Instituto de Relações Internacionais

PUC RIO

BRICS Policy Center
Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas BRICS

ECONOMIA POLÍTICA NAS RELAÇÕES SUL-SUL

South-South Investments: Driver for Alternative Globalization?

Examining China-Led Special Economic Zones in Brazil and South Africa

Sage

Article
Critical Sociology
1–19

Critical Sociology

Critical Sociology

Article

Critical Sociology
1–19

DOI: 10.1177/08969205241252445
journals.sagepub.com/home/crs
Sage

South-South Investments: Driver for Alternative Globalization? Examining China-Led Special Economic Zones in Brazil and South Africa

Ana Garcia
Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Lisa Thompson
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Cleiton Brito
Universidade Federal do Amazonas, Brazil

Abstract
The formation of BRICS marks a significant aspect of 21st-century globalization. This has spurred optimism in the Global South about offering an alternative to Western dominance. China has aimed to expand its global presence and influence, framing its relations as 'South-South Cooperation'. Brazil and South Africa are crucial partners within BRICS, receiving significant Chinese investment, loans, and assistance. In this article, we critically examine South-South investments through a comparative analysis of Chinese investments in South Africa and Brazil, focusing on the case studies of the Manaus Industrial Park and the Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone. Our research employs ethnographic fieldwork and secondary sources to analyze Chinese investments and their socio-environmental impact. We begin with a discussion of globalization and current trends of deglobalization by proposing three dimensions to analyze the role of BRICS. While Chinese investment could offer an alternative to Western financing, a more balanced South-South

Corresponding authors:
Ana Garcia, Department of Development, Agriculture and Society, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Avenida Presidente Vargas 417, 9 andar, 20071-003 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Email: anagarcia@ufrrj.br

Lisa Thompson, School of Government, University of the Western Cape, Robert Sobukwe Road, Bellville, Cape Town 7535, South Africa.
Email: lthompson@uwc.ac.za

Cleiton Brito, Department of Sociology, Federal University of Amazonas, Avenida General Rodrigo Octávio, Coroado I, Setor Norte – Coroado, 6200 Manaus, Brazil.
Email: cleiton.brito@ufam.edu.br

agenda is needed. Both Brazilian and South African state and non-state actors must advocate for better conditions to avoid repeating patterns of resource exploitation and subordination. This shifts the debate beyond traditional dichotomies. Ultimately, embracing South-South FDI and Cooperation must be accompanied by critical analysis to ensure a truly transformative agenda for the Global South.

Keywords
Chinese investments, special economic zones, BRICS, Brazil, South Africa, deglobalization

The establishment of BRICS stands out as a key aspect of 21st-century globalization. Initially comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the group has transformed into a political and economic bloc since the late 2000s, evolving further into a geopolitical alliance with a broader membership. The rise of BRICS has fostered visions of modernization and development in the Global South, sparking optimism about these countries' potential to offer an alternative to Western dominance in the global political economy.

Since the late 1990s, China has been actively expanding its economic presence in foreign markets and enhancing its geopolitical influence. Chinese economic engagements with the Global South are often portrayed as 'South-South Cooperation' in official documents, emphasizing mutual benefits and complementarities. China has implemented two major programs to support its overseas economic and political expansion: the 'Going Global' strategy initiated in 1999, aimed at internationalizing Chinese enterprises, accessing raw materials, exploring new consumer markets, and exporting surplus capacity while ensuring food security (Jaguaribe, 2018); and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013, aimed at fostering a new global flow of capital, services, and communications centered around China's economic structure and political influence (The State Council, 2015). In both programs, Chinese officials stress non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for national sovereignty. Some argue that China-led economic cooperation offers developmental benefits (Sen et al., 2019).

Brazil and South Africa have become important partners of China in the BRICS in multilateral arenas and in their own regions. In addition to loans and aid, China's South-South Cooperation typically includes foreign direct investment (FDI) (Jenkins, 2019). This diversification of economic partnerships holds the potential to counterbalance the influence of the United States and Europe historically present in these regions. However, to what extent can South-South investments create new opportunities for more equitable and sustainable socio-environmental development? Or, on the contrary, to what extent do they reproduce the traditional international division of labor, generate practices of natural resource and labor exploitation, and create new asymmetries?

This article aims to analyze and compare Chinese investment in South Africa and Brazil, focusing on Chinese-led special economic zones (SEZs). The first section discusses China and BRICS in (de)globalization, proposing three dimensions to analyze BRICS: a top-down geopolitical perspective, a horizontal view of intra-BRICS relations, and a bottom-up examination of power asymmetries and exploitation. The second section compares Chinese investments, loans, and trade in Brazil and South Africa, along with diplomatic relations and supporting public policies. The third section examines socio-environmental and labor dynamics in areas where Chinese projects are implemented, with case studies of the Manaus Industrial Park (MIP) in Brazil and the Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ) in South Africa's Limpopo province.[1]

Our analyses consider labor and livelihood aspects of development through the lens of ethnographic fieldwork. We employed ethnographic research techniques, including field studies with interviews in South Africa and Brazil.[2] In addition, we used available open access databases, literature reviews, and online media coverage as secondary sources. Finally, this article benefits from previous research conducted in the context of the BRICS Policy Center and other research projects (Garcia et al., 2023a, 2023b; Thompson et al., 2023).

We argue that, while Chinese FDI, loans and development assistance *could* provide a powerful alternative to the conditionalities attached to traditional Western-based forms of financing, a more balanced and mutually beneficial South-South agenda needs to be much more South-led and less driven by the Chinese economic and geopolitical agenda. South-South investment, operating within the capitalist mode of production, has reinforced a production and export-oriented model dependent on raw materials and commodities, limiting its potential as an alternative to traditional (imperial) North-South economic relations (Svampa and Slipak, 2015). Thus, we aim to reposition the debate to move beyond dichotomous views of 'North-South' and 'West-East'. The field evidence presented in this article suggests that both Brazilian and South African state and non-state actors need to actively push for better conditions in their relations with Chinese foreign investors. South-South relations must ensure better living conditions for both the organized and informal working classes. Without this, it will lose its transformative role and would repeat the history of subordination of the 'developing' South that has trapped states in new political narratives that mask similar patterns of resource extractivism.

China, BRICS, and (De)globalization

The BRICS economies play significant roles in globalization, both as recipients of FDI and as foreign investors with large multinational corporations operating globally. In 2018, these five countries collectively accounted for 20% of global investment inflows and 24% of global GDP (UNCTAD, 2019). Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic in 2020, China led global outward investment with $133 billion in FDI (UNCTAD, 2021). Brazil consistently ranks among the top 10 recipients of FDI inflows, while Russia and India consistently rank among the top 20 in both FDI inflows and outflows in recent years (UNCTAD, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). Kiely (2015) contends that the rise of the BRICS has led to more, rather than less, integration with Western-based globalization. He argues that the rise of these countries is less due to deviations from neoliberal prescriptions, as is often perceived, and more to the adoption of pro-globalization policies.

