The BRICS re-scramble Africa

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Abstract

Systems of capital accumulation have left Africa 'scrambled,' in ways that even prior to the 1884-85 Berlin conference, favoured Western corporations and their African comprador partners. Does the advent of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) 'bloc' (or network) and associated corporations herald a dramatic change in these arrangements? Revisiting the broader theory of imperial power relations in the contemporary world economy is revealing, as are instances of BRICS' multilateral reforms (mostly in late 2015) at the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and United Nations climate summit. In a context of extremely adverse global and internal power relations, at a time there has been hope expressed for anti-imperialist responses by BRICS to the dominant modes of destructive multilateralism (especially with the US presidency of Donald Trump), it increasingly appears that a different theoretical and empirical framing is more appropriate: *sub-imperialism*. If true, then a stronger movement of popular forces within the BRICS and their hinterlands would be one logical response to the worsening economic, social, political and environmental conditions.

Introduction

Systems of capital accumulation left Africa 'scrambled' long before the infamous 1884-85 border carve-up was completed in Berlin. There, negotiators from the colonial powers Britain, France, Portugal, Germany and Belgium created scores of dysfunctional national units without reference to prior indigenous social organization. Setting the stage for colonial domination, the transatlantic enslavement of approximately twelve million Africans from the 15th-19th centuries was followed by the first systematic Western extraction projects: Kimberley diamonds (1867), Johannesburg gold (1884) and the myriad other mineral and petroleum outflows that followed. Then, over the next century, came repeated disasters for Africa: the colonial project's catastrophic distortions; the 'false decolonization' and neo-colonial power relationships after 1950s-70s independence struggles were won; the durability of settler colonialism especially in Southern Africa through the late 20th century; the Cold War machinations until 1990; the foreign debt enslavement and structural adjustment policies of the neoliberal era, especially the lost decades of the 1980s-90s; calamities associated with ongoing wars and terrorism; scores of African dictatorships supported by Washington, London and Paris; the looming destruction posed by climate change; and the resource cursing alongside 'Africa Rising' myth-making of recent years. All these largely resulted from capital accumulation processes that favoured Western corporations and their African comprador partners. The geopolitical arrangements and multilateral economic management strategies associated with this historic trajectory have – since even before Rosa Luxemburg wrote the seminal text in 1913 – earned the tag "imperialism," because it is (as she showed using Africa as her main research base) in the combination of periodic global capitalist crises, the expansion of corporations' geographic reach, the growing ambitions of financiers, and the fusion of capitalist/non-capitalist exploitative prowess that Western-dominated accumulation continues to underdevelop Africa.

Would the advent of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) 'bloc' (or network) herald a dramatic change in these arrangements? After all, since 1990 when the Cold War ended, formidable changes have beset African political economy. With the USSR becoming (an initially impoverished) Russia during the 1990s, the dramatic decline of Western overseas development aid to Africa reflected new power balances and geopolitical calculations. The liberation of South Africa from apartheid in 1994 portended a more aggressive economic role – which has ebbed and flowed, with Johannesburg firms still the largest source of FDI in Africa – as well as Pretoria's PanAfrican political leadership, in the 2001 New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), the 2003 African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), in the controversial election to the African Union's chair of President Jacob Zuma's ex-wife Nkosozana Dlamini-Zuma from 2012-16 and in Zuma's 2015 push for a military-oriented 'African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises.' South Africa intervened to 'keep peace' in nearly a dozen African sites (but with mixed results and occasional disasters).

Simultaneously, other BRICS increased their footprint in Africa. The 1990s-2000s rise of Chinese trade and parastatal investment (albeit with uneven flows) raised the continent's level of GDP – apparently justifying $200 billion in new Sub-Saharan African foreign indebtedness from 2006-16 (a 50 percent increase, mostly to China) – at the same time the continent's overall wealth shrunk dramatically due to (net negative) natural capital depletion in nine out of ten countries (World Bank 2014). The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation met every three years from 2000-15, and at the last summit in Johannesburg announced notional Chinese commitments of $60 billion, along with a 'reindustrialization' strategy for light manufacturing enterprises with Ethiopia in the vanguard. From 2003-16, Brazil's Workers Party leaders made encouraging sounds about a benign approach by its corporations and development aid mechanisms in Lusophone Africa (Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde). In New Delhi, an India-Africa Forum Summit to promote interstate and business relations was held in 2008, and again in Addis Ababa in 2011 and New Delhi in 2015, with the latter meeting generating a $10 billion Indian commitment before 41 heads of state in attendance (up from 10-15 in the prior two). Even the least active of the BRICS, Russia, was meanwhile promoting nuclear energy, arms, transport, mining and petroleum deals in more than a dozen African countries. (In competition, Barack Obama's 2014 meeting with most African leaders in Washington had a $37 billion deal-making headline.)

In short, prospects for an ever-greater BRICS role in Africa were the source of enormous optimism. But reality has begun to set in. From 2011, the crash in commodity prices signified the exhaustion of Chinese Keynesian infrastructure expansion and left African materials exporters with enormous excess capacity and debt (mostly to China). The BRICS countries' role in world trade amplified economic and political contradictions associated with generalized world capitalist overproduction and global governance failure; this was evident at the World Trade Organization's (WTO's) revitalization in December 2015, as the Nairobi summit had devastating implications for food sovereignty in Africa as well as in the BRICS themselves. The same month in Washington, International Monetary Fund (IMF) vote restructuring featured four BRICS countries' increases (led by China with 35 percent) but also dramatic setbacks for Nigeria (-41 percent) and South Africa (-21 percent) as well as smaller economies which were not as capable in supporting the institution's recapitalization. Finally, the December 2015 Paris Agreement confirmed Africa's victimization by climate change, mainly because the BRICS allied with historic greenhouse gas emitters, especially the United States and European Union, in a deal celebrated by polluters because not only are (weak) emissions cut commitments non-binding (with no legal accountability for violations), there is no longer a prospect of legal liabilities (the 'climate debt') against the wealthy countries for their role in what are likely to be 200 million additional African deaths this century due to extreme weather, droughts and increased temperatures.

In this context of worsening political economic and political ecological devastation traceable to both the BRICS and Western powers, there are also worrying socio-cultural backlashes against BRICS firms and citizens operating in Africa (and likewise within BRICS against Africans – especially African immigrants to South Africa). The one example of constructive intra-BRICS solidarity, which has saved millions of lives of HIV+ Africans already, is the Indian and Brazilian violation of Intellectual Property on AntiRetroViral (ARV) medicines that South African activists and allies forced to become available as generic supplies through protest against Big Pharma, the WTO's Trade Related Intellectual Property System and the South African and US governments. That model of 'brics from below', which will be required to link hinterland-African anti-extraction and debt activists to South African and other BRICS counterparts, is probably the only positive feature of the transition of the 'emerging powers' into what now appear to be, at least in the cases of Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa, *submerging*, albeit still explicitly *sub-imperial* powers (Bond and Garcia 2015).

In nearly all African countries, infrastructural and productive investments are desperately needed, along with life-saving medicines and access to new technologies. Development aid, trade, loans and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) are considered vital for these purposes, yet indisputably, the world's main political-economic and political-ecological processes have been hostile to the continent since slavery, unequal trade, colonialism, durable settler-colonialism and neo-colonial modes of extraction began in the 15th century. Nearly without respite, Africa has witnessed external actors whose imperial, colonial and now multilateral institutional power bases have largely drawn surpluses from the continent without reinvestment (aside from the 20th century's settler colonial societies – South Africa, Rhodesia, Mozambique and Angola – which prospered from the 1930s-60s). There have been exceptions to the despair, including two high-growth, high-investment countries (Botswana and Mauritius). And there have been inspiring, victorious resistance struggles in many African countries and international solidarity campaigns against slavery, colonialism, apartheid and illegitimate debt.

But writing in mid-2016, the main forces drawing Africans into the world economy appear uniformly destructive. The 2002-11 commodity super-cycle peaked just at the point that Africa Rising rhetoric was ramped up, apparently so as to encourage the continent's elites to continue trade and investment liberalization aimed at more intense extractivism, even when this was obviously not in their economies' interests. In part because the value of minerals and petroleum exports shrunk, the continent's foreign debt doubled to more than $400 billion after the West's (partial) debt relief in 2006. FDI flowed into Africa more rapidly until a 2015 reversal, but was mostly directed at the extraction of primary commodities in a process that (unlike Australia, Canada and Norway with similar commodity export orientations) left African countries 'resource cursed,' losing far more in depleted minerals and petroleum than regained via the capital account (World Bank 2014). The West's foreign aid to Africa shrunk dramatically after the Cold War ended in 1990, and subsequent increases after 2000 translated only into marginal gains (e.g. in education and health). However, the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation has recently heralded a dramatic increase in aid and credit availability, though not without complications discussed below.

In this context of apparent shifts in world power, in March 2013 Durban hosted the heads of state summit of the BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The BRICS have been heralded not only as major 'emerging markets' in terms of their GDP growth – although at least from 2014-16 three were economically *sub*merging (Brazil, Russia and South Africa) – but as the main forces reshaping multilateral institution governance. To illustrate, just before the G20 meeting in China in mid-2016, an experienced journalist for a major Johannesburg Sunday newspaper, Godfrey Mutizwa (2016), applauded the BRICS:

> From a desire in 2009 to advance the reform of the Bretton Woods institutions – the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – the group has moved from cooperation to a commitment in 2015 to act jointly on key international issues ranging from UN Security Council reform to global conflict and climate change.

