7. Joining the BRICs: The case of South Africa

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This chapter examines and evaluates the accession of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) to the BRIC group of nations in April 2011. Given the fact that South Africa was, in several respects, an unlikely candidate for membership, and it remains the junior member in terms of most relevant indicators, the usage the 'BRICs' (as opposed to the BRICS) has been adopted here to identify the group post-RSA accession. Adoption of the lower case has a symbolism beyond the convenience of providing an acronymic plural for the BRIC – it suggests that in many respects South Africa is a limited player in a grouping of emerging economies which could be a potential force in the global political economy (World Bank, 2011a).[1]

The accession of South Africa will be examined in the context of current themes in international affairs and regional relations, and with reference to some prominent issues in the global political economy. It considers factors that could have motivated the inclusion of a country which might in many respects have been overlooked as a potential BRICs member, and reflects on the roles which the new member might play in the BRICs institutional environment. It concludes with reflections on themes of inclusion and exclusion in contemporary state-to-state relations and group formations, with particular relevance to other potential inclusions in the BRICs.

The BRICs has been referred to, in a metaphor derived from the world sport of soccer, as the 'premier league' of emerging markets (Ernst & Young, 2011). While acronymic labels might seem ephemeral in the global political economy, they can sometimes matter in symbolic and iconic ways. There is an increasing use of acronyms for purposes of grouping political economies in the international arena with individual state players manoeuvring among multiple non-exclusive and overlapping 'clubs', in the search for economic and geopolitical advantages. Acronyms such as the BRICS commence life as useful heuristics for categorizing such groups and shaping the discourse around them, but they can also become reified beyond their appropriate utility and use by dates (Cooper, 2010, pp. 63–5; Sharma, 2012, p. 2).

THE BRICS AS A TRANSGOVERNMENTAL NETWORK

In this chapter the BRICs is depicted as a 'transgovernmental network', denoting an arrangement in an intermediate position between formal international institutions and mere occasional interactions. It adopts Slaughter's conceptualization of transgovernmental networks as information institutions regulating different actors from different state institutions in aspects of governance beyond the domestic level. As Slaughter and Hale describe it, these networks,

> . . . exhibit patterns of regular and purposive relations among like government units working across the borders that divide countries from one another and that demarcate the 'domestic' from the 'international' sphere, [featuring] loosely structured, peer-to-peer ties developed through frequent interaction rather than formal negotiation (Slaughter & Hale, 2010, p. 48).

The compatibility of the BRICs with this conceptualization of a transgovernmental network is reflected in the fact that it has no conventional status in international law, it deals predominantly with issues of high-level policy without specific regulatory authority, it lacks a significant infrastructure, and its meetings are interactive as opposed to negotiational in form. At the same time it involves regular, if not frequent, peer-to-peer and intergovernmental meetings, as opposed to occasional diplomatic interactions which occur in less structured settings.

Structurally the BRICs constitutes a self-selected but non-exclusive forum through which a collective of countries can act in coordination, where they would otherwise lobby and interact exclusively as a single entity, or through larger groupings such as the G20. Membership of the grouping does not preclude other associations, multiple memberships being axiomatic in transgovernmental networks.[2] It has a quixotic existence vis-à-vis the G20 group of nations, of which all the BRICs countries are also members, with the BRICs subservient to the G20 in terms of the informal 'hierarchy' of transgovernmental networks. While the pre-existing G20 assumed greater prominence in response to problems arising out of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the BRICs was less specific in its motivating origins, arising more casually and organically, with a diffuse mandate lacking the troubleshooting specificity of the post-GFC G20. Despite their nominal autonomy from each other, there are inevitable inter-connections between the two networks, some commentators contending that the BRICs should play agenda-setting and lobbying roles within the G20 (Boulle, 2011a).