Nevertheless, the BRICS countries, especially China and Russia, are at the center of the current debates on 'deglobalization' (García-Herrero and Tan, 2020; Paul, 2023; Roach, 2022). Baumann (2022) views deglobalization as characterized by trade protectionism, the restructuring of global production chains, and the rise of nationalism, leading to the gradual relocation of production units. Tooze (2023) sees it as a 'polycrisis', involving economic and non-economic shocks, with significant involvement from the BRICS countries, particularly China. Brancacio and Califano (2023) note a reversal of roles, with China advocating for free trade while the West emphasizes protectionist measures, a trend they term 'friend-shoring'. García-Herrero and Tan (2020), however, argue that deglobalization is not entirely new and is less pronounced in finance compared to trade and investment, despite attempts by the United States and China to decouple financial flows and delist Chinese companies from the US stock market.

Prior to the discourse on deglobalization, Mignolo (2011) discusses 'de-Westernization', highlighting the rise of the Global South amid growing tensions between two trajectories: 're-Westernization' and 'de-Westernization', both underpinned by capitalist economies. Mignolo emphasizes the hegemonic struggle between East and West for control over the colonial matrix of power, encompassing knowledge, subjectivity, gender, sexuality, economy, and authority, intersecting with racism and patriarchy. Rather than offering an alternative to capitalist oppression, both the East and the West operate within capitalist frameworks shaped by diverse local histories.

Following this debate, we propose examining the BRICS on three levels. The first level is a top-down view and involves analyzing the international system through the lens of nation-states striving to enhance their power amid competitive dynamics. Often conflated with geopolitical analysis, this approach views the BRICS as seeking to bolster their economic, political, and military capabilities relative to the United States and Europe.

Amid the 2008 financial crisis, the BRICS nations coordinated efforts in multilateral forums to advocate for reforms in international financial institutions. This stance has caused friction with Western powers, who have often resisted or delayed such reforms within institutions established after World War II. This dynamic has fostered hopes regarding the 'counter-hegemonic' potential of the BRICS. Desai (2013) expressed optimism, comparing this collective challenge to Western dominance to the efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s. Bello (2014) views the BRICS' role positively for the Global South, anticipating it would provide a counterbalance in negotiations with Western entities. Van der Pijl (2017) perceives the BRICS as a bloc of 'contender states', each having experienced challenges to liberal norms individually, and relying on finance capital in a manner distinct from the liberal West, emerging as state-oligarchic rivals.

Since Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014, geopolitical tensions between the BRICS and the West have heightened. Following Donald Trump's election in 2017, the United States redirected its focus toward containing China's technological expansion (Weinland, 2022). By 2022, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the world is once again portrayed as 'West vs East'. In this context, the BRICS is increasingly viewed as a geopolitical alliance. The shared priority agenda extends beyond merely reforming multilateral financial institutions to forging new alliances and establishing institutions aimed at fostering a 'multipolar world'. Consequently, the BRICS has become a magnet for countries dissatisfied with the structures of the international order under US hegemony, with some formally expressing their desire to join the BRICS group (Garcia and Ibanez, 2023).

Thus, the BRICS is a part of the trends characterizing deglobalization. Two key issues define this geopolitical moment: the expansion of the group to include new members and the reduction of dependence on the US dollar. Expansion has long been a Chinese agenda, exemplified by its advocacy for South Africa's inclusion in BRICS in 2011. In 2023, it has now gained momentum with support from Russia, and six countries were invited to join the bloc: Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran (Brasil, 2023). Notably, the new members include Saudi Arabia, a historical US ally in the Middle East, and Iran, which is subject to US sanctions.

Reducing dependence on the US dollar and establishing trade and credit mechanisms in local currencies represent a significant step toward advancing deglobalization in finance. Li (2023: 9) highlights several actions in this direction: India has initiated purchases of Russian oil using renminbi, Saudi currency, and rubles. Similarly, Russia and China have engaged in trade involving Russian oil, coal, and metals conducted in renminbi. In addition, Russia and a coalition of African nations have commenced discussions on settling transactions in national currencies, thereby reducing reliance on the US dollar and the euro. Brazil and China have announced the establishment of a clearing house to facilitate commercial transactions and loans in renminbi (Sanches, 2023). In response to sanctions against Russia, the United States froze Russia's international reserves, leading to an increase in the renminbi's share of trade between China and Russia (Li, 2023). Furthermore, the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB, 2021b) aims to have 30% of its financing denominated in the local currency of its members by 2026. As of the end of 2021, 23% of cumulative approved loans were in local currency, with China accounting for 70% of the bank's loans that year (NDB, 2021a: 39).

A second way to analyze BRICS is a horizontal (or lateral) view, which involves analyzing intra-bloc relations and identifying both convergences and asymmetries among member countries. Over the past 15 years, the BRICS have experienced institutional and thematic densification, marked by the creation of new institutions and the expansion of intra-bloc cooperation (Ramos et al., 2018). Examples include annual meetings of foreign ministers held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, regular gatherings of sectoral working groups (e.g. on health), meetings of finance ministers and central bankers within the G20 framework, and the establishment of two new institutions: the NDB and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). In addition, the BRICS extends beyond being a mere intergovernmental grouping by acknowledging other non-governmental bodies such as the BRICS Business Council, the Council of Think Tanks, and Civil BRICS. Beyond these official bodies, 'Brics from below' continues to serve as a platform for grassroots movements.

However, previous research has highlighted economic asymmetries between countries within the BRICS, largely due to China's economic dominance (Garcia, 2020). For instance, in terms of trade relations, three BRICS members—Brazil, Russia, and South Africa—maintain trade surpluses with China, yet their exports primarily consist of primary agricultural and mineral products. India, the sole BRICS member with a trade deficit vis-à-vis China, also tends to export primary products and pharmaceuticals to its Asian partner. Conversely, China's intra-BRICS exports encompass a diverse range of products, from telephone parts and data processing machines to semiconductors (Trade Map, n.d.). Thus, intra-BRICS trade relations resemble the traditional international division of labor with China positioned at the center, a pattern similarly observed in FDI, as will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Finally, a third way of analyzing the BRICS is from a bottom-up perspective, focusing on their relations with other developing countries and regions in the Global South, as well as on the labor and livelihood aspects of development. Two analytical approaches emerge here. The first posits that China-led 'South-South cooperation' represents a transformative development alternative distinct from historical forms of capitalist expansionism due to its wide array of development instruments and mechanisms for cooperation. This perspective finds support in various political economy analyses, such as Gu and Kitano (2018) and Gomes and Esteves (2018), which argue that Chinese international development cooperation (IDC) embodies a new approach to development termed 'beyond aid'. In Latin America, relations with China are perceived as an alternative to US imperialism, potentially fostering more autonomous political spaces for regional integration initiatives and regional institutions free from US interference (Boron cited in Svampa and Slipak, 2015).

The second take draws from Harvey's (2007) seminal notion of newly developing centers of capital accumulation requiring temporal-spatial fixes to dispose of surplus capital, a concept also embraced by other critical, Marxist-oriented scholars (Bond, 2016). According to Harvey (2018), China's myriad investment strategies are extending across Africa and Latin America, placing Chinese companies at the forefront of mineral and agricultural commodity chains, extractivism, and land acquisitions. Instances include Brazilian mining companies in Mozambique (Articulação Internacional dos Atingidos pela Vale, 2021; Marshall, 2015), Chinese oil and mining ventures in South America (Martínez, 2014; Rodriguez and Bazán Seminario, 2023), Russian mining enterprises in Zimbabwe (Amsi et al., 2015), and infrastructure projects encroaching on community territories in Africa and Latin America.

