is present in searches for alternative internationalism, in global reform projects, in progressive internationalism, and such ideas. It requires that the South accept the reality of globalisation as irreversible in its entirety, but as capable of being transformed through the use of alliances of progressive and revolutionary forces, through a network of agencies of the South, through rebellious activities of mass organisations, through alternative platforms of agency like the BRICS, and through coordinated actions of negotiators and governments of the South chipping away at the privilege of the North by winning concessions on the negotiating table on a range of policy matters.

The Bandung Conference that brought together African and Asian states to discuss ways of enhancing cooperation among them was in response to a global order – that perpetual colonial order of things. The conference accepted this reality as a fact, actually embraced the establishment of the IMF and World Bank in the hope that though born within the belly of the beast, the resources they held would enable developing countries to chart their own directions in economic development. It put faith in the multilateral system to control the negative impacts of the international economic system on developing countries, such as fluctuating commodity prices, trade imbalances, growing poverty and the shortage of capital. Subsequent South initiatives, including the Buenos Aires Plan of Action on technical cooperation in 1978 and the South Commission established in 1987, as well as platforms like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the G77, shared this sense of optimism about the possibility of changing the trajectory of globalisation from within.

The South Commission's report concluded that the best way to respond to globalisation was to 'devise international economic and political structures and arrangements for dealing effectively with the host of new issues raised by growing interdependence', while incorporating the developing countries 'both in the fair sharing of the benefits of interdependence and in the systems through which it is managed'. Critical to this, the commission argued, developing countries needed to resist the adaptation of the international system by the global North in order to preserve the colonial



order of power relations by taking initiatives to promote an alternative vision of the world based on a more equitable system capable of serving all the peoples of the world.

The World Social Forum and the counter-globalisation platforms are more radical representations of options for change. These energies for change created space for IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa), CIVETS (an acronym coined by Robert Ward in 2009 to denote six promising economies: Columbia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa), ALBA (an alliance of Latin American and Caribbean countries) and the BRICS to emerge as platforms seeking change. The BRICS that emerged is not the one that Goldman Sachs envisaged in 2001: it is a platform in favour of global transformation, even though it is fair to argue that it is in fact more for reform than fundamental change in global governance. It can be shown that BRICS is a logical if imperfect outcome of the global South's search for alternatives and platforms for change on a global scale not seen since Bandung. This conference laid the basis for formal South-South cooperation as a way of building the momentum towards a new world order or the new international economic order Nyerere refers to earlier.

Like Bandung, more recent structures hope for gradual systemic reform of the world. But it can also be shown that BRICS is also an outcome of voices outside states and political parties that have consistently imagined, argued and campaigned for a post-colonial, post-capitalist, post-imperial world, what Afro-Latin activists call the worlds otherwise. Some of these voices participate in BRICS forums for academics, trade unionists, civil society and so forth, but others have established parallel civil society platforms on BRICS. Still more continue their struggles for transformation at a distance, and quite a sizeable number of them are sceptical of the BRICS, fearing that it has become an extension of the very problem we hope it can resist. The point is that some of these voices and actors have hopes that BRICS will be able to achieve certain things that are expected to enable the achievement of their dreams for the worlds otherwise.

The BRICS joins this variety of impulses for change marked by different tones and texture of ideas. This variety is part of the dilemma of being BRICS. It is about how BRICS distinguishes itself from previous South platforms that have failed to represent in comprehensive ways the interests of those on the margins of forums and debates. This must be borne in mind as we discuss how BRICS appears to be responding to the imperative to search for alternatives to liberal/neoliberal globalisation. In this regard, it must be accepted that BRICS is a state-driven and dominated process, and it is already an established fact that these states pursue statist versions of global change and that these versions are not fully in sync with what is being demanded on the margins of BRICS society. It is obvious too that individually, in their national development, none of these states have pursued radical transformation or a bold departure from neoliberal globalisation but have in some cases worked with capital to 'manage' the expectations and demands of the people on the margins, especially the workers, the landless, the angry and the discontented. Sometimes, this has happened in ways that involve suppression of public mobilisation, using violence in response to often peaceful protests.