In terms of the character of modern groupings, the BRICs is plurilateral and regional in nature, bridging the gap between multilateralism and bilateralism. While its members lack the geographical contiguity of most regional arrangements, and the community of interests associated with it, the BRICs can in some respects be portrayed as a regional grouping of states. In a contemporary world that is partly virtual in nature, there is no contradiction in entertaining the concept of a 'virtual region'. As pointed out, the BRICs is in some senses also 'a region of regions' in that each member dominates its particular geographical sector of the world. The regionalism[3] of the BRICs is incongruent with aspirational paradigms of inclusive international multilateralism, but as a self-selecting 'club of nations', it is compatible with the contemporary patterns of intergovernmental networks of many varieties.

While one may expect commonalities of interests among the BRICs members, there are in fact many disjunctions in their key attributes. These are reflected in Table 7.1.

These indicators reveal disproportionalities in many dimensions. For example the GDP of China gives it substantial potential leverage within the grouping, and South Africa presents as a relative minnow in the economic and demographic leagues. Each member has its own bag of strengths – such as Russia in the energy field, China in manufactured exports, Brazil in aerospace industries and India in the services sector. South Africa is not pre-eminent in any field but it has a strong services sector, referred to further on, and surprising export resilience in the automotive industry. The differences provide the occasion for both complementarity and competition among individual members. However, there are also other important differences among the members at the constitutional and institutional levels where there are vastly different levels of statism, of participatory government, of rule of law enforcement and of private sector involvement in the economy.

The functionality of the BRICs is linked to its structural features and the attributes of its members. Given the institutional looseness of the group it has no direct political functions, nor even common political positions – particularly in international relations; members' heterogeneity is preserved in respect of foreign policy and on matters such as nuclear weapons, disarmament and reform of the UN Security Council.[4] As a collective its main focus is economic in nature, with particular reference to reform of the international financial architecture, changed governance arrangements in the IMF and World Bank (or alternatives to the latter), and a shift towards trade agreements and credit facilities being denominated in member states' own currencies as opposed to US dollars. Even in economic matters it has none of the formal authority associated with some

Table 7.1 Key indicators for the BRICS members

Indicator	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Population (million)	194	142	1155	1331	49
Gross domestic product (GDP) in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms	2017	2690	3778	9091	507
GDP per capita, PPP (current international $)	10412	18963	3270	6828	10278
Land area (million km2)	8.5	16.4	3	9.3	1.2
Urban population (% of total)	86	73	30	44	61
Under-five mortality rate (per 1000)	21	12	66	19	62
Gross savings rate (% of GDP)	14.6	22.7	33.6	53.6	15.4
Ores and metal ores exports (% of GDP)	1.7	5.7	6.2	1.2	29.3
Ores and metal ores imports (% of GDP)	2.9	1.6	5.6	13.5	1.3
Portfolio inflows, net ($ billion)	37.1	3.4	21.1	28.2	9.4
Agriculture (% of GDP)	6.1	4.7	17.1	10.3	3
Manufacturing (% of GDP)	14.8	15	15.9	33.9	15.1
Carbon dioxide emissions (kg per PPP $ of GDP)	0.2	0.6	0.5	0.9	0.9
Energy use (kg of oil equivalent per capita)	1239	4730	529	1484	2784
GDP per unit of energy use (PPP $ per kg of oil equivalent)	7.9	3.6	5.4	3.7	3.6

Source: World Bank (2009).

international institutions and only the soft power of an intergovernmental network.

The loose structure of the BRICs and the indeterminacy of its functionality make it difficult to identify how it might respond to some of the key questions relating to its meta-objectives. For example there is debate over whether the BRICs is seeking greater inclusion within the existing institutions and processes of global governance, or pushing to change or replace the institutions. While the G20 operates predominantly within a Bretton Woods framework and policy agenda, the BRICs, despite overlapping membership with the Bretton Woods institutions, constitutes a potential rival to Washington Consensus thinking and to institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. Whereas developing countries have historically established interdependent relations with the EU and the US (and other G7 countries), the BRICs grouping provides a potentially alternative point of interconnectedness for such economies. There is, conspicuously, no overlap of membership between the G7 and the BRICs, reinforcing the axis of prospective rivalry.