In this vain, Carmody (2015) suggests that South African and Chinese capital frequently collaborate to exploit natural resources and assert dominance over the African continent. In Latin America and Africa, some analysts view the relationship with China as unequal and reliant on trade and investment, which are aimed at securing the supply of raw materials and facilitating the penetration of markets for high-tech Chinese products and services (Jenkins, 2019;

Menezes and Bragatti, 2020; Slipak and Ghiotto, 2019). Svampa and Slipak (2015) highlight a 'Beijing Consensus' that exacerbates dependency, reinforces the 'Commodity Consensus', and hastens premature deindustrialization.

The subsequent sections will delve into the second and third dimensions, which involve examining intra-BRICS relations by comparing Chinese investments in Brazil and South Africa, along with the political relations established to frame FDI, loans, and aid. In addition, a bottom-up perspective will be employed to scrutinize the socio-environmental and labor dynamics of Chinese investment in SEZs. In contrast to viewpoints positing this as an alternative, autonomous, or people-centered form of development, our analysis draws from critical approaches rooted in the Marxist tradition (Harvey, 2007, 2018). Through ethnographic research conducted with affected communities and workers, we aim to add another dimension to the debate on North-South versus South-South relations. By focusing on the voices of communities, broadly defined as key stakeholders whether or not they are recognized as such by state and corporate actors, we are able to ground our theoretical analysis in the praxis of capitalist relations (Thompson, 2019).

Chinese Investments in Brazil and South Africa: A Comparative Analysis

Chinese FDI in Brazil and South Africa shares both similarities and differences. In Brazil, China's investment presence emerged predominantly in the 2010s, with significant ventures in sectors like oil, hydropower, and banking. Between 2007 and 2020, Chinese companies executed 176 projects amounting to $66.1 billion in investment, with Brazil capturing 47% of Chinese investment in South America (Cariello, 2021). Notably, Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs), particularly hydropower firms like State Grid and China Three Gorges, accounted for a substantial portion of the total investment, with the electricity sector receiving the lion's share, comprising 48% of equity value (Cariello, 2021). Investments in power generation were predominantly directed toward renewable energy sources such as hydro, solar, and wind. While the manufacturing industry witnessed the highest number of projects, investment levels experienced a significant decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, investment flows rebounded in 2021, with a resurgence in projects, particularly in services and information technology (Cariello, 2022).

In South Africa, by contrast, the Chinese state began investing a decade before, in the early 2000s. Annual flows to Africa increased from US$75 million in 2003 to US$2.7 billion in 2019. FDI peaked at US$5.5 billion in 2008, following the sale of a 20% stake in Standard Bank SA to the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (John Hopkins University, n.d.). Chinese investment has expanded into South Africa's mining industry, transport infrastructure, and SEZs (Carciotto and Chikohomero, 2022; Thompson and Tsolekile de Wet, 2018).

Chinese FDI, loans, and broader investment initiatives are particularly intertwined in South Africa, especially when it comes to infrastructure. It is estimated that Chinese infrastructure commitments in Africa exceeded $25.6 billion in 2018, making it the largest single source of financing (Thompson, 2020). However, there is an issue of transparency: it is very difficult to find accurate data on the amount of Chinese loans to South Africa, as the government and other stakeholders do not make this data readily available to the public, whereas in Brazil, data can be accessed in governmental and business reports.

In both Brazil and South Africa, Chinese financial flows have come mainly from the China Development Bank (CDB). It has provided loans in the form of project finance to Chinese companies, as well as loans to Brazilian and South African SOEs. In South Africa, a great part of Chinese loans are part of official development assistance, that is, non-repayable, while in Brazil they are offered on a commercial basis.

In the Brazilian case, CDB financed projects in the oil and gas and electricity sectors in the mid-2000s, but in the 2010s, it turned to renewable energy and electric mobility projects (such as electric cars) that promoted Chinese technologies. The largest loans, however, went to the Brazilian oil company Petrobras. Between 2009 and 2017, the CDB granted six loans totaling US$25 billion (The Dialogue, n.d.). These loans were partially based on 'loans for oil', as they were tied to the condition that Petrobras prioritize the supply of oil to certain Chinese companies and use the funds to acquire goods and services from these companies (Soujun and Miranda, 2016). CDB loans helped Petrobras finance the exploration of pre-salt oil fields in the adverse context of the 2008 global financial crisis, and also helped the company recover from the 'Carwash' anti-corruption investigation, which led to a decline in the company's market value and difficulties in obtaining financing from other creditors.

In South Africa, Chinese loans generally come in the form of IDC, which is offered in two ways: through bilateral agreements between Chinese SOEs and/or private companies, or through Chinese banks offering low-interest loans to African countries. However, the forms of trade aid and investment have not differed substantially with Brazil, for example of the biggest loans made to South African state-owned companies by China are to Eskom the South African energy provider and Transnet, the SOE involved with Railway Infrastructure. Unlike Brazil, however, in the South African context, very often it is not made public whether the IDC is an investment and/or a loan and/or some other type of aid (Thompson, 2019).

Trade is an important pillar of Brazil and South Africa's relations with China, as it became the main trading partner of both countries in the same year, 2009. However, it resembles the traditional division of labor: Brazilian exports to China are concentrated in three primary products—soybeans, iron ore, and crude oil—which account for 80% of Brazil's total annual exports to China between 2010 and 2022, while it imports a wide range of manufactured products from China (Brasil, n.d.). This asymmetric economic interdependence tends to perpetuate the deindustrialization of the Brazilian economy in the medium term, as Brazil has lost its place to China as the main exporter of manufactured goods to other South American countries (Lopes Afonso et al., 2021).

China's exports to South Africa have grown at an annual rate of 14.3%, from US$637 million in 1995 to US$20.5 billion in 2021 (OEC, n.d.). The main export products are broadcasting equipment, computers, and coated flat-rolled iron. South Africa's exports to China have remained primary commodities, however, in the form of gold, diamonds, and iron ore. A key area of Chinese economic influence has been the establishment of preferential trade and investment zones, also known as SEZs. Our case study of Chinese investment in South Africa's SEZs shows that they include fewer labor regulations, all to distort statistics on how much local labor is used in investment projects.

Economic relations have been accompanied by closer political and diplomatic ties between China, Brazil, and South Africa. Multilaterally, these three countries participate in the G20 and BRICS, and are founding members of the NDB and the AIIB. Regionally, China has maintained important cooperation forums in Latin America and Africa. However, while the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), created in 2000, has played a major role in diplomatic and economic relations between China and South Africa (Naidu, 2015), the China-CELAC Forum, created in 2014, has not played a decisive role in Brazil-China relations (Vadell, 2018).

Political and diplomatic relations between Brazil and China date back to the 1970s. Since then, there have been more than 90 meetings between heads of state and state representatives, more than 60 of which have taken place since the 2010s (Brasil, 2014b). During the administrations of Lula da Silva (2002–2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016), the relationship between Brazil and China intensified significantly. Bilateral initiatives include the creation of the Sino-Brazilian High-Level Commission for Coordination and Cooperation (COSBAN) in 2004, the adoption of the Brazil-China Joint Action Plans, the Ten-Year Cooperation Plan 2012–2021, and the elevation of bilateral relations to the level of a 'Global Strategic Partnership' in 2012 (Berringer and Belasques, 2020). All of these initiatives and mutual visits have resulted in more business opportunities, for example, an agreement was signed for State Grid's participation in the construction of the high-voltage transmission line for the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam; the Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES), China Exim Bank, CDB, and China Investment Corp. agreed on the expansion of credit for exporters and investors; and Build Your Dreams (BYD) announced its production of rechargeable batteries and energy storage systems (Brasil, 2014a).