To be sure, this is conventional wisdom in mainstream South Africa, especially in the wake of the Durban summit. Yet in reality, such 'joint action' (albeit rarely with all five BRICS aligned) has *amplified* not ameliorated the underdevelopment of Africa, *where it has been effective,* e.g. in the December 2015 decisions taken in Paris, Nairobi and Washington.[1] To make this case, the structure of the argument that follows is that the BRICS have risen up to a point in the global division of labor, then suffered intense fall-out from the broader crisis of capital accumulation (reflected in Africa most spectacularly in the end of the commodity super-cycle), and have as a result intensified the metabolism of exploitation. This exploitative role in Africa is worsening in part through the BRICS' current strategy of assimilating into (not offering genuine alternatives to) the multilateral finance, trade and climate systems, all of which have devastating implications for this continent.

In part this strategy of weakening many African countries is entirely coherent, as seen through the predatory actions of BRICS' corporations. This is especially obvious in the extractive sectors where to a large extent the BRICS' corporate reaction to falling commodity prices is increased volumes of output in search of a stable supply of profits. Space constraints do not permit a cataloguing of these experiences (see, e.g. Burgis 2015, Carmody 2013). But revealing cases of BRICS-based looting have emerged, such as:

- Chinese entrepreneur Sam Pa's Queensway Group in Marange, Zimbabwe where in 2016 Robert Mugabe alleged $13 billion in diamonds extracted over the prior decade are unaccounted for (only $2 billion of revenues were officially recorded);
- Vedanta's purchase of Africa's largest copper mine (Zambia's Konkola) for $25 million followed by at least $500 million in externalized profits *annually*;
- AngloGold Ashanti's collaboration with Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) warlords during a period in which five million civilians were killed;
- displacement by Brazil's Vale mining house of thousands Mozambican villagers during its search for coal;
- sales pitches for Russian Rosatom nuclear power plants to corruption-prone governments in South Africa, Zambia, Uganda, Egypt and Nigeria;
- tax-dodging in various African countries (using Mauritius as a hot money centre) by South Africa's cellphone giant MTN (when chaired by subsequent deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa), as well as MTN's failure to cut off Boko Haram's Nigerian cellphone accounts in 2015 which led to a $1.9 billion fine;
- the dubious roles of South African politicians Tokyo Sexwale and Khulubuse Zuma – both in league with Israeli mining tycoon Dan Gertler – in central African deals; and
- the 2013 South African National Defence Force armed intervention to support the authoritarian regime of Francois Bozize in Bangui, Central Africa (leaving more than a dozen fatalities but also more than 800 rebel deaths) on behalf of Johannesburg businesses.

But these are some of the more extreme cases of corporate-driven under-development, and what this chapter dwells on instead is the broader context in which the BRICS are re-scrambling Africa.

Stressed BRICS on uneven global economic and geopolitical terrain

Together as a bloc, the five BRICS control 26 percent of the earth's land mass but 42 percent of its population. Although hosting 46 percent of the global workforce, the BRICS are responsible for just 14 percent of world trade and 19 percent of world Gross Domestic Product, which rises to 27 percent if measured in purchasing power parity (PPP). In per capita GDP (also in PPP terms), only Russia has a higher figure than the world average ($11,800). The bloc was, however, initially named and celebrated – as BRIC, without South Africa until Beijing invited Pretoria to join in 2010 – by Goldman Sachs Assets Management chair Jim O'Neill in 2001. The first formal BRIC event was in 2006 when foreign ministers met at the United Nations, followed by heads-of-state summits in Yekaterinburg in 2009, Brasilia in 2010, Sanya in 2011, New Delhi in 2012, Durban in 2013, Fortaleza in 2014, Ufa in 2015 and Goa in 2016. There is usually a degree of pageantry and back-slapping associated with these events though they last just two days, typically. And there are parallel, often overlapping conferences of business leaders which have access to the state officials, as well as meetings of labor (since Durban in 2013) and 'civil BRICS' (innocuous civil society groups, starting in Russia in 2015). Dozens of other BRICS-related events occur in between on different schedules, including meetings of ministers responsible for economies, security, agriculture, health and municipal government, as well as the alliance of think tanks and interested academics. There have been three counter-summits (and protest marches) dedicated to expanding the terrain of critical analysis, in Durban, Fortaleza and Goa.

In Durban, 'gateway to Africa' rhetoric was justified by the dedication of a half-day discussion between BRICS and more than a dozen heads of state from the continent. (This strategy of drawing in the host's friendly neighbours was repeated in Brasilia in 2014 and Ufa in 2015.) Then deputy foreign minister Marius Fransman (2013) expressed conventional wisdom just before the 2013 summit: "South Africa presents a gateway for investment on the continent, and over the next 10 years the African continent will need $480 billion for infrastructure development." The Durban event's focus on Africa undergirded the renewed local emphasis on mega-project economic development strategies focusing on an 'aerotropolis,' the Dube Trade Port, harbour widening and deepening in what is already Africa's largest container port, and a new 'Dig Out Port' anticipated to cost hundreds of billions of rands. In the latter cases, however, Durban's leaders believe their main competition is from African ports, e.g. Maputo in Mozambique which is more favourably suited to eventually supplying the huge Johannesburg market and northerly transport routes.

As a bloc, BRICS issues periodic communiques and occasionally acts in concert, for example successfully lobbying against the proposed expulsion of Russia from the G20 Brisbane summit following sanctions imposed on Moscow by the West after the March 2014 transfer of power over Crimea. But BRICS will ultimately be known not for its generally anti-Western rhetoric, but for what it does, concretely, to change the world. The most important institutional innovations – discussed below – are the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) for project loans, and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) which stands ready to augment the IMF in the event bail-out credits are required by BRICS members. There was also talk of an internet cable rerouting to avoid United States interference and a credit rating agency alternative to Moody's, Fitch and Standard&Poors, but these have not come to fruition.

Starting in mid-2013, the 'tapering' of US Federal Reserve 'Quantitative Easing' (i.e. slightly tighter monetary policy) lowered the value of four BRICS currencies (all aside from the yuan). Full-fledged economic depression has characterized Brazil and Russia since 2014, partly because commodity prices plummeted, and South Africa was pushed to the brink of recession in 2016. India's extreme uneven and combined development threatens to leave the vast majority of citizens behind, notwithstanding the world's fastest growth rates in what will soon be the world's most populous country. China's lower growth rates, much-reduced commodity imports and stagnation of major new investment (as a result of massive overcapacity) became the world's main economic threat by 2014. The Beijing-Shanghai-Shenzhen capitalist and state elites themselves stand vulnerable, having suffered:

- stock market crashes of 7 percent+ that caused 'circuit-breaker' panics on two days in the first week of 2016 trading, with panicky trading forcibly halted within a half hour on the second occasion, after mid-2015 market crashes costing an estimated $3.5 trillion over the course of a fortnight;
- capital flight that reduced China's peak $4 trillion in foreign reserves in 2013 to $3.3 trillion by 2016, at a pace rising to a record $120 billion/month outflow by the end of 2015 (in contrast, the average annual 'illicit financial flows' from China were $140 billion from 2003-14, according to a study by the NGO Global Financial Integrity);
- massive industrial and commodity overcapacity especially in coal, steel and cement, requiring a new round of subsidies to avoid massive local bankruptcies;
- an inability by many Chinese borrowers to repay the fast-rising $27 trillion domestic debt, given the profusion of zombie companies and individuals who over-borrowed;
- such an over-saturation of commodities that the dependency generated elsewhere during China's import splurge is now the cause of many exporters' collapse;
- real estate overbuilding in an even more maniacal fashion, resulting in a 20 percent crash in 2014-15, a problem far worse in the provincial cities (the ratio of real estate to GDP – 23 percent – in China had reached a level three times higher in 2016 than the US at its most property-bubbly in 2007);
- several attempts at devaluing the yuan – in late 2015 named an IMF 'reserve' currency – that could start a currency war;
- bouts of regulatory incompetence and other corporate-captive maladies that include extreme urban pollution,
- the rejection of worker rights including occupational health and safety, the banning of non-sweetheart trade unions, an apartheid-style rural-urban migrant labor system, and marketing prowess (pioneered in the US) to foist consumption of especially shabby products, whose planned obsolescence is even more rapid than US corporations' slovenly standards; and
- a willingness to continue putting down citizen and worker uprisings with police violence and arrests of a couple of dozen key labor leaders here, a few hundred human rights lawyers there, thousands of environmentalists here, 15,000 internet activists there, and more hundreds of thousands of ethnic minorities.

These are some of the main socio-economic and environmental contradictions in just one BRICS country. Another debilitating financial meltdown is likely to arrive while the BRICS are suffering severe economic stresses. At the global scale, capital had, by 2016, become dangerously 'overaccumulated' due to overcapacity in production, especially the basic materials Africa exports such as petroleum, iron ore (and steel and aluminium in South Africa's case), coal, platinum and nickel, all of whose prices had fallen drastically from 2011-15 peaks to trough, as well as in labor-intensive manufacturing. The backlash in the world market was reflected in the one-third drop in the value of world trade from early 2014 to late 2015. The peak in trade was in 2008, when the Baltic Dry Index – the main measure of world shipping prices – exceeded 12 000; it subsequently fell to less than 300 by early 2016.