Whatever the structural and functional indeterminacies of the BRICs, it allows a small emerging power in the form of South Africa to interact in supranational governance at a level of prominence not formally offered by many other international organizations (Slaughter & Hale, 2010, p. 48). Its non-exclusive nature also allows the RSA to retain membership of other groupings with similar organizational arrangements and some overlap of membership and objectives.[5]

SOUTH AFRICA'S ACCESSION TO THE BRIC

In terms of economic ranking or population size, countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico or South Korea might have been more likely additions to the original BRIC foursome – each significantly outranks South Africa on both dimensions, a factor referred to again in the final section. Moreover, as previously alluded to, South Africa as a 'candidate' member was relatively insignificant vis-à-vis the existing members, in relation to many economic indicators. This can be illustrated by reference to one such dimension, namely inward and outward foreign direct investment (FDI) flows, as indicated in Tables 7.2 and 7.3.

These figures reveal the limited status of the RSA in the field of cross-border investment. Given the mode of accession it is not possible to identify precise motivating factors leading to its acceptance in the BRICs, and the self-selecting nature of membership entailed that there was no official record of the decision to admit the new country.[6] The RSA was first invited to attend a summit by then host country China in what some commentators see as a reward for the country's political support for China (Khan, 2011). Nonetheless South Africa had in other respects, relevant and even unique attributes, which could have motivated its accession, not only to the BRICs but also to bodies such as the G20.[7] These include the following factors.

The Regional Power Argument

South Africa is a regional power in its own right, as is the case with each of the other BRICs countries, and it has contributed to the reconfiguration of the global order through its part in the rise of regional powers (Nolte, 2010; Carmody, 2012). A regional power has economic, political

Table 7.2 Inward FDI flows, 2000–11

Year	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
2000	32 779	2714	3588	40 715	887
2001	22 457	2748	5478	46 878	6784
2002	16 590	3461	5630	52 743	1569
2003	10 144	7958	4321	53 505	734
2004	18 146	15 444	5778	60 630	798
2005	15 066	12 886	7622	72406	6647
2006	18 822	29 701	20 328	72 715	−527
2007	34 585	55 073	25 506	83 521	5695
2008	45 058	75 002	43 406	108 312	9006
2009	25 949	36 500	35 596	95 000	5365
2010	48 506	43 288	24 159	114 734	1228
2011	66 660	52 878	31 554	123 985	5807

Notes: US dollars at current prices and current exchange rates.

Source: UNCTAD (2012b).

Table 7.3 Outward FDI flows, 2000–2011 (US$ million)

Year	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
2000	2282	3177	514	916	271
2001	−2258	2533	1397	6885	−3178
2002	2482	3533	1678	2518	−398
2003	249	9727	1876	2855	565
2004	9807	13 782	2175	5498	1350
2005	2517	12 767	2985	12261	930
2006	28 202	23 151	14 285	21 160	6063
2007	7067	45 916	19 594	22 469	2966
2008	20 457	55 594	19 257	52 150	−3134
2009	−10 084	43 665	15 927	56 530	1151
2010	11 588	52 523	13 151	68 811	−76
2011	−1029	67 283	14 752	65 117	−635

Notes: US dollars at current prices and current exchange rates.

Source: UNCTAD (2012b).

and strategic significance over and above its own immediate attributes, acting as a centre of gravity in respect of contiguous and other accessible countries. In this context the region, in respect of which South Africa is a centripetal force, extends through much of Sub-Saharan Africa, a vast expanse with extensive natural resources, population growth, investment attraction and economic potential.[8] Needless to say, however, not all African countries view South Africa as the regional hegemon, and some do so with considerable reluctance (Shaw, Cooper & Chin, 2009), but this does not detract from the de facto reality.