After the impeachment of President Rousseff in 2016, the new administration of Michel Temer (2016–2018) redirected the focus of Brazil's foreign policy toward closer ties with the United States and the European Union and a more pragmatic relationship with China. Nevertheless, during Temer administration, the Ministry of Mines and Energy signed an agreement with State Grid for the second phase of the high-voltage transmission line for the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant; China Communication and Construction Company (CCCC) announced an investment of US$700 million in the port of São Luís; BNDES and CDB agreed on a US$3 billion loan (Brasil, 2017).

However, in 2018, the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil created uncertainty about relations with China, largely due to Bolsonaro's alignment with Donald Trump (Saraiva and Silva, 2019). Despite Bolsonaro's bellicose rhetoric against China, his first year in office in 2019 was marked by high-level reciprocal visits, particularly serving the interest of Brazilian agribusiness, which was an important support basis for the Bolsonaro government. Several cooperation agreements to increase agribusiness trade and investment were signed (Brasil, 2019a, 2019b; Wilkinson et al., 2022).

China's IDC narrative describes its diplomatic and economic relations with South Africa as part of the realignment of the Global South (Thompson, 2020). China claims to be a former colony and currently a developing state, and as such its dominant role makes it the leader of the new Global South. The Chinese government's influence throughout Africa has been enhanced by its close relationship with the African National Congress (ANC). Through strong bilateral relations, China has gradually reshaped how the African continent prioritizes joint development initiatives in international and regional platforms. For example, under the influence of China's foreign policy, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have reorganized the continental agenda to include joint development initiatives with China (Thompson, 2020).

Thus, the growing economic relationship between China and South Africa has changed the nature and ideational content of South Africa's foreign policy on the African continent. While ideals of Pan-Africanism still abound, now they are framed through the lens of South-South Cooperation, which prioritizes extra-continental interests over dreams of continental community and evolving historical continuity. South Africa could focus more on ensuring that national and continental priorities are not diluted. However, given the continent's urgent need for better transport infrastructure and more diversified economies, it is clear that the positive financial 'take-up' of the benefits of this South-South Cooperation is too high to dwell on the potential disadvantages it brings to the African agenda. Thus, South Africa's foreign policy in the last decade has shown a clear shift from a continental-based agenda to a Global South agenda (Naidu, 2015; Thompson, 2020).

After the establishment of FOCAC in 2000, Chinese trade with Africa accelerated so rapidly that it had overtaken the United States as Africa's largest trading partner. South Africa and China have expanded and consolidated their 1997 Bilateral Investment Treaty, albeit with many omissions regarding labor rights and climate change commitments. The number of agreements, along with robust bilateral trade, has increased significantly since President Jacob Zuma's visit to Beijing in 2014 (Thompson, 2020). While President Thabo Mbeki had emphasized a more Africa-centric approach during his presidency (1999–2008), there was a clear shift toward global partnerships when President Zuma took office, especially after joining the BRICS in September 2010 (Naidu, 2015).

Table 1. Brazil-China and South Africa-China political and economic relations.

China	Brazil	South Africa
Chinese foreign direct investment	China is not the biggest investors	China is the main investor
Investment sectors	Energy (oil, hydroelectric dams, energy transmission), banking and services	Mining industry, transport infrastructure and finance
The largest investments	Hydropower plants and renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, and oil fields	Special Economic Zones
Chinese loans	Not indebted	Indebted
Type of loan	Commercial basis	International Development Cooperation
Financed projects	Oil, gas and electricity sectors (gas pipelines and coal-fired thermal power)—2000; Energy and electric mobility, tied to the promotion of Chinese technologies (hydroelectric plants and electric vehicle plant)—2010	Electricity (Eskom) and road and rail (Transnet), including the Gupta-led China South Rail railway infrastructure project, where millions of dollars were misappropriated by both Transnet officials and Gupta-fronted companies
The largest loans	Brazilian state-owned company Petrobras	South African SOEs, Eskom (electricity provider) and Transnet (road and rail)
Trade	China is the main trading partner	China is the main trading partner
Commercial relations	Asymmetric economic interdependence leading to deindustrialization. Brazil exports iron ore, soybeans and crude oil to China and imports Chinese manufactured goods	Asymmetric economic interdependence. Special economic zones have become preferential trade areas
Political-diplomatic relations	Significant bilateral relationships, concomitant business interests, agreements in agribusiness, railway and electrical sectors and expansion of credit for exporters and importers	Strong influence on the content of South African foreign policy, which focuses on a Global South agenda
Regional cooperation forums	China-CELAC Forum (2014) has not played a decisive role in Brazil-China relations	China-Africa Cooperation Forum FOCAC (2000) has played a major role in diplomatic and economic relations between China and South Africa

Source: Garcia et al. (2023a, 2023b); Thompson et al. (2023).
Authors' elaboration.

The relationship between South Africa and China is officially described by the Chinese government as a 'comprehensive strategic partnership' (FOCAC, 2018), which is the highest level of economic and political support offered by Beijing. According to official Chinese discourse, loans, investment, technical assistance, and cooperation are all free from the heavy conditionalities imposed by Northern governments and international organizations (FOCAC, 2018). Many African state leaders have been seduced by the Chinese lending narrative of 'mutual benefit' and 'no strings attached', but have become even more indebted (Carciotto and Chikohomero, 2022). In the South African case, the lack of public disclosure is one of the most troubling aspects of the China-South Africa relationship. Table 1 summarizes the discussion presented in this section.

Labor and Livelihood in Chinese-Led SEZs: The Cases of Musina-Makhado in South Africa and the MIP in Brazil

Between the 1970s and 1980s, global development debates strongly favored the export-led growth successes of the East Asian region. After the 1980s, China's SEZ model became the new regional development model in Southeast Asia. According to UNCTAD (2019), SEZs could transform economies in the Global South as they are expected to attract foreign and local investment for technologically appropriate industrialization, manufacturing value chains, and job creation.

The term SEZ is applied to any geographically delimited development zone that offers packages of investment incentives. SEZs are considered mega-projects by design, as they aim to increase industrialization and diversification of manufacturing. These megaprojects include industrial development zones, export processing zones, industrial parks, and free ports (UNCTAD, 2019). Globally, the creation of SEZs is thought to benefit foreign and local firms as well as workers due to the focus on skills transfer and job creation. However, there are many potential problems and debates about how to structure SEZs in terms of sustainable development, as acknowledged by UNCTAD (2019).

This section presents findings from two sets of fieldwork conducted in Chinese-led SEZs in South Africa and Brazil (see Note 1). The first fieldwork involved stakeholder interviews with key informants in provincial and local government in Limpopo, South Africa, and community consultations with affected communities near the MMSEZ. The affected communities, namely the Musina, Mudimele, and Mulambwane communities, were regularly engaged to both inform and empower them about their rights and to understand their interests and concerns.