Profit rates are another symptom of the overaccumulation crisis, and at the global scale they fell steadily from mid-20th century levels of around 30 percent to 20 percent since the neoliberal age began in the 1980s. During the years 2006-08 and 2010-15, year-on-year profit rates fell precipitously. Once a substantial problem of overaccumulation arises in production (from the mid-1970s), it inexorably moves to finance. The system reacts to overcapacity pressures by attempting to displace them through credit creation. After the 2008-09 meltdown destroyed vast financial assets, the world's debt markets rose again thanks to loose monetary policy and bailout loans, adding \$15 trillion to the 2008 total debt stock of \$165 trillion, but on the basis of only \$8 trillion in new GDP (from \$62 trillion in 2008). World stock markets continued bubbling at unprecedented levels, far out of any relation to real underlying asset values.

By July 2016, the G20 (2016) trade ministers diagnosed the overaccumulation crisis at their Shanghai meeting: "We recognize that the structural problems, including excess capacity in some industries, exacerbated by a weak global economic recovery and depressed market demand, have caused a negative impact on trade and workers. We recognize that excess capacity in steel and other industries is a global issue which requires collective responses." With such excess capacity at the global scale, ameliorative moves to cut Chinese output in steel and coal were marginal. Even former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers (2016) declared that the world suffered "secular stagnation… an increasing propensity to save and a decreasing propensity to invest" notwithstanding inordinately low interest rates. But the best way to way to understand this 'propensity to save' was because of capitalist crisis tendencies. As explained by Richard Westra (2016), "With the disarticulating of production through globalization, there existed no possibility for bloating funds to ever be converted into real capital with determinate, socially redeeming use. Instead, systemic rule changes empowered big banks, big investment firms and finance wings of giant corporations to unleash vast oceans of funds in a global orgy of money games."

Loose monetary policy had encouraged the reflation of financial bubbles and by 2013, the president of the US Federal Reserve System's Dallas bank branch, Richard Fisher, identified this contradiction in his Fed colleagues' third Quantitative Easing (QE). Central banks in the US, EU, UK and Japan can print money to bail out fragile financiers no matter how foolish the cause and corrupt the recipient bankers, or run a Negative Interest Rate Policy and devalue currencies to spur investment or compete with other economies. Though he described QE3 as "monetary Ritalin" on that occasion (losing the Fed vote by 1 to 11), Fisher had supported QE the first two times, in 2008 and 2012 due to the extreme dangers of financial meltdown. As he conceded to a stunned CNBC (2016) reporter, **"**What the Fed did, and I was part of it, was front-load an enormous market rally in order to create a wealth effect." The \$15 trillion in QE paper wealth loaded into the world's largest banks trickled upwards to the top 0.1 percent of the richest societies, i.e. to enterprises where speculation has replaced production. Thanks to the hollowed-out Western economy that resulted from the repeated QE fix, financial crisis is again brewing. “An uncomfortable digestive period is likely now” because “The Fed is a giant weapon that has no ammunition left,” Fisher remarked.

The resulting indigestion – what David Harvey (1982) termed the “devalorization of overaccumulated capital” – ebbs and flows in what appear as unpredictable surges of capital to and fro. Rising inequality plays a major role in assuring that devalorization is resisted by the wealthier markets and costs imposed on the poorer regions. BRICS are particularly susceptible to having large shares of their paper wealth devalued, especially in currency runs. There are defence mechanisms, to be sure, and the two most forward-thinking BRICS economic management teams – in China and Russia – began preparing for a coming collapse in several ways: tighter financial regulation (China ordering major international commercial banks to cease dealing in early 2016, for example); de-dollarization (e.g. in their bilateral energy relations, although Chinese T-Bill holdings still exceeded $1 trillion); purchasing gold (the world contains 35 000 tonnes of gold, of which China and Russia have together bought 5 000 in recent years); and shifting towards IMF Special Drawing Rights (especially China), which may become the global economic managers’ next edition of the QE strategy (similar to April 2009 when $750 billion were issued to spur global demand).

Until recently, China has been immensely functional to Western capitalism, what with its banning of trade unions from western corporate factories, its rural-urban migration controls that cheapen labor supplies, and its local ecological despoliation. Together these shifted substantial costs of production to workers, to women left in the countryside, and to nature. Yet as Johns Hopkins University sociologist Ho-fung Hung (2015) argued, “Capital accumulation in China follows the same logic and suffers from the same contradictions of capitalist development in other parts of the world. To understand the recent booms and busts of Chinese capitalism, we first have to understand capital’s international trends and cycles.” In a 2015 London School of Economics lecture (2015), Harvey remarked on how China served the world economy during the last decade: “There is a tale to be told here about the overaccumulation of capital… and surplus capital and labor which had to be absorbed in order to keep stability within the global system of capital accumulation.” Hung (2015) agreed that this is “a typical overaccumulation crisis, epitomized by the ghost towns and shuttered factories across the country.”

Not only has the unevenness of capital accumulation never been more obvious, so has extreme ecological damage risen, e.g. in Chinese and Indian cities to the extent that pollution-related health warnings are now commonplace. With China and India also representing the main threat to the world’s planet due to growing greenhouse gas emissions – albeit at per capita rates far lower than the industrial countries – it has never been more important to reconcile capitalism and catastrophic climate change (and if that is impossible, then to reach beyond the former to prevent the latter). African countries (aside from South Africa) have done the least to create greenhouse gases yet are anticipated to be the ones that will suffer most from extreme weather, enduring droughts, flooding, sea-level rise and acidification, and coming carbon taxes that will lower exports. The inadequacy of the BRICS countries’ inadequate Intended National Determined Contributions (INDCs) correlates to their role in global climate policy, which as codified in Paris cannot address the likelihood of catastrophic damage, with Africa the most adversely affected continent.

Political dynamics in the BRICS are diverse at the time of writing, with one head of state – Dilma Rousseff – suspended in an impeachment vote in May 2016 (generally seen as unfair given the circumstances, with impeachment and an appeal likely to follow in late 2016), while three others have strong mandates from democratic elections – Narendra Modi, Vladimir Putin and Jacob Zuma (albeit the latter suffered a frightening 8 percent decline in his party's electoral support between 2014 and 2016) – and one is a Communist Party dictatorship, led by Xi Jinping. The potential for solidarity between Brazil's Workers Party and other BRICS was dashed when the Indian foreign ministry immediately signalled that the 'coup' president, Michel Temer, would be perfectly welcome at the October 2016 Goa summit.

Africa also suffers extreme political turmoil and occasionally this is reflected in tense BRICS relations. South Africa has the most active set of African interventions underway, as discussed below, but China's placement of troops in South Sudan is also a harbinger of the overlap between commercial and military interests. China's recent roles in the South African foreign affairs and finance ministries also undermine Beijing's advertised neutrality and non-interference, for Chinese officials regularly bragged about forcing the South African foreign minister to deny an entrance visa to the Dalai Lama (Bond 2013). And the Chinese were allegedly instrumental in reversing the appointment in December 2015 of finance minister Desmond van Rooyen (widely seen as a dangerously ill-equipped crony of Zuma), according to *Business Day* publisher Peter Bruce (2016): "I have reliably learnt that the Chinese were quick to make their displeasure known to Zuma. For one, their investment in Standard Bank took a big hit. Second, they've invested way too much political effort in SA to have an amateur mess it up. Their intervention was critical." The overarching political importance of the BRICS to Africa is propping up undemocratic regimes, just as do political leaders from the US, Britain and France (Bond 2013).

But it is the economic logic that is most worthy of examination in the sections below regarding BRICS' assimilation into world capitalism, and the adverse implications for the African continent. Leonce Ndikumana (2015) argues that because of the adverse power relations, Africa is both "more integrated but more marginalized." The marginalization associated with IFFs is well established, and this occurs particularly when Western and BRICS corporations externalize profits from mining. The United Nations Economic Commission on Africa (2013) showed how $319 billion was transferred illicitly from Africa during the commodity super-cycle (from 2001-10), with the most theft in Metals, $84 billion; Oil, $79 billion; Natural gas, $34 billion; Minerals, $33 billion; Petroleum and coal products, $20 billion; Crops, $17 billion; Food products, $17 billion; Machinery, $17 billion; Clothing, $14 billion; and Iron & steel, $13 billion. During this period, African FDI fell from its $66 billion peak annual inflow in 2008 to a level of $50 billion by 2015, but each year, in addition to *illicit* financial outflows, there were licit flows in the form of dividend expatriation that created extreme balance of payments deficits in many countries.

Some of the deficits follow from debt repayment on mega-projects that failed to realise the returns that were promised. Chinese projects in particular have been criticized, e.g.

Botswana's coal-fired power-plant failed, and Zambia's disastrous hydro-electricity expansion suffered allegations of sub-standard Chinese equipment that excessively reduced the Kariba Dam's water level. Other notorious mega-project failures, according to the *Wall Street Journal* (2014), include China Railways in Nigeria ($7.5 billion) and Libya ($4.2 billion), Chinese petroleum in Angola ($3.4 billion) and Nigeria ($1.4 billion), and Chinese metal investors in the DRC and Ghana ($3 billion each). The renewal of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in December 2015 did nothing to assuage critics of the type of Chinese investment and credits, and their appropriateness in a post-commodity super-cycle environment.