In its combination of existing regional powers into a super-regional entity, the BRICs suggests a new conceptualization of regionalism as involving associations extending beyond geographical boundaries – what might be termed 'intentional regionalism'. Here there is strategic significance in the 'regional' BRICs grouping having regional members in Europe, Asia, South America (the sub-continent) and now Africa. This phenomenon is consistent with the shift to regional trade agreements and the continuing stalemate in multilateralism as epitomized by the WTO. While regionalism runs counter to idealized notions of multilateralism, it has together with bilateralism, become prominent in the global political economy. Deadlocks in the multilateral trade regime and the challenges of the GFC have also contributed to the regionalist trend.

Apart from being a regional power, South Africa is also the largest and most sophisticated economy in the African continent. It not only dominates the economy of the region and the continent, but also has significant diplomatic and political leverage, allowing it to expand its own economy into many parts of Africa through FDI, trade and finance. While South Africa's regional economic integration is currently focused primarily on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA),[9] this is not incompatible with its further integration into the BRICs' intentional regionalism (Castel, Mejia & Kolster, 2011).[10]

The African Gateway Hypothesis

South Africa is often depicted as a 'gateway' to the rest of Africa.[11] While it is in overall terms an emerging economy, the RSA has a highly developed 'sub-economy' within the economic whole and is seen as one of the most attractive African countries from which to conduct business into other jurisdictions (Ernst & Young, 2011). South Africa's extensive economic interests in countries to its north contribute to the 'gateway' into Africa theme.[12] At least three, and potentially four, BRICs members have interests in Africa's resources and other potential benefits, and the gateway hypothesis is to the effect that they could utilize the competencies the RSA has developed over the past century (Kahn, 2011, p. 37). It might be contended, under the hypothesis, that Brazil would be attracted to using the RSA as a gateway into Lusophone Africa.[13]

Apart from its pervasive economic presence in Africa, South Africa has comparative advantages in many aspects of the services sector, which at 67 per cent dominates the domestic economy, with particular strengths in banking, finance and insurance, telecommunications, education and construction. Comparative advantage can also be identified in South Africa's existing memberships of, and economic influence within, the SADC, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The comparative advantage attraction is exemplified by a pre-BRICs investment into a major South African bank with extensive existing interests in other African countries,[14] and although not relating to a BRICs member, by the transnational Walmart Corporation's takeover of a major South African retailer with subsidiaries in more than ten African economies (*Walmart Stores v Massmart Holdings Ltd*, 2011). Needless to say this does not suggest any intra-BRICs exclusivity − China's largest ever investment bid occurred in another resource-rich country, namely, Canada (Kelly, 2012).

In reality the idea of South Africa being a gateway to Africa is an imprecise and diffuse notion, and is not incompatible with investors using other gateways or investing directly in relevant African economies.[15] This is evidenced by the ever increasing diplomatic outreach initiatives in Africa.[16] Moreover the very success of South African countries in their expansion into Africa, for example in brewing and telecommunications, suggests that some corporate interests in the RSA would vigorously oppose any facilitation of new competition. Nonetheless the gateway theme is prevalent in business and diplomatic circles, as well as in the literature.

South Africa as Representative Agent

Allied to the 'gateway' theme is the proclaimed 'representative' nature of South Africa in respect of its geopolitical neighbours. This is reflected in South Africa's self-defined 'African voice' mission, particularly evident in relation to the G20 group of countries where the RSA has conspicuously claimed to speak on behalf of African interests. It is also reinforced by the expectations, and sometimes explicit endorsements, of other countries and institutions of South Africa playing this role. For example in relation to the G20, South Africa engages in consultative discussions with other African countries before summit meetings, and undertakes to convey African views to the summit. Conversely other African countries have indicated that they regard South Africa as their voice in this grouping which has only one African member.

Whatever South Africa's self-depiction of its representative role, or the perceptions of other African countries, the BRICs, like the G20, has not developed on a constituency basis. This is in keeping with other transgovernmental networks where leaders and other elites do not operate with direct mandates from their own political constituents, let alone from other countries. Importantly the BRICs overlooks the fact that Africa comprises over 50 countries with deep variations in culture, history, politics and economic policy. Different African countries and regions are responding to the forces of globalization and neo-liberalism in different and contrasting ways, and there can be no concerted representation of these interests. Nonetheless the African voice syndrome persists.