## BRICS and globalisation

It is in this context that BRICS' emergence is seen as significant opportunity for the global South, though it is not a purely southern initiative. Many in the South see it as a potentially radical project for global transformations necessary for giving birth to a prosperous, peaceful and just world for all. The BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) that the investment bank, Goldman Sachs, anticipated in 2001 was to be an addition to the mainstream global power structures, an extension of the responsibility for the Western-driven globalisation to a few emerging economies of the South on account of the size of their GDPs and their growing voice in economic platforms.<sup>23</sup> It is the capitalist and the liberal democratic credentials of some of the BRIC that qualified them as sub-imperialist forces to perpetuate the status quo with some reforms here and there, such as their participation in privileged discussion forums such as the G20.

This article argues that though the BRIC that emerged eight years later was as anticipated in terms of countries involved and their economic status, it was different in its outlook on the world and intensions for global governance. When seen from a critical South perspective, the BRIC of 2009 was a major departure from the Goldman Sachs concept. Instead of a BRIC that wanted to save the world system as is, what emerged was a BRIC that shared the discontent of the global South and those calling for reforms. Instead of a BRIC that would position itself like the Middle Powers of earlier decades that sought a space for themselves at the Western high tables of decision-making, as became of Japan, South Korea, Australia and Canada for instance in the pre-1990 period, the BRIC carved a space for itself as a major critique of this arrangement. Its very first declaration in 2009 signaled that the BRIC would not be a supporter of the status quo in global governance and global power distribution.<sup>24</sup>

This BRICS of today (after South Africa was welcomed as the fifth partner at the 2011 summit, held in Sanya) is not significant only in its share of the global economy, but also in its discontent about the inequity in this economy. The member countries are not measured just by the size of their GDP but the size of their ambition to transform the global system that they had no role in designing in the first place. Their value is not measured only by their growing participation in esteemed platforms for managing the Western-centred system, but also their willingness to ask difficult and uncomfortable questions in these platforms, an expectation they share with other platforms born outside the dominant western blocs.<sup>25</sup> It is not just their participation in institutions of global governance, but also their willingness to do so while representing the views, aspirations and ideas of those that are excluded from the centre of global power.

In this sense, the BRICS is a platform for seeking alternatives to Western-centric globalisation, for pursuing another kind of globalisation.<sup>26</sup> The proviso is that those wanting this kind of BRICS continue to be vigilant and ensure that it is not blunted by the rise of right-wing governments in BRICS countries. It was born with the promise to transform the world in favour of the excluded, especially emerging powers. It was born not as an appendage to the imperial West, but as a thorn in its flesh, albeit in subtle and quiet ways. The BRICS partnership has taken a posture that is almost completely opposite of what the West generally anticipated. For this reason, there is fear in the North that BRICS could scuttle the entire Western global agenda and open the system up to diverse influences and possibilities. The responses from the West have been to divide by talking up

differences among BRICS countries between supposedly democratic and non-democratic countries, bilateral disputes such as those between China and India, singling out China and Russia for scorn and ridicule and so forth.

Critical is the growing cohesion in BRICS's voice on its agenda, in spite of its many weaknesses – including internal divergences on political and economic situations, and fears that BRICS is becoming a platform for sub-imperialism. This voice is for the reform of institutions of global governance, principally the UN Security Council, the IMF and the World Bank as well as its voice in favour of a stronger and more effective G20 as a sort of a transitional phase towards a world for all. Our analysis of the ten communiqués and several statements of meetings of BRICS leaders suggest the following key principles in the BRICS agenda so far, evolving in respect of what must be achieved in transforming institutions of global governance:

*Global equity:* This principle applies in particular to the distribution of decision-making power and the power to manage global affairs. The BRICS want an end to the power of the West to single-handedly decide the leadership of the IMF and World Bank. But this principle also has implications for a whole range of other policy areas including the structure of negotiation systems, decision making in the G20, and so forth.

*Global justice:* This relates to recognising the deep-seated injustice of the structure of global power and governance as designed by the West when seen from outside the West. They want a clear acceptance that injustices have been committed. The concentration of poverty, violence and despair in the global South is not an act of nature or just failure of the South, but it is an outcome of structural arrangements. This opens up an opportunity for frank conversations about fundamental transformation in global governance, one that says to the global South that the world understands the injustices committed.

*Global equality:* This principle is evident in the BRICS' messages about poverty and participation of the developing world in structures of global governance. These messages require the agreement at the global level that the inequality that persists through phases of global prosperity and crises are deeply structural and that they are part of the reason some parts of the world have prospered more continuously for decades. This opens opportunities for arguments to be made about drastic actions towards redistributing wealth, value and significance towards a more equitable distribution.