In Brazil, field research was conducted at four Chinese factories in the MIP: ChinaBoard, TVChina, MotorChina, and ArconChina. Based on the 'guanxi methodology',[3] the research consisted of interviews with Brazilian and Chinese managers, workers, union leaders, public managers, and labor justice agents (Brito, 2023). Our research included an extensive ethnography of the workplace, including factory visits and observations of daily production processes. From our observations, we synthesized what we call the 'Chinese production model'. This model includes factories with minimal local integration, operated directly by Chinese parent companies, characterized by low wages, the presence of Chinese expatriates who enforce both material and cultural discipline, a culture of strict managerial control, and a lack of worker participation in production processes.

Implementation and Profile

The Manaus Free Trade Zone (MFTZ) was created in the 1960s as part of the industrial policy of Brazil's military dictatorship (Seráfico, 2011). It was one of the first free trade zones in the world. The Amazon region became the home of the MFTZ, whose main 'competitive advantage' offered tax and non-tax incentives for companies to implement projects in this SEZ (Silva, 2013).

Within the MFTZ, the MIP was created as a hub for factories from different industrial sectors. They arrived first from Europe, the United States, and Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, then from the Asian tigers in the 1990s, and finally from China in the 2000s (Brito, 2017). By 2017, Chinese investors in Manaus had a total of 22 factories in the sub-sectors of electronics, mechanics, thermoplastics, and two-wheelers, employing about 10,000 workers, or about 10% of the total workforce in the industrial park (Brito, 2023).

South Africa only enacted a Special Economic Zones Act in 2014 (South African Government, n.d.). Since then, the SEZs have been modeled as investment tax havens (including minimal corporate tax, customs duties, and tax exemptions) and one-stop shops to assist with rapid business start-up, reduced water and electricity tariffs, and often a blind eye to labor rights and regulations (Thompson, 2020). While SEZs are seen as important job creators, there are other potential drawbacks, such as guidelines for labor contracts to ensure minimal disruption to production, which can limit labor rights. Nonetheless, until recently, South African trade union organizations have broadly supported SEZs as a means of large-scale job creation (FOCAC, 2018).

Labor Issues

Labor issues are also at the center of the debate over the MIP. Manaus is home to a specialized workforce with decades of experience in low-cost manufacturing (Valle, 2007). Through factory visits and interviews, we identified key issues related to labor practices in Chinese factories in the MIP. Among the most common labor issues raised by workers and labor courts are wage cuts, harassment, forced work even during vacations, failure to honor collective bargaining agreements, difficulties in allowing union representatives into factories, elimination of workers' leisure time and space, and nonpayment or reduction of worker benefits such as daycare, dental plans, and food baskets:

> In my old job I earned US$800.00, but in TVChina it was US$630.00. A supervisor was paid US$1700.00 in the Dutch company and US$1190.00 in TVChina. In the Dutch company, when employees completed two years in the company, they would receive a letter congratulating them for being with the company so long and saying that they would receive a US$10.00 raise the following month. This doesn't happen in the Chinese company. (Interview with a reserve employee, 2016)

Chinese companies tend to comply with Brazilian legislation, but they do not offer more than what is required by law. The companies' policy is to pay the employees of their subsidiaries a wage close to the average amount paid by the parent company in China. No data were found to indicate non-compliance with labor laws. Chinese companies emphasize the more technical side of the work, coordinated by a management team composed of expatriates. They have generally preferred workers with experience in the MIP to reduce training costs. Both the state and the market avoid responsibility for training, passing it on to the workers themselves.

Local factory managers have no say in personnel matters, which are completely controlled by headquarters in China, in a way that avoids dealing directly with local pressures (Brito, 2023). This can be seen in the case of labor disputes, as the headquarters in China is the one to decide on compliance with the labor agreements negotiated in Manaus. In terms of control and supervision of the factory, the workers have little autonomy to make decisions. According to the workers, the Chinese do not create space for dialogue in the factory, do not accept suggestions and weave a very hierarchical web of relationships:

> With the Chinese you can't say something is bad, you have to do it anyway. They say, 'The instruction came from China, you can't change it. You have to do it this way because the guy in China does it this way and it works there, so you have to do it this way here. It has to be this way, you can't change it. So we have no freedom to change things, to give ideas, and then it gets bad . . . It was like they pulled the rug out from under us, everything changed, they say there is no encouragement to work, 'those who want to work will work'. (Interview with Production Operator, 2016)

Thus, in the correlation of forces between capital and labor, we can affirm that state policies have benefited capital more than the working class in MIP. The main advances of the working population in Manaus are the result of the struggle of the working class against the forces of capital, not the actions of the state. On the one hand, the workers are at the mercy of the comings and goings of the manufacturing companies, and on the other hand, they have to deal with the lack of educational courses, housing and sanitation policies, and professional and technical training programs on their own.

China's political and economic impact in Brazil is very different from that in the African context, because in Brazil there is little emphasis on strategic interests related to China's geopolitical ambitions. Our research shows that in a place where international companies dominate production and distribution, Chinese investors simply go with the flow; they do not violate labor laws, but they continue to cut costs and adopt strategies to survive or get ahead of their competitors. Such strategies include paying Chinese managers and supervisors working in Brazil lower wages and benefits than those paid in China (Brito, 2017).

Environmental and Livelihood Issues

The case of the MMSEZ in South Africa raises similar issues, albeit at a very different stage of implementation, as the zone was approved in early 2022. Environmental concerns, as well as issues of participation and transparency, have been at the center of the debate surrounding the government's approval of the SEZ. The MMSEZ was established by the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 2017 (Thompson, 2020). The zone is a mega-industrial complex and manufacturing metallurgical hub, announced as a new engine for economic and development innovation. In 2017, the Hong Kong company of the Shenzhen Zone, Shenzhen Hoi Mor, was appointed as the operator of the SEZ. The company now operates under the name of South African Energy Metallurgical Base (SAEMB) and claims to have invested US$3.8 billion (Thompson et al., 2023). The investors in the SEZ mega-project are predominantly Chinese, as announced by the government, but there is a lack of transparency about the nature of the investments in terms of loans, development assistance projects, and the like.

The MMSEZ Master Operational Plan also emphasizes that safety and labor within the SEZ will be tightly controlled, as will any attempts at public oversight by concerned environmental groups. Environmental organizations have lobbied to emphasize that the MMSEZ does not comply with South Africa's environmental legislation and is not part of the National Integrated Resource Plan (Thompson, 2020). In response to environmental opposition, the approved size of the coal plant has been reduced. However, the approved Environmental impact assessment (EIA) includes the proposed 1320 MW coal-fired capacity along with the metallurgical industry components (MMSEZ, 2021).

Another environmental and livelihood issue is that the SEZ plant is located in the Vhembe Biosphere, which contains a rich diversity of flora and fauna that will be drastically affected by the SEZ (MMSEZ, 2021). Recent fieldwork with communities has revealed that the government has not provided them with sufficient information about the impacts of the SEZs on their livelihoods to make informed decisions. Community focus group meetings in the Makhado area revealed that most communities do not understand what this MMSEZ mega-project will entail, both in terms of job creation and on their livelihoods in the medium to long term.

In interviews, the Musina community indicated that prior to the establishment of the SEZ, they had been approached about employment opportunities at the newly reopened Vele coal mine (Musina Focus Group Interviews, 2023). The mine, originally owned by Rio Tinto, had been sold to MC Mining in 2012. The Musina Town Planner confirmed in a telephone interview that the EIA for the Vele mine had been re-approved after facing environmental litigation (Interview, Mr Mphephu, Musina Town Planner, 2023). Similarly, in a focus group meeting in Mudimele village, the chief of Mudimele confirmed that he had received an email from MC Mining informing him that the Makhado coal mine would be reopened and that employment opportunities would be made available to Mudimele villagers (Mudimele Focus Group Interviews, 2023). Again, the Makhado mine was closed due to legal environmental action taken by commercial farmers and the Mudimele in 2016.