South Africa and the African Renaissance

The regional, gateway and representative factors which may have influenced South Africa's accession to the BRICs are located within the umbrella context of an 'African renaissance' in the twenty-first century. A decade ago the *Economist* magazine referred to Africa as the 'hopeless' continent ('The hopeless continent', 2000), whereas a 2012 KPMG survey portrayed the continent as a major source of economic growth, investment and opportunity for 'exploitation' (KPMG, 2012). This is substantiated in other reports on the continent, indicating it to be one of the fastest growing regions of the world with projected economic growth of 4.8 per cent in 2013 (OECD, 2012).[17] The reports also indicate surprising resilience in the continent with respect to financial and other global crises, subject to the normal vicissitudes of a global economy; this is partly a function of the appetite of Asian and Latin American countries, including those represented in the BRICs, for natural resources. In this sense the BRIC countries might have seen South Africa's inclusion as facilitating their involvement in the latest 'scramble for Africa'.

The African Renaissance project was in fact conceived by the then South African President Mbeki, and was followed institutionally by the creation of the African Union (AU) (Kahn, 2011, p. 40). While there is some analytical content underlying the renaissance theme there are also limits to the concept. It has become a popular theme for journalists and editors who emphasize the continent's high economic growth, the world's interest in its abundant commodities, relatively high levels of foreign direct investment and a population fast reaching 1 billion in number (Holman, 2011). These factors attract captains of industry to seminars and summits but tend to overlook current problems of authoritarian government, managerial shortcomings and undeveloped infrastructure. Moreover there is a surprising lack of regional economic integration in the continent, and human development remains low in comparison with other global regions. As in other economic regions of the world there are also immense discrepancies in the distribution of economic strengths among and within African states.

Among the founding BRIC countries it was China, South Africa's largest trading partner, which was the strongest supporter of the Republic's accession (Noury, 2011). On the investment front China had previously made one of its largest ever investments in a South African bank, and on the trade front China is the main purchaser of South African commodities and the main exporter of manufactured goods to the Republic.[18] While Chinese support for South African membership was a necessary condition for inclusion, it was not a sufficient condition and as with other optional groupings, acquiescence from all members would have been necessary. However, India was already an established investor in the country, and the African economic renaissance had awoken interest in all members as reflected in the fact that prior to South Africa's accession each had conducted a 'cooperation forum' with African states.

South Africa's Membership Benefits

The motivations for South Africa's accession to the BRICs have been depicted in terms of the individual and collective interests of the original four members. There were also significant economic, political and strategic motivations for South Africa to join the grouping.

In pure economic terms there are potential short-term benefits for the smallest and latest member of the BRICs, but it is hard to ascribe causatively specific economic benefits in regard to trade, investment or finance to BRICs membership. As the South African-Brazil trade dispute referred to further on suggests, the BRICs countries stand in a dialectical relationship with one another in relation to economic issues. At present they are in many respects economic competitors, contesting not only within their intra-group economic relations, which is the case with all membership organizations, but also with one another for trade and investment opportunities with other countries, including those in Africa (Castel, Mejia & Kolster, 2011). In this context it is likely that the benefits to South Africa will accrue more in terms of political leverage at the diplomatic level than material advantage at the economic level. As discussed earlier, labels do matter, hence membership of the club has symbolic significance and symbols are relevant in the world of international relations. Nonetheless South Africa's services industry, which contributes over 60 per cent of GDP, is dependent for growth on market access and global value chains, accentuated by current economic constraints in the country (CIA, 2013); the RSA has a particular need for outlets for its resources and commodities and for its rare manufacturing successes in the automotive exports.[19]