Even though the soured deals should offer a warning, and though commodity prices began falling in 2011, Africa has recently witnessed a dramatic increase in infrastructural project investment – real and planned – to support extraction. It was logical for BRICS leaders to identify port, bridge, road, rail, hydropower, thermal coal, nuclear energy and other infrastructure projects for subsidized investment, given that their countries' corporations would benefit from the associated extraction of minerals, petroleum and crops. The Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) was the coordinating system. In 2016, the most ambitious of the PIDA projects included the Inga Hydropower Project in the DRC, which at $100 billion will be the most expensive development project in history if taken to fruition with 43 200 megaWatts of electricity (compared to the second largest, China's Three Gorges Dam at less than half that). But with commodity prices crashing, even China attempted in mid-2014 – on the eve of Obama's summit with African leaders in Washington – to get Washington's support. Two years later, the World Bank withdrew its financing, on grounds of the DRC's (and other Inga project participants') failure to comply with socio-economic and environmental agreements. Another controversial form of BRICS investment in Africa was in land, a process that has often been caricatured as 'land grabbing.' Thomas Ferrando (2013) developed a database to track this, discovering extensive holdings especially by Indian and Chinese firms.

These top-down processes are not uncontested. Seen from below, resistance initiatives by many African grassroots communities and shopfloors – most spectacularly in the three largest economies (Nigeria in 2012, Egypt in 2011 and South Africa throughout) – have intensified in recent years. These protests are regularly repulsed by states hostile to democracy, mostly with Western backing (although successes in Tunisia in 2011 and Burkina Faso in 2014-15 put dictatorships onto the retreat). But Western hypocrisy is not the only factor. In many cases when African tyrants face popular critique, notably Zimbabwe, social unrest also threatens the stability of investments made by BRICS countries and corporate interests; indeed in several important African sites of struggle, the primary battle was between BRICS mining interests and affected communities and workforces. Other modes of resistance to either political tyranny or economic misery include refugee status or migrancy; in the case of South Africa, either path has been enormously difficult for Africans, as a result of malgovernance at the Department of Home Affairs and SA Police Services, as well as in working-class communities which have hosted immigrants but which periodic sites of xenophobic upsurges (2008, 2010 and 2015).

Only in the sole case of access to anti-retroviral (ARV) medicines did concerted international support dramatically improve African life expectancies, as expensive branded medicines were replaced by generics in the early 2000s. Two of the BRICS were exceptionally important allies of Africa's HIV+ community and health officials: Brazil and India had provided innovative pharmaceutical development of generic ARVs, and were unintimidated by Western corporations whose patents they abused. However, this may be seen in retrospect as an exception that proves the rule, for in 2016 right-wing governments in both countries heralded a new era of respect for intellectual property rights at the expense of their sick citizenries, with Modi pressured by Obama to retract Indian opposition to a new round of intellectual property protections that aid Big Pharma at a time many treatable diseases continue to ravage Africa. It is in this sense that the sub-imperial role of BRICS, assimilating into international capitalism, is obvious, given the alternative that the ARV case presented. This sort of power reversal – from one genuinely anti-imperial instance to a pattern of sub-imperialism – is explained with theoretical inputs that draw especially upon Brazilian intellectuals.

Sub-imperial and anti-imperial stances

Given the intense contestation underway across these issue areas, this uneven record of Africa-BRICS relations deserves a theoretical explanation as well as strategic insights for the sake of social, economic and environmental justice. These are values regularly expressed by BRICS' own lead officials in their communiques, sometimes in opposition to critical analysts (including this author) as well as analysts and journalists from competing Western powers. In Durban, for example, *Business Day* newspaper ran a non-stop barrage of hostile commentaries about BRICS in March 2013. One reaction was a talk given to the Academic Forum that month, by South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane (2013):

> The emergence of BRICS has not been well received by all of us. There are those who do not have a positive appreciation of BRICS because they believe that its continued existence will threaten the status quo and tamper with the current international balance of forces. At the other end, we find critics of BRICS who see it as a body of what they call 'sub-imperialist' countries that are joining the club of traditional powers. These critics talk of what they call a 'new scramble' for Africa, comparing the growing interest on our continent by BRICS countries to the late 19th century when European colonial powers partitioned Africa among themselves.
>
> What these two groups of critics have in common is their lack of appreciation of multi-polarity for the geopolitical health of our international system. The first groups views multi-polarity in a negative sense, as a threat; while the second group would rather remain in the old system than to see it being shaken by emerging players from the South.
>
> To see BRICS countries as 'sub-imperialists' is the result of a dogmatic application of classical notions of imperialism and Immanuel Wallerstein's centre-periphery model to a situation that is fundamentally different from what these theories were trying to comprehend and explain. Our scholars have to be innovative and courageous enough to develop new tools of analysis and theoretical models when history challenges us to do so. I am reminded here of a warning Franz Fanon made in his *The Wretched of the Earth* that, and I quote: "It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic

> mishaps." The tragic mishap in this case is that such intellectuals will be left behind and rendered irrelevant by history.

These reflections by Nkoana-Mashabane (and her then-speechwriter Eddie Maloka, subsequently head of the Africa Peer Review Mechanism) reflect a classic problem in analysing South African public policy: 'talk left, walk right' (Bond 2006). What, then, are the theoretical framings associated with sub-imperialism that upset her so much? The term originates in Brazil with the *dependencia* argument by that after 1964, when a US-supported dictatorship was installed, Brasilia served as a strong US ally. According to Ruy Mauro Marini (1965:22), "It is not a question of passively accepting North American power (although the actual correlation of forces often leads to that result), but rather of collaborating actively with imperialist expansion, assuming in this expansion *the position of a key nation*." Mathias Luce (2015) is one of the contemporary followers of Marini:

> Sub-imperialism is considered the result of the laws of dependent capitalism in combination with the world economic system configured by post-World War II capital movements. The arrival of a few socio-economic formations at the highest stage of dependent capitalism along with the rise of intermediate links in the imperialist chain made room for a new hierarchical level in the global order. In this way these formations turn into countries that do not just transfer surplus value to imperialist centres but also succeed in appropriating weaker countries' surplus value by displacing some of the contradictions specific to dependent capitalism. And they develop a policy of antagonistic cooperation with the dominant imperialism… Every sub-imperialist country is part of what used to be called the semi-periphery but not every semi-peripheral country is a sub-imperialist socio-economic formation.

For Marini (1974), three key features of a sub-imperial society were regional economic extraction, the export of capital typically associated with imperialist politics, and internal corporate monopolization. Having read Rosa Luxemburg's 1913 *Accumulation of Capital* analysis of Africa's underdevelopment (using case studies from South Africa, Namibia and the DRC), Harvey (2003:185-186) added another feature to what he termed the *New Imperialism*:

> The opening up of global markets in both commodities and capital created openings for other states to insert themselves into the global economy, first as absorbers but then as producers of surplus capitals. They then became competitors on the world stage. What might be called 'sub-imperialisms' arose … Each developing centre of capital accumulation sought out systematic spatio-temporal fixes for its own surplus capital by defining territorial spheres of influence.

Updated, consider these four features:

- *the systemic processes of imperialism,* within which sub-imperialism facilitates accumulation, rely upon extra-economic coercion found in relations between capitalist and non-capitalist spheres, i.e. what Harvey (2003) calls "accumulation by dispossession," under conditions of capitalist crisis;
- those *capitalist crisis conditions* become evident within the sub-imperial economies in

the form of overaccumulated capital, specifically overproduction and resulting excess capacity given that demand cannot match supply, intensified uneven geographical development (in Harvey's terminology, the 'spatial fix' because it displaces the crisis across space) and financialization (the 'temporal fix' insofar as the day of reckoning is postponed through the credit mechanism which displaces the crisis over time);

- as crisis conditions mature and cannot be resolved internally, the sub-imperial powers turn increasingly to their *regional spheres of influence*, and their Treasuries, central banks and allied state and capitalist institutions facilitate and legitimate multilateral trade, investment and financing relationships which both serve to strengthen the *regional platform for accumulation* (even as sub-imperialist manufacturing exports destroy hinterland productive capacity and economic sovereignty) and require *a regional gendarme role* to enforce business contracts and to extract needed raw materials (and sometimes workers who lower the cost of labour); and
- the *super-exploitation* of the internal labor market intensifies which, given the limits of consumption that result, in turn "would require external markets for the resolution of its profit realization crisis," as Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (2011) remark. Likewise, sectoral biases exist within BRICS economies, Steffen Böhm, Maria Ceci Misoczky and Sandra Moog (2012:1629) observe: "the sub-imperialist drive has remained the same: while domestic capital continues to invest heavily in extractive and monocultural industries at home, it is increasingly searching for investment opportunities in other peripheral markets as well, precipitating processes of accumulation by dispossession within their broader spheres of influence."