Table 2. The Muzina-Makhado special economic zone (South Africa) and manufacturing plants in the Manaus Industrial Park (Brazil).

China	Manaus Industrial Park (Brazil)	Muzina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (South Africa)
Implementation	In the 1960s, during the civil-military dictatorship. One of the first SEZs in the world, an attempt to industrialize and modernize the Amazon region	In the 2010s, as part of the implementation of Chinese SEZ throughout Africa. Attempt to industrialize and integrate Africa in the manufacturing chains
Profile	A hub for the proliferation of factories from various industrial sectors, which offers tax and non-tax incentives to companies establishing projects in this SEZ	An investment tax haven that offers incentives, including minimal corporate taxes, customs duty and other exemptions, one-stop shops to assist with setting up businesses rapidly, greatly reduced water and electricity tariffs, and often no attention to labor rights, regulations and minimum wage
Investment sectors	Electronics, mechanical, thermoplastic and two-wheeler	Industrial and manufacturing metallurgy
Disadvantages/ conflicts	Labor issues: worse working conditions, lower wages, less benefits and incentives; excessive control and supervision in the factory and lack of spaces for workers' participation and opinions; lack of education courses, housing and health policies and professional/ technical qualification programs	Environmental problems: failure to comply with environmental legislation; drastic impact on the diversity of fauna and flora; limited community participation; lack of information from the government on the SEZ's livelihood and socioeconomic impacts on the communities

Source: Garcia et al. (2023a, 2023b); Thompson et al. (2023).
Authors' elaboration.

Although communities in the area are only aware of the reopening of the coal mines, most were unaware that the MMSEZ EIA was approved in early 2022. A national coordinator of the social movement called 'Mining Affected Communities Unite in Action' (Macua) confirmed that the legally required process of community consultation and Social Labor Pacts (SLPs) appears not to have been followed in the cases of the reopening of the Vele and Makhado mines. This raises serious concerns about the environmental and livelihood issues associated with the Musina-Makhado SEZ (Table 2).

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have engaged with the discussion of 'deglobalization' by examining South-South investments from a critical perspective. To this end, we have examined and compared Chinese investments in South Africa and Brazil, focusing on the case studies of the MIP and the MMSEZ. We have outlined three dimensions through which to analyze BRICS. The top-down dimension shows that BRICS has increasingly become a geopolitical alliance that has formed coalitions to confront traditional Western powers. In particular, China and Russia are at the center of the current trends of deglobalization. The other two dimensions were part of our analysis. We have examined the asymmetries in intra-BRICS relations, analyzing the main characteristics of Chinese investment, loans and trade in Brazil and South Africa, as well as the diplomatic relations that support and facilitate FDI; and from a bottom-up perspective, we have discussed the socio-environmental and labor dynamics generated in Chinese-led SEZ mega-projects.

These cases show that within the capitalist mode of production, which inherently extracts value from labor and wealth from nature, South-South investment fails to provide a positive economic alternative for local workers, communities, and the environment. Consequently, the narrative of mutual benefit propagated in Chinese IDC lacks grounding in local realities and falls short of offering a transformative economic alternative for these stakeholders. We argue that it is imperative for both state and non-state actors to actively advocate for improved terms in their relations with foreign investors. This advocacy is essential to ensure better living conditions for both organized and informal working classes and to integrate them into development projects in a manner that is socioeconomically advantageous and environmentally sustainable. This requires transcending the 'West vs East' or 'North vs South' dichotomy and ensuring that the rhetoric of a 'people-centered approach' that is integral to China-led development strategies remains central and operationalized in practice.

In the case of the MFTZ model, the primary challenge lies in devising public programs that enhance the rights of local citizens and uplift their social conditions. Despite the city's robust economy and substantial revenues generated for both companies and the state government, Manaus stands as one of Brazil's most violent and unequal cities, marked by a glaring absence of public policies. The fundamental query arises: how can an industrial policy be transformed into a public policy that yields greater benefits for workers? Presently, the primary gains attained by the working populace of the Amazon capital stem from the relentless struggle of the working class against the forces of capitalism, rather than from actions taken by the federal government. On one hand, workers find themselves subject to the whims of manufacturing companies, while, on the other hand, they grapple with deficiencies in educational programs, housing and sanitation initiatives, as well as limited access to professional or technical training opportunities.

In the case of the Musina-Makhado SEZ, the provincial government justifies environmental degradation as worthwhile in order to strengthen local economic livelihoods, even though locals are dubious about what jobs will be actually available. However, this approach is extremely shortsighted, as the impacts of climate change and massive water shortages threaten the livelihoods of all civil society actors in Vhembe District. The Chinese strategy of linking SEZs to the broader FOCAC and African Union agendas is remarkably astute and regularly reinforced. As argued in the second section, China's influence in Africa has led to a reformulation of intra-African relations, which are now framed through the lens of South-South Cooperation, a narrative that brings Chinese interests to the continent (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa, 2018). Where this official dialogue leaves the workers of Limpopo Province is currently unclear. However, given the level of education of the majority of the unemployed in the Vhembe district, the likelihood is that the trade-off of jobs at the expense of the environment will be less of a 'win-lose' and more of a 'lose-lose' situation, with neither employment nor environmental sustainability likely. This underlines the precarious nature of this type of South-South Cooperation.

Thus, our analysis highlights that while BRICS and South-South investments have been drivers of globalization, they do not always present a socially and environmentally sustainable alternative. A more equitable and mutually beneficial South-South agenda would need to be driven by Southern objectives rather than solely by the Chinese agenda. While the current narrative of the Global South serves to foster a sense of common identity among developing countries, it needs to be scrutinized. As Darnal (2023) suggests, the Global South is not merely a geographic, economic, or developmental category; it encompasses diverse states that seek to promote decentralization and multipolarity in the global political economy and reduce the dominance of the United States and Northern Europe. According to Mignolo (2011), de-Westernization does not mean abandoning the capitalist economy; rather, it is part of a struggle to wrest control of the colonial matrix of power, which includes knowledge, subjectivity, gender, sexuality, economy, and authority, all of which intersect with racism and patriarchy. Just as peripheral states were shaped to facilitate colonization, the Global South must be reinvented to facilitate the analysis and implementation of economic decolonization. Without this reinvention, the transformative potential and credibility of the South-South agenda may diminish over time. Embracing Chinese-led South-South FDI and Cooperation without critical examination risks perpetuating historical patterns of subordination in the 'developing' South. Such narratives may obscure the ongoing exploitation of human resources and natural wealth, perpetuating past injustices.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article results from research funded by the Carlos Chagas Foundation of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ), Brazil, grant number E-26/201.306/2022; and from the Karibu Foundation, Norway.