Table 7.4 Global competitiveness of the BRICS members

Category	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Overall country ranking /142	53	66	56	26	50
12 Pillars of Global Competitiveness					
Basic requirements	*83*	*63*	*91*	*30*	*85*
Institutions	77	128	69	48	46
Infrastructure	64	48	89	44	62
Macroeconomic environment	115	44	105	10	55
Health and primary education	87	68	101	32	131
Efficiency enhancers	*41*	*55*	*37*	*26*	*38*
Higher education and training	57	52	87	58	73
Goods market efficiency	113	128	70	45	32
Labour market efficiency	83	65	81	36	95
Financial market development	43	127	21	48	4
Technological readiness	54	68	93	77	76
Market size	10	8	3	2	25
Innovation & sophistication factors	*35*	*97*	*40*	*31*	*39*
Business sophistication	31	114	43	37	38
Innovation	44	71	38	29	41

Source: *The global competitiveness report*, World Economic Forum, Switzerland 2011 (p. 39).

The fact that only two BRIC countries were in the country's top ten trading partners in 2011, [20] suggests that trade diversification could be an intermediate-term benefit of South Africa's accession.

With respect to global competitiveness, South Africa is the most competitive economy in Sub-Saharan Africa. More significantly its competitiveness ranks second among the BRICs countries. As Table 7.4 indicates, South Africa scores well on the quality of its institutions and the efficiency of its goods market (World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 39).[21] In addition, the country's financial market development measurements are extremely high, denoting confidence in the country's financial markets. South Africa's competitive measures in business sophistication and innovation are also of note (World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 39).

In terms of tangible economic benefits for South Africa, much depends on the grouping's future activities. For example if the BRICs does provide infrastructure and incentives for intra-group trade and investment, South Africa might well be a beneficiary. As regards foreign investment South Africa could find new access to the large pool of capital provided by the other four members. This opportunity would come at a sensitive time in terms of South Africa's FDI policy as there are currently proposals for the development of a new foreign investment framework comprising an Investment Act, a new Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), an Investment Agency and possibly a dedicated tribunal for investment disputes (Boulle, 2012). However, regardless of the BRICs connection, South Africa faces a dilemma in regard to the way it balances inconsistent interests in its evolving investment policy. Besides maintaining constitutional values and regulatory policy space, any changes need to ensure continued attractiveness to overseas capital, to comply with international trade and investment obligations, and to avoid unfair treatment of investors from treaty parties (Boulle, 2012).

As regards trade, China is South Africa's main trading partner, but the other BRICs economies do not feature in its next five most important import or export partners, suggesting that any impetus for trade among BRICs members would be an improvement over existing patterns. Here a practical example concerns mineral beneficiation within the RSA to add value prior to export. This would prospectively break the pattern exporting raw materials and importing manufactures. However, despite some apparent Chinese support for such a programme, there is no institutional basis for its implementation.

The BRICs' Declarations and Reports

Before commenting on South Africa's potential role within the BRICs it is appropriate to refer to the organization's self-perceived roles and functions, as reflected in its declarations and reports.

Collectively the BRICs could operate as a lobby group and be influential in the global arena, but this is yet to manifest. It might for instance have acted concertedly during the selection of a new IMF chief in 2011, but it missed the opportunity. When the head of the IMF resigned, the prospect arose of breaking the convention that the position be held by a European, to balance traditional US leadership of the World Bank.[22] South Africa in fact had a highly regarded candidate who was a long-serving Treasurer and leader of reform initiatives in the Fund itself.[23] Not only was there no collaboration in this regard but Brazil allegedly engaged in quiet negotiations with the favoured G8 candidate for the position (Lukyanov, 2011, p. 113). In the end the old convention was preserved and the BRICs did not assert its influence.

Another possible function for the BRICs as a whole is to legitimize international institutions which might otherwise be seen to lack legitimacy from the perspective of emerging states. Thus the grouping has been informally recognized by the G20 in terms of its ability to feed agenda items into the larger group,[24] and it does formulate its collective positions in advance of G20 meetings. In this way it can serve as a counterbalance to the exclusive G7 which has always had a strong influence over G20 agendas and outcomes. The recognition and participation of the BRICs as an emerging power entity affords greater legitimacy to the workings of the G20.