There are, in the process, occasional territorial disputes, and it is always tempting for Western powers to provoke incursions in the BRICS' regional sites of accumulation and geopolitical influence (of which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's conflicts with Russia in Georgia, the Ukraine, Syria and Turkey, and the US with China in the South China Sea, have been most important in recent years). Although the US dominates military spending, with $610 billion in direct outlays in 2014 (and myriad other related expenses maintaining imperial order), four of the five BRICS also spent vast amounts on arms: $385 billion in 2015 (of which 55 percent was China). There are various other sites of contestation, e.g. over Washington's (and its 'five eyes' allies') capacity to tap communications and computers through the internet. After revealing the US National Security Agency's (NSA) snooping capacity in 2013, whistle-blower Edward Snowden has an apparently safe Moscow exile, after fears of extradition to the US or worse (on 15 August 2016, Snowden tweeted, "Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated"). A few months later, Rousseff cancelled the first visit by a Brazilian head of state to Washington in 40 years, as a way to protest Snowden's revelation that the NSA was tapping her phone.

But seen in these macro geopolitical terms, the Zuma government's initial endorsement of the NATO bombing of Libya in 2011 was the most egregious case of sub-imperial reach into Africa, against the African Union's wishes (and to be fair, Pretoria did reverse course and opposed further intervention). But behind the scenes, US journalist Nick Turse identified the Pentagon's "war fighting combatant command" in dozens of African states. It soon transpired that there was a blunt division of labor at work between Washington and its deputy sheriff in Pretoria, as a strategist from the Africa Command explained why they are training so many African militaries, including SA National Defence Force soldiers: "We don't want to see our guys going in and getting whacked" (Cochran 2010). At the conclusion of his 2014 meeting with Obama as part of a US-Africa heads-of-state summit, Zuma (2014) offered a veritable sub-imperialist manifesto:

> There had been a good relationship already between Africa and the US but this summit has reshaped it and has taken it to another level… We secured a buy-in from the US for Africa's peace and security initiatives… As President Obama said, the boots must be African.

Still, to those who believe BRICS are anti-imperialist, Rousseff's impeachment in May 2016 confirmed a sustained attack on the bloc by Washington. According to *Counterpunch* commentator Eric Draitser (2016), "what's unfolding in Brazil is a multi-pronged effort to destabilize the country via a variety of political and economic means, with the ultimate goal of bringing to heel a key member of BRICS." The former Assistant Treasury Secretary in the Reagan Administration, Paul Craig Roberts (2016), wrote even more explicitly, "This is Washington's move against the BRICS. Washington is moving to put into political power a right-wing party that Washington controls in order to terminate Brazil's growing relationships with China and Russia." Venezuelan Vice President Vice-President Aristobulo Isturiz warned South African leaders during a May 2016 visit to Pretoria: "Obama is using his remaining time in office to destabilize all progressive countries and undermine their emancipation movements. It is [Washington's] intention to weaken the BRICS countries" (Ebrahim 2016).

This remark coincided with revelations that a Central Intelligence Agency operative bragged about assisting the apartheid state's 1962 arrest and twenty-seven-year imprisonment of Nelson Mandela. (The US State Department kept Mandela on its terrorist watch list until 2008, and there was close collaboration between Washington and Pretoria throughout the 20th century.) African National Congress spokesperson Zizi Kodwa (VOA, 2016) charged that the CIA "never stopped operating here. It is still happening now. The CIA is still collaborating with those who want regime change." Another version of the anti-imperialist framing was heard at the South African Black Consciousness movement's Black First Land First launch conference two days after Rousseff's impeachment: "Brazil and South Africa are seen by the Western imperialist forces as the weak link in the BRICS chain. The strategy of imperialism is to get rid of presidents who support the BRICS process."

Likewise, a founder of Brazil's Movement of Landless Workers (MST), João Pedro Stedile, was asked by *Il Manifesto* (2016) about why "a group of deputies from right-wing organizations went to Washington before the last elections." He replied, "Temer will arrange his government in order to allow the US to control our economy through their companies... Brazil is part of the BRICS, and another goal is that it can reject the South-South alliance." As WikiLeaks cables revealed, Temer was a mole for the US State Department a decade earlier, but merely playing what Washington considered to be an incompetent, ideology-free role as a political "opportunist."[2]

But as concrete evidence of a US-led coup in Brazil, this fact seems insufficient. Moreover, Rousseff herself denied the role of imperialism a week after the impeachment, during a *Russia Today* (2016) interview: "I don't believe external interference is a primary or a secondary reason for what's happening now in Brazil. It's not. The grave situation we see now has developed without any such interference." She repeated this when pressed by the interviewer, so it was crystal clear that she blamed the old oligarchs for her downfall. This point was reinforced by subsequent revelations about the coup plotters' local motivations: the key men involved were aiming simply to derail the 'Car Wash' and other corruption investigations that threatened to sweep a large share of the Brazilian legislature into jail.

Nevertheless, insisted widely-read Brazilian geopolitical analyst Pepe Escobar (2016), "The most important angle as far as I'm concerned is the global angle. What will happen in that next BRICS meeting in four or five months, and what happens to the BRICS projects, including the development bank that features collaboration between Brazilian, Russian, and Chinese executives?" The answer came the day after the coup from Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Vikas Swarup, who said Temer was welcome and the summit would "take place as scheduled."

In spite of the evident contradictions, all these (and other) contingencies sometimes call forth the claim of "anti-imperialism" for BRICS and this is nowhere more apparent when it comes to multilateralism. Endorsements of the BRICS' international financial agenda by progressive analysts highlight the potential for the bloc's resistance to the long, destructive US-European hegemony at the Bretton Woods Institutions (for a critique of arguments by Walden Bello, Radhika Desai, Horace Campbell, Mark Weisbrot, Mike Whitney and others, see Bond 2016). For example, Sunanda Sen (2015) of the Levy Economics Institute supported the BRICS' "alternative sources of credit flows, aiming for financial stability, growth, and development. With their goals of avoiding IMF loan conditionality and the dominance of the US dollar in global finance, these new BRICS-led institutions represent a much-needed renovation of the global financial architecture." And according to *Review of International Political Economy* writers Cornel Ban and Mark Blyth (2013), the BRICS' "autonomy relative to the coercive apparatus of the International Financial Institutions has enabled more state-led development interventions than would have been the case otherwise… [with] ever-widening policy space created by the growing weight of the BRICs in the global economy." Just after the coup against Rousseff, South African Institute for Global Dialogue director Siphamandla Zondi (2016), wrote,

> The [BRICS] platform has become the most powerful platform for the pursuit of global reform… Brazil has been a crucial voice in global debates about the reform of global governance, including the IMF and World Bank, and about fair and just outcomes for the developing world in world trade negotiations… Brazil is an important part of the effort today to shift global power from the former colonial powers and their diaspora in North America to all regions of the world. It is a key partner in South-South co-operation.

BRICS assimilation into the IMF and World Bank

These claims about the BRICS' alternative agenda are ambitious but are not shared by either progressive critics (this author included) or the technocrats who designed the CRA and NDB, for the latter repeatedly assured the international financial community that assimilation and collaboration is the best approach, e.g. in the words of BRICS NDB Vice President Leslie Maasdorp: "We will and should benefit from the long years and decades of experience of these [Bretton Woods] institutions" (Mnyandu 2015). Indeed, when it comes to global finance, instead of establishing an alternative reality (e.g. as anticipated by Hugo Chavez's Bank of the South, which Brazil sabotaged), the BRICS are financing the old one. Vast quantities of US Treasury Bills are held by BRICS countries (especially China) as their main foreign reserve holding. While the NDB may eventually move to financing projects in local currencies, the articles of agreement specify contributions in US dollars. The CRA is anticipated to be a dollar lender, since repayment of most foreign debts the BRICS countries have incurred will be in dollars.

To illustrate, while the first NDB loans – in April 2016 – promoted 'sustainable' energy, they were rife with contradictions insofar as the $250 million (in dollars not rands) to expand Eskom's grid so as to draw in more renewable energy, reflected the Independent Power Producers' privatization of electricity generation (long opposed by South African progressives who insist on state-supported renewables). Yet a month later, Eskom's chief executive Brian Molefe announced he would no longer buy renewable electricity, as for long-term baseload supply especially to serve mining houses and smelters, Eskom would focus instead on nuclear. In mid-2015, NDB director Tito Mboweni had told Bloomberg news that the proposed $100 billion South African nuclear deal, probably with Russia, "falls squarely within the mandate of the NDB," in spite of enormous local controversy surrounding Zuma's corruption-prone deal-making regarding not only Putin but the Gupta family, whose firm Oakbay would be the main uranium supplier.

Other items on Molefe's BRICS Business Council (2015) project wish-list included new coal-fired generators, off-shore oil drilling, and Durban's $25 billion port-petrochemical complex expansion. These infrastructure mega-projects are all rife with social, economic, governance and environmental dilemmas (Bond 2014), which South Africa does not have a strong history of resolving in the public's interest. In another mega-dam project, what may be the world's most infamous case of construction company bribery in World Bank lending history occurred in Lesotho, where more than $2 million flowed from a dozen multinational corporations to the Swiss accounts of the leading dam official, Masupha Sole, who served 9 years in jail but was then, to everyone's astonishment, reinstated thanks to his political influence. Lesotho's dam water flows to South Africa, even in times (such as 2016) when the country faces ruinous drought. Although the World Bank debarred some of the most corrupt companies (in the process catalysing the bankruptcy of Canada's once formidable civil engineering firm Acres International), nothing was done to punish the firms by Pretoria officials.