ORCID iD

Ana Garcia https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4106-5989

Notes

1. While much has been written about China's economic ties with Africa and Latin America separately, there is a lack of research directly comparing these relationships. One exception is Jenkins (2019), but his focus is broader, not specifically on Brazil and South Africa. A systematic comparison of Chinese investment in SEZs between these two economies is notably absent, despite their growing importance in Africa, as noted by UNCTAD (2019, 2021, 2022) reports. Our research aims to fill this gap by offering a comparative analysis. Building on prior work that examined Chinese investment in Brazil, South Africa, and India (Garcia, 2020), we seek to deepen understanding of China's engagement with these regions and economies.
2. Fieldwork was conducted in South Africa by Thompson and her team between January and February 2023. In Brazil, the research was conducted by Brito in Chinese factories in the Manaus Free Trade Zone, covering visits to the factories between 2013 and 2017, and documentary research and interviews between 2018 and 2023.
3. 'Guanxi' refers to special relationships in Chinese culture characterized by continuous exchanges of favors, loyalty, moral leadership, trust, harmony, hierarchical respect, and obligation. In guanxi relationships, individuals are committed to each other. In research, guanxi involves mutual trust between the researcher and the researched, with ongoing exchange of symbolic or material goods.

References

Amsi B, Bond P, Kamidza R, et al. (2015) BRICS corporate snapshots during African extractivism. In: Bond P and Garcia A (eds) *BRICS, an Anti-Capitalist Critique*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media, 97–116.

Articulação Internacional dos Atingidos pela Vale (AIAAV) (2021) Vale unsustainability report. Available at: https://atingidosvale.com/relatorios/vale-unsustainability-report-2021/ (accessed 14 October 2023).

Baumann R (2022) Globalização, desglobalização e o Brasil. *Revista de Economia Política* 42(3): 592–618.

Bello W (2014) The BRICS: challengers to the global status quo. *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 29 August. Available at: https://fpif.org/brics-challengers-global-status-quo/

Berringer T and Belasques B (2020) As relações Brasil-China nos governos Lula e Dilma: burguesia interna e subordinação conflitiva. *Carta Internacional* 15(3): 151–173.

Bond P (2016) BRICS banking and the debate over sub-imperialism. *Third World Quarterly* 37(4): 611–629.

Brancacio E and Califano C (2023) War, sanctions, deglobalization: which comes first? *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 66(1): e004.

Brasil (2014a) *Declaração Conjunta entre Brasil e China por ocasião da visita de Estado de Xi Jinping*. Brasília, Brazil: Ministério das Relações Exteriores.

Brasil (2014b) *República Popular da China*. Brasília, Brazil: Ministério das Relações Exteriores.

Brasil (2017) *Atos assinados por ocasião da visita do presidente Michel Temer à China – Pequim*. Brasília, Brazil: Ministério das Relações Exteriores.

Brasil (2019a) *Brasil assina acordos sanitários para exportação de carne processada e farelo de algodão*. Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento. Available at: https://www.gov.br/agricultura/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/brasil-assina-acordos-sanitarios-para-exportacao-de-carne-termoprocessada-e-farelo-de-algodao-para-a-china (accessed 2 May 2024).

Brasil (2019b) *Visita de Estado do Presidente da República, Jair Bolsonaro, a Pequim (China)*. Brasília, Brazil: Ministério das Relações Exteriores.

Brasil (2023) *Declaração de Joanesburgo II – Sandton, Gauteng, África do Sul – 23 de agosto*. Available at: https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/declaracao-de-joanesburgo-ii-sandton-gauteng-africa-do-sul-23-de-agosto-de-2023 (accessed 2 May 2024).

Brasil (n.d.) *ComexVis. Comex Stat*. Ministério do Desenvolvimento, Indústria, Comércio e Serviços. Available at: http://comexstat.mdic.gov.br/pt/comex-vis (accessed 14 October 2023).

Brito C (2017) *Made in China / Produzido no Polo Industrial da Zona Franca de Manaus: o trabalho nas fábricas chinesas*. Doctoral Thesis in Sociology, Universidade Federal de São Carlos, São Carlos, Brazil.

Brito C (2023) *China and Globalization in the Amazon: Workers, Expatriates, and the Chinese Production Model*. New York: Routledge.

Carciotto S and Chikohomero R (2022) Chinese labor practices in six southern African countries (Monograph 207). Institute for Security Studies. Available at: https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/Mono-207.pdf

Cariello T (2021) *Investimentos chineses no Brasil: histórico, tendências e desafios globais (2007-2020)*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Conselho Empresarial Brasil-China.

Cariello T (2022) *Investimentos chineses no Brasil: Tecnologia e Transição Energética*. Rio de Janeiro: Conselho Empresarial Brasil-China.

Carmody P (2015) The new scramble for Africa. *Jacobin Magazin*. Available at: https://jacobin.com/2015/12/china-south-africa-imperialism-zambia-brics-globalization (accessed 2 May 2024).

Darnal A (2023) The 'global south' is a valid concept. Deal with it. *World Politics Review*, September 28. Available at: https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/global-south-countries-term-brics/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

Desai R (2013) The BRICS are building a challenge to Western economic supremacy. *The Guardian*, 2 April. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/02/brics-challenge-western-supremacy

Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa (2018) '2018 FOCAC Beijing summit: what to expect. Available at: http://za.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zngx_1/202401/t20240104_11218319.htm (accessed March 2024).

FOCAC (2018) Forum on China-Africa cooperation Beijing action plan (2019-2021). Available at: http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201809/t20180912_7933578.htm (accessed 30 October 2023).

Garcia A (2020) *Investimentos da China no Brasil, África do Sul e Índia: arranjos institucionais, atores e impactos*. Revista Tempo do Mundo. Available at: https://www.ipea.gov.br/revistas/index.php/rtm/article/view/240

Garcia A and Ibanez P (2023) Brics expandido, e agora? Novos desafios para a política externa brasileira. *Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil*, 28 Agosto. Available at: https://diplomatique.org.br/brics-expandido-e-agora-novos-desafios-para-a-politica-externa-brasileira/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

Garcia A, Rodriguez M, Brito C, et al. (2023a) Chinese investments in Brazil: investment data, public policies for investment facilitation and the case of the Manaus Industrial Pole. *BPC Policy Brief* 13(6). Available at: https://bricspolicycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/BRICS_ChinaBrasil-7.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

Garcia A, Thompson L, Rodriguez M, et al. (2023b) The political economy of South-South relations: a comparative analysis of China's investments in Brazil and South Africa. *BPC Policy Brief* 13(8). Available at: https://bricspolicycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/BRICS_Comparative-3-1.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

García-Herrero A and Tan J (2020) Deglobalization in the context of United States-China decoupling. *Policy Contribution* 21: 1–16.

Gomes G and Esteves P (2018) The BRICS effect: impacts of South-South cooperation in the social field of international development cooperation. In: Gu J and Kitano N (eds) *Emerging Economies and the Changing Dynamics of Development Cooperation*. Institute for Development Studies, 129–144.

Gu J and Kitano N (2018) Introduction: beyond aid – the future of development cooperation. In: Gu J and Kitano N (eds) *Emerging Economies and the Changing Dynamics of Development Cooperation*. Institute for Development Studies, 89–108.

Harvey D (2007) In what ways is 'the new imperialism' really new? *Historical Materialism* 15(3): 57–70.

Harvey D (2018) Realities on the ground: David Harvey replies to John Smith. *Review of African Political Economy* 5. Available at: https://roape.net/2018/02/05/realities-ground-david-harvey-replies-john-smith/ (accessed 2 May 2024).

Jaguaribe A (2018) Characteristics and directions of China's global investment drive. In: Jaguaribe A (ed.) *Directions of Chinese Global Investments*. Brasília: FUNAG, Implications for Brazil, 17–50.