*Global fairness:* The principle is about matters of procedure and process mainly. It is about pointing out that the manner in which global governance is managed and used to solve global governance is designed to privilege the centre and further deepen the predicament of the South. For instance, the idea of equal responsibility for such global problems as climate change, burden the countries that contributed the least to the problem with equal responsibility to those that contributed the most. The same can be said about negotiation positions on world trade, property rights, and so forth. This principle creates space for thinking about reforms to the rules of procedure, to attitudes and to paradigms of international relations in order to ensure greater procedural fairness and achievement of fair outcomes for all.

*Agency of the developing world:* The principle is about accepting genuinely and demonstrably the roles, contributions, positions, aspirations and agendas of the developing world in global governance. This entails recognising the voice of alliances that are challenging for reforms and

transformation. It is recognising that they will only grow in their determination to get a fair share for the excluded, downtrodden and peripheralised regions, countries, economies and peoples of the world. It is accepting that they are obliged to grow in their internal cohesion, determination and their effect on global developments. It is not about offering charity or patronising agents of global reform and transformation, but it is to change attitudes, orientations, paradigms and so forth. It is an invitation to horizontal conversations and partnerships of equals. It is about moving from the rhetoric of equality in international law to equality indeed. The principle implies that the BRICS intend to ensure that the developing world is taken seriously. This is the logic behind the founding of the New Development Bank, the common currency mechanism, the role played by BRICS in the climate change outcomes since 2011, the BRICS harmonised positions with the G20 and the WTO, the posture on IMF and World Bank reforms and so forth.

The BRICS do not have to achieve these principles by themselves, but because these are commonly held ideas right through the global South community of institutions as well as critical platforms in the global North, the BRICS can count on alignment with other platforms seeking fundamental change of global governance. These include the G77+China, the G24 (a chapter of G77), the NAM, IBSA, and so forth. Progress in championing these and other related principles will depend on a number of conditions that the BRICS must think about and decide on:

*BRICS cohesion:* The achievement of its ambitious agenda in a world system hostile to the agency of the non-West in global governance will require greater internal cohesion within BRICS. This must be related to three areas, at least: a clear, shared vision and aspiration in respect of the world the BRICS wants to see and how this expresses itself in the arrangement of global governance. Secondly, BRICS needs coherence in policy programmes such as they are emerging from sectoral ministerial meetings BRICS initiated in 2010. But these must be packaged strategic policy agendas that make their positions on a range of themes predictable and principled. Thirdly, greater institutionalisation of BRICS will enhance its ability to pursue its agenda with regard to the transformation of global governance with greater vigour and coherence. This includes creating a secretariat either in one place or decentralised into sectoral coordinating secretariats in various BRICS countries. These matters have been raised in BRICS summits and some decisions have been taken, but only practical actions will determine if this cohesion materialises.

*Catalytic capacity:* If our review of thinking about the postures of the global South regarding globalisation is anything to go by, then the BRICS become effective when they acquire the ability to act as a catalyst for placing transformation of global governance at the centre of global discussions and activities; for growing alignment of agendas across the developing world; for strategic alliances among various South formations; for stimulation of widespread debates and discussions about these reforms including among civil society formations; for policy initiatives that transcend the neoliberal, neocolonial consensus of the West; for pooling together various strands of initiatives challenging globalisation through the identification of points of convergence across the South; and so forth.

*BRICS credibility and legitimacy:* BRICS will achieve very little without attending to factors that limit the legitimacy and credibility of their efforts. Legitimacy must derive from at least two factors: Firstly, BRICS must connect with the peoples of their countries. This should include serious engagement with structures of civil society within BRICS countries and between them. This civil

constituency of BRICS will enhance its voice in global dialogues and negotiations. Secondly, BRICS needs to reach out to the rest of the peoples, especially in the South, by positioning themselves as advancing the interests of not only states in the developing world but also ordinary people. What BRICS has done in reaching out to non-BRICS can be replicated in reaching out to civil society and movements across the South. Credibility must derive, in our view, from the ability of the BRICS to follow through on their promises, ensuring that their bold actions, such as funding alternative energy projects, have a bearing on peoples on the ground. It is also about individual BRICS countries better managing domestic issues that diminish their credibility as catalysts for a very difficult process of transformation.