BRICS NDB Vice President Maasdorp (Mnyandu, 2015) discussed his own role at the helm of the institution responsible: "I served for example as chairman of TransCaledon Tunnel Authority, which is a state-owned enterprise with a mandate to finance and implement bulk raw water infrastructure projects in South Africa, and played an oversight role from a governance perspective for seven years of large infrastructure projects." Several of the same construction firms that were implicated in Lesotho reappeared in notorious collusion cases involving white-elephant World Cup 2010 stadiums and other mega-projects in which billions of dollars were stolen from South African taxpayers. South African firms are obviously not alone; in 2014, the World Bank debarred the China Three Gorges

Corporation's subsidiary building dams in Africa after extreme corruption was identified in another African project.[3]

In what is the most revealing case of BRICS assimilation into this system, in 2012 the IMF was recapitalized (through a credit mechanism) with $75 billion from the BRICS: China gave $43 billion; Brazil, Russia and India gave $10 billion each; and South Africa gave $2 billion. In return, in December 2015, four of the five received major increases in their voting power: China by 37 percent, Brazil 23 percent, India 11 percent and Russia up 8 percent. Yet the US still won't give up veto power – it is the only country with more than 15 percent required – and the BRICS' total vote is now just 14.7 percent. Worse, the restructuring deal that made this rise possible was detrimental to seven African countries which lost more than a fifth of their IMF voting share: Nigeria lost 41 percent of its voting power, along with Libya (39 percent), Morocco (27 percent), Gabon (26 percent), Algeria (26 percent), Namibia (26 percent) and even South Africa (21 percent).

One facet of Africa's decline at the IMF is its inability to maintain currency strength in the face of the commodity crash. This was especially apparent in the period after mid-2011 when, for example, the South African rand peaked at R6.3/$. By January 2016, after a run apparently begun by Goldman Sachs, the rate was R17.9/$, although by mid-year it recovered to R13.4/$. Other African currencies collapsed during 2014-15, with Zambia losing half the kwacha's worth, and the values of currencies from Angola, Namibia, Uganda and Tanzania down more than a fifth over 12-month period.

But aside from the quantitative loss of power, the loss of African 'voice' (as it's known) at the IMF is important given the critiques often expressed about the institution's dogmatic neoliberal ideology and its qualitative power over Africa, dating back to the 1980s. Even Jacob Zuma voiced these concerns in mid-2015 in a *RussiaToday* interview: "They want to dictate what you should do. You can't utilize that kind of assistance the way you want. So, in a sense, it has conditions that will keep you dependent all the time. That's what we're trying to take ourselves out of." Perhaps unwittingly, Zuma was reiterating the criticism offered by his nemesis, former Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils, of the IMF's $850 million loan to South Africa six months before democracy dawned, in December 1993. Kasrils had in 2013 described this deal as "the fatal turning point. I will call it our Faustian moment when we became entrapped – some today crying out that we 'sold our people down the river'." Mboweni had a central role in the IMF deal and subsequent neoliberal strategies such as record-high interest rates and exchange control liberalization. As Mboweni (2004) once explained, he knew that "the apartheid government was trying to lock us into an IMF structural adjustment program via the back door, thereby tying the hands of the future democratic government." But, he claims, "We did not sell out!" Sampie Terreblanche (2012, 64), a former economist who worked in the apartheid government's highest echelons, firmly disagrees, arguing that the deal "committed the Transitional Executive Council to the ideologies of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism."[4]

Also in mid-2015, just before the Ufa summit, hopes were raised in Greece that its prime minister Alex Tsipras could persuade BRICS to advance credit to the indebted country so as to avoid an IMF and EU austerity deal: budget cuts (especially on pensions), higher Value Added Tax on poor people's consumption, privatization, labor casualization and deregulation. Tragically, because of the vast Greek foreign debt, Tsipras had already agreed to privatize one of Greek's main ports to Chinese merchant capital (against the wishes of port workers), so there was hope for Beijing's support. And according to Greek Environment and Energy Minister Panagiotis Lafazanis (ANA-MPA, 2015), "During my (May 2015) meeting with Russian Deputy Finance Minister Sergey Storchak, we secured the decisive Russian support to Greece's request for participation in the BRICS NDB… right after operations begin, it will be able to accept financial support." However, at the crucial moment in July 2015, when BRICS credit would have been vital to Tsipras' potential survival outside the IMF and EU's power, the BRICS failed to provide an alternative credit line. As a result, Tsipras won a 61 percent "No" vote on the IMF/EU austerity plan, but without the alternative, the fear of the financiers' ability to immediately bankrupt Greece by freezing its commercial bank accounts with the rest of the world compelled an historic U-turn by Tsipras.

Instead of searching for an alternative to the IMF, the BRICS CRA actually empowers the IMF to impose conditionalities. According to the articles of agreement adopted in Fortaleza, a CRA member is in need of more than 30 percent of its borrowing quota, it must first go to the IMF for a structural adjustment loan and conditionality before accessing more from the CRA. For South Africa, whose foreign debt rose from around $30 billion in 2003 to more than $140 billion a dozen years later – i.e. more than 40 percent of GDP, which puts it in the debt-crisis danger zone – this would mean that only $3 billion is available from the CRA before recourse to the IMF would be necessary.[5] Other BRICS have a strong repayment commitment, even the leader most feared as a world rogue. Tellingly, at a December 2015 press conference highlighting the role of international financial sanctions in Russia's economic depression, Putin (2015) announced proudly, "Despite all limitations, we complied with all our commitments to our partners, including international credit institutions. We pay everything due on time and in full."[6]

It was the fear of non-assimilation into the Bretton Woods Institutions that most animated Obama when discussing BRICS in Africa with *The Economist* (2014):

> *The Economist*: One of the big factors in Africa and the economy's emergence has been Chinese investment. And they bring a different model. Is that something that you need to confront?
>
> Mr Obama: My view is the more the merrier. When I was in Africa, the question of China often came up, and my attitude was every country that sees investment opportunities and is willing to partner with African countries should be welcomed. The caution is to make sure that African governments negotiate a good deal with whoever they're partnering with. And that is true whether it's the United States; that's true whether it's China. And I do think that China has certain capacity, for example, to build infrastructure in Africa that's critical. They've got a lot of capital and they may be less constrained than the United States is fiscally in helping roads get built and bridges and ports. On the other hand, China obviously has a need for natural resources that colours their investments in a way that's less true for the United States. And so my advice to African leaders is to make sure that if, in fact, China is putting in roads and bridges, number one, that they're hiring African workers; number two, that the roads don't just lead from the mine to the port to Shanghai, but that there's an ability for the African governments to shape how this infrastructure is going to benefit them in the long term.

> *The Economist*: You see countries like China creating a BRICS bank, for instance – institutions that seem to be parallel with the system, rather – and potentially putting pressure on the system rather than adding to it and strengthening it. That is the key issue, *whether China ends up inside that system or challenging it. That's the really big issue of our times, I think.*
> Mr Obama: *It is.* And I think it's important for the United States and Europe to continue to welcome China as a full partner in these international norms. It's important for us to recognize that there are going to be times where there are tensions and conflicts. But I think those are manageable. (emphasis added)

BRICS assimilation into the WTO

The WTO was the second multilateral institution whose neoliberal power was amplified in December 2015 thanks largely to the BRICS, at a ministerial summit in Nairobi that achieved a breakthrough in negotiations to great relief for the world's elites. A vital feature was that three of the BRICS are in formal alliance with the EU and US as the 'G5,' the most important bloc, one generally opposed to what in 2003 formed as the trading-bloc G20, comprising the larger poor and middle-income countries which traditionally opposed the West's power. The BRICS' own divisions are legion, starting with Russia's role as a 'developed' not developing economy (Skrzypczyńska 2015). For many years South Africa acted decisively in opposition to the interests of Africa, with Pretoria's trade minister Alec Erwin even nominated by *Foreign Policy* journal to become the WTO's leader after he performed to the North's satisfaction in various of the insider 'Green Rooms' and as a 'Friend of the Chair' (Bond 2006). In 2013, after fruitless efforts by Director General Pascal Lamy to restart the stalled 2001 Doha Agenda, the WTO was given a new leader: the Brazilian negotiator Roberto Azevêdo, who pro-trade bias was just as strong.

Moreover, according to the (ordinarily pro-BRICS) Malaysian NGO Third World Network (TWN) (2015), Brazil conspired with the United States and the European Union at the WTO to ensure "that India did not get the language it proposed" to maintain vital food subsidies, a defeat which in coming years will lead tens of millions of Indian peasants to suffer. As TWN's Chakravarthi Raghavan (2015) put it, "on the eve of Nairobi, Brazil unilaterally abandoned the G20 alliance to join the US and EU, in trying to act against China and India," not to mention against the world's poor. Azevêdo and Kenya's hosting chairperson agreed, according to Horace Campbell (2016), "to exclude 'African issues' from the agenda while simultaneously pushing through the Expansion of the Information Technology Agreement, which benefits US corporations." The WTO thus became far more hostile to African interests thanks in part to a few of the BRICS countries' interventions.