Jenkins R (2019) *How China Is Reshaping the Global Economy. Development Impacts in Africa and Latin America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

John Hopkins University (n.d.) China-Africa research initiative. Available at: http://www.sais-cari.org/chinese-investment-in-africa (accessed 30 October 2023).

Kiely R (2015) *The Brics, U.S. 'Decline' and Global Transformations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Li Y (2023) Trends, reasons and prospects of de-dollarization. South Centre. Available at: https://www.southcentre.int/trends-reasons-and-prospects-of-de-dollarization-august-2023/

Lopes Afonso D, Quinet S and Salgueiro F (2021) Latin America and China: mutual benefit or dependency? *CEPAL Review* 2021(135): 147–162.

Marshall J (2015) Behind the image of South-South solidarity in Brazil's Vale. In: Bond P and Garcia A (eds) *BRICS, an Anti-Capitalist Critique*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media, 162–185.

Martínez O (2014) La geopolítica petrolera China en Ecuador y el área andina. *Tensões Mundiais* 10(18): 255–273.

Menezes R and Bragatti M (2020) Dragon in the backyard: China's investment and trade in Latin America in the context of crisis. *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy* 40(3): 446–461.

Mignolo W (2011) The global south and the world dis/order. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 67(2): 165–188.

MMSEZ (2021) Media statement. MMSEZ final EIA application report submitted to the competent authority. Polokwane 2 February. Available at: https://mmsez.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/EIA-Media-Statement.pdf (accessed 30 October 2023).

Naidu S (2015) South Africa and FOCAC: enabling a partnership for global economic governance beyond the BRICS? *SAIIA Policy Insights* 26: 1–12.

New Development Bank (NDB) (2021a) Annual report 2021. Expand our reach and impact. Available at: https://www.ndb.int/annual-report-2021/pdf/NDB_AR_2021_complete.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

New Development Bank (NDB) (2021b) General strategy for 2022-2026. Scaling up development finance for a sustainable future. Available at: https://www.ndb.int/about-ndb/general-strategy/#:~:text=NDB's%20General%20Strategy%20for%202022,market%20economies%20and%20developing%20countries

OEC (n.d.) China-South Africa. Available at: https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/zaf (accessed 15 October 2023).

Paul TV (2023) The specter of deglobalization. *Current History* 122(840): 3–8.

Ramos L, Garcia A, Pautasso D, et al. (2018) A decade of emergence: the BRICS institutional densification process. *Journal of China and International Relations* 6(1): 5–26.

Roach S (2022) Deglobalization's China wild card. *The Project Syndicate*, July 25. Available at: https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-hit-hard-by-slowing-world-trade-by-stephen-s-roach-2022-07

Rodríguez F and Bazán Seminario C (2023) Authoritarian practices between 'para-coloniality' and 'cheap security': when Chinese state capital meets neoliberal copper mining (and protests) in Las Bambas, Peru. *Globalizations*. Epub ahead of print 19 April. DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2023.2179813.

Sanches M (2023) Como Brasil e China pretendem fechar negócios sem usar dólar americano. *BBC News Brasil*, 29 March. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/c0wqqne0zk2o

Saraiva M and Silva A (2019) Ideologia e pragmatismo na política externa de Jair Bolsonaro. *Relações Internacionais* 64: 117–137.

Sen G, Leach L and Gu J (2019) Introduction: the belt and road initiative and the sustainable development goals: opportunities and challenges. In: Sen G, Leach L and Gu J (eds) *The Belt and Road Initiative and SDGs: Towards Equitable Sustainable Development*. Institute for Development Studies. Available at: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14898/IDSB50.4_10.190881968-2019.134.pdf?sequence=1016&isAllowed=y (accessed 2 May 2024).

Seráfico M (2011) *Globalização e empresariado: estudo sobre a Zona Franca de Manaus*. São Paulo, Brazil: Annablume.

Silva M (2013) *Metamorfoses da Amazônia*. 2ª ed. Manaus, Brazil: Editora Valer.

Slipak A and Ghiotto L (2019) América Latina en la Nueva Ruta de la Seda: El Rol de las Inversiones Chinas en la Región en un Contexto de Disputa (Inter)Hegemónica. *Cuadernos Del CEL* 4(7): 25–55.

Soujun C and Miranda O (2016) Enquadrando a cooperação energética sino-brasileira: perspectivas chinesas. *Austral: Revista Brasileira de Estratégia e Relações Internacionais* 5(10): 9–33.

South African Government (n.d.). Special Economic Zone Act 16 of 2014. Available at: https://www.gov.za/documents/special-economic-zones-act (accessed 30 October 2023).

Svampa M and Slipak A (2015) China en América Latina: Del Consenso de los Commodities al Consenso de Beijing. *Revista Ensambles* 2(3): 34–63.

The Dialogue (n.d.) China-Latin America finance database. Available at: https://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/ (accessed 30 October 2023).

The State Council (2015) *Full Text: Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative*. Available at: https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm (accessed 2 May 2024).

Thompson L (2019) Alternative South–South development collaboration? The role of China in the Coega special economic zone in South Africa. *Public Administration and Development* 39(4–5): 193–202.

Thompson L (2020) Locating BRICS development strategies in global development policy narratives. In: Puppim de Oliveira JA and Jing Y (eds) *International Development Assistance and the BRICS: Governing China in the 21st Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 35–58.

Thompson L and Tsolekile de Wet P (2018) BRICS civil society initiatives: towards the inclusion of affected communities and collective development? *Third World Thematics* 3(6): 745–764.

Thompson L, Tsolekile de Wet P, Shirinda H, et al. (2023) Chinese investment loans and foreign direct investment in South Africa 2012-2022. *BPC Policy Brief* 13(7). Available at: https://bricspolicycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/BRICS_ChinaAfricaSul.pdf (accessed 2 May 2024).

Tooze A (2023) Three ways to read the 'deglobalization' debate. *Financial Times*, January, 30. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/b3f41263-88d9-4012-aafc-145f0327678f

Trade Map (n.d.) Trade statistics for international business development. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx (accessed 30 October 2023).

UNCTAD (2019) *World Investment Report: Special Economic Zones*. Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

UNCTAD (2020) *World Investment Report: International Production Beyond the Pandemic*. Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

UNCTAD (2021) *World Investment Report: Investing in Sustainable Recovery*. Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

UNCTAD (2022) *World Investment Report: International Tax Reforms and Sustainable Investment*. Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

UNCTAD (2023) *World Investment Report: Investing in Sustainable Energy for All*. Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Vadell J (2018) El Foro China-CELAC y el nuevo regionalismo para un mundo multipolar: desafíos para la Cooperación Sur-Sur. *Carta Internacional* 13(1): 6–37.

Valle I (2007) *Globalização e reestruturação produtiva: um estudo sobre a produção offshore em Manaus*. Manaus, Brazil: Editora da Universidade Federal do Amazonas.

Van der Pijl K (2017) BRICS – an involuntary contender bloc under attack. *Estudos Internacionais* 5(1): 25–46.

Weinland D (2022) The tech war between America and China is just getting started. *The Economist*, November 18. Available at: https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2022/11/18/the-tech-war-between-america-and-china-is-just-getting-started

Wilkinson J, Escher F and Garcia A (2022) The Brazil-China nexus in agrofood what is at stake in the future of the animal protein sector? *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 53: 251–277.