South African Functions in the BRICs

South Africa's role in the BRICs will clearly be circumscribed by the grouping's own limitations, as a loose alliance of states with minimal infrastructure, and by the fact that the grouping will only be motivated to act where it is in the common interests of member states to do so. For the rest, a 'proportionality' principle can be expected to operate in respect of South Africa, as it would in relation to its involvement in the G20 group of nations (Boulle, 2011a, p. 135) − it will only have an influence more or less commensurate with its economic and strategic powers. For a relatively small member of an intergovernmental network it would be inappropriate to expect more than modest roles within the group. These include the following.

Contributing to the agenda

Danny Bradlow has contended that one of the roles for developing countries in new intergovernmental frameworks is to attempt to influence their work agenda and to 'focus on long term goals which are infused with short term objectives' (Bradlow, 2010). Agency is recognized as a significant factor in the development of agendas for meetings and summits (Boulle, 2011a, p. 139). Agendas include and exclude, they prioritize some items and marginalize others, and they frame agenda issues by using language which reflects the interests of agenda-setting agents. Work agendas provide the normative framework for meetings and, as referred to further on, they also control the discourse for political debates.

There are numerous agenda items falling within the remit of the BRICs, which could serve South African needs and the wider interests of the developing world. They include sustainable economic development, reform of international financial institutions, introduction of a financial transactions tax, reciprocal investment and credit arrangements, the rebalancing of international economic principles to accommodate domestic policy space, and explicit systems for currency management.[25] The financial transactions tax (FTT), for example, has been on the agendas of various countries and international institutions for some years, but also faces immense political opposition.[26] In this area, as well as in relation to currency balancing where the country's exports suffer from a strong currency, South Africa has direct interests in global intervention, possibly brokered through the BRICs. Another agenda item at the meta-level of global policy would be the promotion of multilateralism in key areas of trade, investment and finance, despite the BRICs providing in part a contradiction of this principle.

As to how smaller countries could influence agenda-setting, this would be facilitated by the leadership level of BRICs summits and the small size of the grouping vis-à-vis bodies such as the G20, though in reality officials and technocrats on all sides are the real drivers of agenda items. There is some precedent for agenda influence in the G20 where the topic of financial inclusion, not a high priority for developed nations, became part of the agenda through pressure from emerging and developing countries. Over 30 per cent of the world's population is excluded, wholly or in part, from financial services and products. The matter was taken up by the G20 in conjunction with other institutions, with the promulgation of a Financial Inclusion Plan.[27] In fact South Africa is, by developing country standards, relatively well off in terms of financial inclusion, particularly in relation to mobile phone banking. However, this is not the case throughout the continent and it is an area in which South Africa could give voice in the BRICs to the needs of African and other developing countries.

Framing the discourse

While the empowerment of new actors such as South Africa on the international stage might allow the introduction of agenda items, it can at a more general level contribute to changes in the discourse of the global political economy. This is based on the notion that language provides part of the normative framework for social and economic issues and influences judgements, attitudes and behaviours. Thus while many international institutions and policies give lip service to economic growth and development, developing countries would benefit by a stronger definitional focus on sustainable development in the discourse of international economic law.

A topical illustration relates to the coupling of FDI more closely with sustainable economic development. This is pertinently reflected in the UNCTAD *World Investment Report* (2012b) which incorporates an Investment Policy Framework for Sustainable Development (IPFSD). While this is by no means the first report to bring economic growth and sustainability to the forefront of FDI policy and law, it does so on a systematic and comprehensive basis and provides detailed policy options for incorporation of relevant provisions into International Investment Agreements (IIAs). Some of the suggested institutional arrangements are compatible with the predominant language of globalization, but others provide different degrees of challenge to the prevailing discourse.[28]