Is there scope for change? South Africa's main WTO negotiator, Faizal Ismail (2015), has described world trade "a deeply asymmetrical system in favour of its main architects, the US and the EU [that] requires fundamental reform." The WTO reform strategy favoured by Ismail (and his then trade minister Erwin) was the Doha 'Development' Agenda of 2001. But the Doha Agenda was soon a victim of the institution's overall paralysis. Indeed the "new trade narrative", according to Ismail, is: "Doha dead! Emerging markets should 'graduate'… The emergence of Global Value Chains as a new reality of international trade where goods are no more manufactured in one country but are made in the world and the large share of intermediate goods exports provide a compelling reason for countries to have more open trade policies." Ismail blames the strength of this narrative on US officials, especially Susan Schwab (2011), backed by business lobbies and Washington think-tanks. But he then blames a fellow BRICS ally: "The Russian G20 Presidency has been persuaded to continue with the theme of Global Value Chains and to discuss its policy implications for Trade Liberalization."

Nevertheless South Africa signed on to the Nairobi WTO deal, in yet another case of talk-left walk-right. Reflecting Pretoria's tendency towards assimilation not opposition, Azevêdo (2016) remarked in March 2017 at the University of Cape Town,

> South Africa remains a central player in the system today, as a leading voice in the African Group of WTO members, and in all aspects of our work. In fact, your current representative in Geneva, Ambassador Xavier Carim has recently been appointed as chair of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body. This is one of the most prominent positions in the organization… It stands testament to South Africa's leadership in the trade debate today.

African reactions to the WTO debacle were muted, but at least in the wake of the mid-2016 Brexit vote by United Kingdom, there appeared to be increasing resistance to European Union neoliberal penetration in the form of Tanzanian and Ugandan state retraction of commitments to join the European's Economic Partnership Agreements. The other 2016 incident that showed a rethink of Africa's persistent trade deficit with a more advanced industrial power, namely South Africa, was a ban imposed on many imports that typically moved across the Zimbabwe border. The policy kicked in as Zimbabwe ran short on US dollars, so was less a strategic than desperation strategy to preserve the country's currency and reduce the trade deficit. South Africa also came under pressure from both local steel companies and trade unionists to bloc steel imports from China (whose net exports soared from -35 million tonnes to 100 million from 2005-15 as China raised its share of world production from 30 to 50 percent over that decade), and as a result, trade minister Rob Davies imposed a 10 percent special tariff in 2015.

These were small initiatives by countries with highly erratic leaders known more for zig-zagging in diverse ideological directions than any consistent policy stance. Still, in opposition to the persistent ideology of free trade, such desperation-protectionism might in future years be repeated and become the basis of an import-substitution industrialization strategy. But that in turn would require new governments opposed to neoliberalism, whereas the trends in the BRICS were basically in the other direction, especially in Brazil and India, with South Africa still obeying the dictates of the major credit ratings agencies more than its own people. The other important development in the wake of the post-Cancun WTO malaise was the rise of bilateral trade and investment treaties. Ana Garcia (2016) clarifies how damaging these have been to Africa, especially where BRICS countries have dominance.

BRICS assimilation into the UNFCCC

A third multilateral agreement in December 2015 was the Paris UNFCCC agreement. According to Oscar Reyes (2015), seven fatal flaws in the agreement stand out:

1) the targets are ambitious, but unlikely to be met (hence serving as a greenwash)

2) there are no legally-binding targets to cut emissions
3) there was no new money promised to developing countries
4) reparations are now legally off limits (no 'climate debt' can be sued for by victims)
5) oil, gas and coal producers are not compelled to leave fossil fuels unexploited
6) the deal opens the same carbon-trading loopholes that undermined prior climate deals
7) sources of greenhouse gas emissions from international shipping and flights, and from military-related emissions, aren't included

Summing up Paris, the world movement of peasants and landless people Via Campesina (2015) was clearest: "There is nothing binding for states, national contributions lead us towards a global warming of over 3°C and multinationals are the main beneficiaries. It was essentially a media circus." Concluded the world's leading North-South CJ organization, Friends of the Earth International (2015): "The reviews [of whether INDCs are adhered to and then need strengthening] are too weak and too late. The political number mentioned for finance has no bearing on the scale of need. It's empty. The iceberg has struck, the ship is going down and the band is still playing to warm applause." Reyes (2015) singles out the role of Brazil in combining forces with the EU — against Bolivia — to "open the same carbon trading loopholes that undermined the last global climate deal." Finally, not forgetting the voice of climate science, James Hansen (2015) bluntly described Paris, simply, as "bullshit."

Since 2009, the BRICS were vital participants in the degeneration of global climate policy, as four of their leaders ("BASIC") were the original co-signatories (along with Obama) of the Copenhagen Accord. Perhaps by mistake, John Kerry (later US Secretary of State) labelled Zuma, Lula da Silva of Brazil, Wen Jiabao of China and Manmohan Singh of India the 'four horsemen'; the tag is accurate, in terms of climate damage to Africa caused by the 2009 deal and its successors. The Copenhagen Accord was mainly authored by the US State Department and then, as leaks by the US military-intelligence whistle-blower Chelsea Manning in early 2010 proved, was adopted by many poor and climate-vulnerable countries in Africa only thanks to bribery and bullying by the State Department's Todd Stern (Bond 2012). Only one of the BRICS has hosted a COP, Durban in 2011, and Washington immediately claimed victory. As documented by WikiLeaks (after liberating Hillary Clinton's private email server), Stern (2011) bragged to Clinton that in relation to the Green Climate Fund, "We left Durban with virtually everything we sought." His team had destroyed the 'firewall' between rich and poor countries (the latter were not, in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, required to make emissions cuts), so as he reported to Clinton in a memo worth quoting at length:

> The main action here was to beat back efforts to undermine the parallel structure of mitigation commitments for developed and developing countries that we negotiated in Copenhagen… The developing countries insisted on another Kyoto "commitment period," largely because Kyoto embodies the firewall. The EU was the only major player willing to consider that, but insisted that the quid pro quo had to be assurance from other major emitters that they would commit to negotiate a legal agreement to follow the second Kyoto period. For our part, we said that we could not do that unless China and other majors also agreed, but prior to Durban they had never indicated any willingness to do so. So there appeared to be a stalemate. The open questions for us going into Durban were (1) whether the EU would stick to its guns in demanding a future legal agreement in

exchange for a second Kyoto period, and (2) what the 'BASIC' group of China, India, Brazil and South Africa would do if the EU did hold firm.

As it happened, the EU hung tough, while *the BASICs, evidently influenced by the intense push for a legal agreement from the poorest and most vulnerable countries, especially the small island states, showed unexpected flexibility. Brazil led the way on this issue for the BASICs, and we engaged intensively with them.* Two long trilateral meetings (EU-US-BASIC) were held in the middle of the second week, which pushed the ball forward. The final two-page agreement, dubbed the Durban Platform by the South Africans, was negotiated over many hours Friday and Saturday in a group of around 35 countries, with the EU and the island states pushing hardest for strong language and the earliest possible start. The new agreement is to be completed by the end of 2015 and start to be implemented from 2020 onward.

The key points for us, each of which we insisted upon, are:

- "Applicable to all Parties." This language is a singular breakthrough – the first time China and other emerging economies have agreed that they too would be bound by legal obligations.
- The Bali Roadmap. The agreement sunsets the 2007 Bali mandate at the end of next year's COP. This is important because Bali is consistently read as enshrining the firewall and we thus could not allow it to become the basis for negotiating the new legal instrument.
- "Common but differentiated responsibilities." This phrase is read (not by us, but by most developing countries) to denote the firewall, but the phrase is conspicuously absent from the Durban agreement.
- 2020 implementation date. The 2020 date is also important. The EU and its small island allies pushed very hard to have the agreement take effect as early as possible. But this didn't work for the BASICs, who are determined to keep their Kyoto protection all the way to 2020; and it couldn't work for us to start earlier than 2020 if the BASICs did not, since such asymmetry would be lethal to developing political support in the U.S.

Taking all these points together, I think Durban amounts to a significant achievement.

For Africa, the implications of multilateral climate imperialism, amplified by BRICS/BASIC sub-imperialism, are catastrophic. According to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Global Humanitarian Forum (2009), already more than 300 000 current deaths per year are attributable to climate change, mostly in the Global South. With the present trajectory of warming anticipated to break 4 degrees above normal by 2100, with inland Africa heating up by 6 to 7 degrees, not only are humans threatened, but so too is nearly every living species – biodiversity itself – reliant upon water and a stable eco-system. African scientists anticipate worsening weather chaos, not to mention 182 million Africans dead this century, early and unnecessarily, due to climate related disease (Christian Aid 2006).