## Conclusion

A credible, legitimate, effective and efficient BRICS has a better chance of succeeding in building the momentum for a global push for fundamental transformation from a colonially-inspired and imperialist global system towards one that includes and works for all. This is BRICS' mission, not purely of its own choosing, but because it inherits a tradition of the South, seeking alternatives to the coloniser's model of the world. It cannot avoid being seen as a custodian, together with other platforms of the dreams of Bandung, Cairo, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. The BRICS promise to lead efforts to bring about a new global governance should not mean that BRICS will produce a blueprint for all to just rubber stamp, but that it should open the space for the whole world to design the alternative global governance by championing cardinal principles mentioned above in existing and new global governance institutions. It is precisely because there is no complete consensus, even in the South, about what must change and what must be specific outcomes, that BRICS must position itself as a catalyst for growing convergence of reform agendas as the basis of a consensus on transformations needed. But BRICS will require internal cohesion, catalytic ability, legitimacy and credibility to succeed in getting its ambitions translated into reality.

## Notes and References

- 1 Grosfoguel, R., 2009. A Decolonial Approach to Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Border Thinking and Global Coloniality. *Kult Special Issue: Epistemological Transformation*, Fall: 10–37, p.19.
- 2 Mignolo, W.D., 2011. The Darker Side of the Enlightenment. A Decolonial Reading of Kant's Geography. In Elden, S. and Mendieta, E. (ed.), 2011. *Kant's Geography*. Stony Brook Press: Stony Brook.
- 3 Gordon, R.L., 2007. Through the Hellish Zone of Nonbeing, Thinking through Fanon, Disaster, and the Damned of the Earth. *Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 5, pp.6–21.
- 4 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S., 2016. Beyond 'Clash of Civilisations' Towards 'Pluriversality': Culture, Identity, and Power in Africa. *Unpublished Paper*. Author Copy.
- 5 Mafeje, A., 2011. A Combative Ontology. In Devisch, R. and Nyamnjoh, F.B. (ed.), 2011. *Postcolonial Turn: Imagining Anthropology and Africa*. Bamenda and Leiden: Langaa, pp.31–41.
- 6 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S., 2013. *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonisation*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- 7 Amin, S., 1990. *Maldevelopment: Anatomy of a Global Failure*. London: Zed Books.
- 8 Grosfoguel, R., 2009, p.19.

- 9 Amin, S., 2002. Africa: Living on the Fringe. *Monthly Review*, March 2002.
- 10 Wilder, G., 2015. *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonisation and the Future of the World*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- 11 Warner, A., 2004. A Brief History of the Anti-Globalization Movement. *University of Miami International and Comparative Law Review*, 12, pp.237–268.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Blaut, J.M., 1993. *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical and Eurocentric History*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- 14 Acharya, A., 2014. *The End of American World Order*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- 15 Wa Thiong'o, N., 2012. *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 16 Amin, S., 1990.
- 17 Bhagwati, J., 2004. Anti-Globalisation: Why? *Journal of Policy Modelling*, 26, pp.439–463.
- 18 Nyerere, J., 1979. *Unity for a New World Order. An Address to the Ministerial Conference of the Group of 77*. Tanzania: Arusha, 12 February.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Kwarteng, K., 2012. *Ghosts of Empire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- 21 Chinweizu, I., 1987. *Decolonizing the African Mind*. Lagos: Pero Press.
- 22 Fraser, N., 2003. From Discipline to Flexibilisation? Retreading Foucault in the Shadow of Globalisation. *Constellations*, 10(2), pp.161–173.
- 23 Smith, J.A., 2011. BRIC becomes BRICS: Emerging Regional Powers? Changes on the Geopolitical Chessboard. Available at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/bric-becomes-brics-emerging-regional-powers-changes-on-the-geopolitical-chessboard/22812> [Accessed 20 May 2014].
- 24 Stuenkel, O., 2013. Towards a 'BRICS Consensus'. 26 March 2013. Available at <http://www.postwesternworld.com/2013/03/26/towards-a-brics-consensus/> [Accessed 27 March 2013].
- 25 Wilder, G., 2015.
- 26 BRICS, 2015. *Ufa Declaration*. Ufa, Russian Federation, 9 July 2015. Available at <http://brics2016.gov.in/upload/files/document/5763c20a72f2d71hDeclarationeng.pdf> [Accessed 23 August 2016].