Some on the continent will profit from ongoing emissions, especially South African capital. Accommodatingly, the Department of Environmental Affairs has a minister, Edna Molewa, who did nothing to shift power relations in defence of the climate, in spite of a relatively high profile in international negotiations. She played a central role in Durban's COP17 (Bond 2011, 2012), and in 2012, she was visible at the Rio+20 UN Earth Summit. Yet when it counted, in regulating South African polluters, Molewa knew how to avoid conflict. She was silent about the vast bulk of national infrastructure spending on carbon-intensive activities: three major coal-fired power plants, expanded coal exports via a $25 billion rail budget in the first Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Committee (PICC), and in the second PICC project, the $20 billion expansion of Durban's port and petrochemical complex, aiming to raise container throughput capacity by a factor of eight by 2040 (Bond 2014a). Government also gave permission in 2013 for Shell Oil to begin the process of 'fracking' the arid Karoo. This was followed in mid-2014 by President Jacob Zuma's Operation Phakisa ('speed up') ocean-economy strategy, including $5 billion worth of deep-sea oil and gas exploration, especially by ExxonMobil. Other carbon-intensive state policies include ever-worsening suburban sprawl in Gauteng province (and other metropolitan areas), facilitated by the doubling of the Durban-Johannesburg oil pipeline at nearly four times the initial budget of $500 million. Pretoria also granted approval for a new $6 billion state oil refinery, and has plans for more smelter-intensive minerals beneficiation including a new Chinese steel factory (in spite of steel imports from China decimating the two main existing producers in 2015). The South African office of Greenpeace (2015) was scathing about the INDCs Molewa offered in Paris:

> The 'Discussion Document: South Africa's INDC: 1 August 2015' avoids quantifying any contribution to mitigation and fails to meet the very basic generic requirements agreed for the mitigation component of the INDC. If not rectified, such blatant evasiveness will undermine South Africa's credibility and any claim to moral authority in leadership of developing country negotiators.

This lack of ambition is consistent with Pretoria's traditional post-apartheid approach. When seen from the perspective of civil society, government turns a blind eye to pollution violations especially from coal mining, electricity generation and oil refineries (all associated with climate change) (groundWork *et al* 2014). Confirming an inappropriate degree of state modesty, Molewa's (2014) once remarked in a rebuttal to this author, "We are constantly addressing issues to do with climate change – mostly behind the scenes." Also behind the scenes, South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa's massive coal mines and similar dirty coal corporations were, according to insiders, long pampered by Molewa's water officials. At least forty major new mines were proposed to provide coal to at least two new power plants, not to mention new export-oriented coal digs to supply China and India. Residents of the coal-producing province of Mpumalanga was by 2014, quite literally, wheezing (groundWork *et al,* 2014), as the National Development Plan called for 18 billion tonnes of coal to be dug and exported through the Richards Bay port in the country's largest infrastructure project. In addition, Eskom applied to Molewa for "rolling postponements" on pollution reductions required by law at 14 power plants there. Eskom's assumption was that its own crises – and regular load-shedding that struck fear into the society – would persuade Molewa of the need for forbearance. By February 2015, Molewa had agreed to a five year extension on air pollution regulatory forbearance for Eskom, Sasol and dozens of other firms whose emissions both harmed local workers and residents and contributed to climate change.

With the South African population recording 47 percent awareness that climate change is the world's greatest threat, according to the 2015 Pew Research Centre survey (i.e., the greatest international problem of local concern, ahead of second place "international financial instability") (Carle 2015). Turning that awareness into activism remains the only hope, given that Pretoria's elites appear unwilling to change course (Bond 2012). The same is true for the other BRICS countries, whose companies are not only carbon-intensive when operating in Africa, but also structurally committed to the continent's resource exploitation.

Conclusion

The BRICS stand accused of underdeveloping Africa in several respects, a process amplified by roller-coaster commodity price changes during the period 2002-16. The BRICS are, according to the information and analysis developed above, best understood as a new, more malevolent force within a general framework of neoliberal extractivism, amplifying the already extreme uneven and combined development so damaging to Africa. There are exceptions, of course, in which African leaders have helped their countries raise productivity and convert their natural resource wealth into investment (the main one being Botswana although the citizenry have witnessed very little trickle-down). But as the World Bank (2014) notes, mostly the African continent is losing natural capital and in only a very few countries (12 percent) can a net benefit can be calculated from extraction, even by the (pro-extractivist) Bank. The BRICS capacity to take advantage of Africa's weaknesses justifies the use of the term sub-imperialism. Whatever name one might use, South Africa's own National Planning Commission (2012) sheepishly conceded a "perception [*sic*] of the country as a regional bully," such that the "gateway to Africa" logic often comes up against the harsh reality of extraction and exploitation (especially in March 2013).

Still, the most important reasons for Africa's prone position in the world economy are not the fault of the BRICS – which simply amplify pre-existing problems instead of offering alternatives – but of the West. The latest manifestation of Western imperialism in Africa is indicative: when the World Economic Forum (WEF) came to Kigali in May 2016, the organization highlighted "Fourth Industrial Revolution cyber-physical systems" as central to Africa's future: the continent is "the world's fastest growing digital consumer market" (though fewer than four Africans in ten have electricity). For good measure, the WEF's main speaker, (the as-yet-unindicted war criminal) Tony Blair, celebrated the dictatorship of his host Paul Kagame. At the same time, the IMF's (2016) *Regional Economic Outlook for Africa* suggested that "a substantial policy reset is critical in many cases... Because the reduction in revenue from the extractive sector is expected to persist, many affected countries also critically need to contain fiscal deficits and build a sustainable tax base from the rest of the economy." This is the Western solution: a policy reset that represents more of the same, a reboot of an infected computer suffering Western-installed malware, rehacked by the BRICS so as to empty Africa's bank accounts.

The danger is, Obama agreed with *The Economist* (2014), quite straightforward: whether the BRICS institutions are "potentially putting pressure on the system [of Western capitalism] rather than adding to it and strengthening it… [and] whether China ends up inside that system or challenging it. That's the really big issue of our times." There are always contingencies, as noted earlier, and the Chinese geopolitical and economic strategy is known to shift dramatically from generation to generation. Still, under Xi Jinping, the tendency of talking left while walking right will continue. The alternatives are obvious, but so far the main BRICS have only begun to exert defensive mechanisms – e.g. banning certain foreign exchange transactions (especially China in early 2016) and imposing desperately defensive tariffs – while the bigger-picture reforms attempted by others remain essentially unexplored:

- default on unpayable, unjustifiable debt – taken out by corrupt elites – as did Argentina and Ecuador in 2002 and 2009;
- evict World Bank personnel, as did Ecuador in 2007;
- impose exchange controls against elites, as did Malaysia (1998), Venezuela (2003), Cyprus (2013), Greece (2015);
- establish new common currency in order to avoid US$ transactions;
- provide solidarity financing for governments resisting financial imperialism, as was offered (by Russia's deputy finance minister) to Greece but then never materialized;
- adopt socially- and ecologically-conscious financing strategies tied to compatible trade (like ALBA), such as were proposed and seed-funded by Venezuela in the still-born Bank of the South.

Instead, the BRICS have chosen the course of undergirding multilateral agencies (the Bretton Woods Institutions and UNFCCC) whose role is disastrous for Africa. What that means for BRICS in the years ahead, it is fair to predict, is more top-down scrambling within Africa, and more bottom-up resistance (Bond 2016). Where African governments emerge that have more patriotic instincts, there will be scope for campaigning on matters of economic justice: e.g. against mining and petroleum extraction, IFF (and *licit* financial flow) extraction, and illegitimate debt. With the profits of so many Western firms in Africa hitting new lows and their share value nearly wiped out (e.g. the 2011-15 cases of Lonmin, Anglo and Glencore, which each lost more than 85 percent of value), there are imperialist precedents for what BRICS firms now may find logical: yet more extreme metabolisms of extraction and more desperation gambits to keep BRICS-friendly regimes in power, at the expense of the reproductive needs of society and nature. But resistance is already evident, as the Africa Uprising against 'Africa Rising' proceeds.

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Endnotes

[1] Where joint action has *not* been effective or not been attempted – e.g. where Russia and China join the US, France and Britain to *deny* UN Security Council seats to the other three BRICS in spite of a decade-plus campaign to democratise that body (for fear of diluting their own power), or in the BRICS' failure to even

propose a candidate from their ranks to replace two disgraced IMF Managing Directors (Dominique Strauss-Kahn in 2011 and Christine Lagarde in 2016) and poorly-performing World Bank presidents (Paul Wolfowitz in 2007, Robert Zoellick in 2012 and Jim Yong Kim in 2016) – this chapter does not have the scope to delve.

[2] South Africans witnessed a similar problem when Chelsea Manning released US State Department cable transcripts in 2010 revealing that the country's then lead spy, Moe Shaik, regularly offered the same sort of tell-all function to US embassy officials. He later switched jobs to become a key liaison to the BRICS New Development Bank (Bond 2016).

[3] The World Bank 'Vice President – Integrity' (*sic*) responsible for the decision, Leonard McCarthy, was himself declared in 2015 by the finest South African newspaper editor, Ferial Haffajee (2015), to have "ruined our criminal justice system" because of his own political corruption when serving as lead prosecutor of Zuma.

[4] Even personnel conditions were attached to the deal: Mboweni had to wait an extra five years to become central bank governor because IMF head Michel Camdessus insisted informally in a January 1994 meeting with Nelson Mandela that apartheid-era neoliberals Chris Stals at the Reserve Bank and finance minister Derek Keys be reappointed to their jobs (Bond 2014).

[5] In 1985, the last time this debt ratio was hit, the then leader of apartheid South Africa, P.W.Botha, found it necessary to default on $13 billion in short-term debt payments coming due, to close the stock exchange and to impose exchange controls (Bond 2014).

[6] The contrast with his predecessor Boris Yeltsin is obvious, for on the eve of his $40 billion default in 1998, Yeltsin's pro-Western government had borrowed $5 billion from the Bretton Woods Institutions, which disappeared without a trace. Nevertheless, the IMF quickly advanced a $20 billion bail-out loan, which if it occurred today would probably be vetoed by the US government's IMF representative (Bond 2003).