This is an area in which South Africa could, through the BRICs and its own devices, use the 'objective' criteria set out by the UNCTAD in the IPFSD to modify the discourse of FDI. One issue to introduce into the discourse is the development of Investment Protection Agencies in developing countries to perform pre-establishment scrutiny of proposed FDI in terms of relevant criteria; another, relating to the renegotiation of IIAs, involves the greater use of treaty exceptions for domestic regulatory measures pursuing legitimate public policy objectives (UNCTAD, 2012b, Art. 5.1.4). The Seoul Development Consensus, deriving from a G20 Summit in South Korea, provides another source of reference for changing the discourse;[29] it can serve to legitimize specific applications of generalized policies, for example, job creation through national budgetary allocations, local industry policies or regional agricultural projects designed to improve food security. Another example involves reframing highly generalized issues, for instance strengthening global financial regulation in terms of more specific factors relevant to member countries, such as ensuring the viability and transparency of domestic banks.

A significant segment of contemporary discourse relates to measuring the successes and failures in economic globalization. Despite globalization entailing in large measure a reduction in national boundaries for purposes of borderless trade and investment and finance (but not in the movement of people), global measurements tend to be made in terms of traditional state identities (such as various countries' growth rates) and in aggregate terms (such as increases in national GDP or FDI). Even where reduced to per capita figures, the conventional measurements tend to exclude statistics on distributions within nation states, on regional and local variations within countries, or on specific economic sectors or enterprises within a national economy. A consistent emphasis on measurements such as these would modify the globalization discourse and therefore how the phenomenon is perceived and acted upon. Other parts of the dominant discourse such as 'free trade', 'removal of trade barriers' and 'market choices' impose a particular ideology on globalization discourse, and the terms limit the scope for challenging prevailing practices and trends.[30] Here there is potential scope for a country such as South Africa to use the vehicle of the BRICs to modify the discourse of trade, investment and finance.

Monitoring and compliance

International diplomacy is littered with ambitious multilateral statements on various matters, such as the Millennium Development Goals, G8 aid commitments and climate change mitigation, which never achieve implementation and fall quietly from global political agendas. This raises the question of compliance surveillance and measurement in respect of the BRICs' declarations and policies.

At present there is no treaty basis to the BRICs, nor are there dedicated infrastructural systems for performing monitoring and compliance functions. These realities entail intrinsic limitations within the group itself in regard to the enforceability of the BRICs' policy decisions, and to compliance measures requiring the positive actions of individual member states. The larger members in particular will respond to policy pronouncements and directives in accordance with their domestic strategic interests. Here South Africa, less able to assert its own strategic interests, could play a monitoring function in relation to member compliance.[31]

Monitoring and compliance constitute more defensive than activist roles in any organization. In the BRICs context they could not be undertaken unilaterally by a country such as South Africa. However, they could be agitated for as part of the network's work programme and the monitoring itself could be 'monitored'. This initiative would contribute a 'governance' element to the operation and functioning of the BRICs.

Governance issues

Despite being the smallest brick in the edifice, South Africa could, as indicated in the previous section, raise governance issues relating to the operation of the BRICs. The democratic dispensation of 1996 provided South Africa with a modern and progressive constitution resplendent with arrangements for representation, transparency, inclusivity, checks and balances, accountability, reasoned decision-making, court access and other accoutrements of good constitutional governance. These factors operate in widely differing degrees among the country's BRICs partners.

The transgovernmental framework nature of the grouping precludes any simplistic prognosis of significant constitutional governance within the BRICs. However, there are several areas in which South Africa could attempt to influence issues of governance. One possibility relates to organization and leadership in the grouping. Here the G20 provides a model of rotating chairs with accompanying responsibilities to develop agendas. It would be salutary to find that the same transparency and meritocracy which developing countries claim for international financial institutions, such as in selecting the head of the IMF, could operate in relation to the BRICs itself.

The BRICs' proposal for a new international development bank, which has been supported by South Africa (Zuma, 2012), could be seen as providing a new agency of transnational governance. The BRICs envisages that the bank could play an instrumental role in 'fostering investment among emerging markets and developing countries' (BRICS, 2012b). Here South Africa could both contribute its financial expertise and be a beneficiary of investment finance on conditions favourable to it (World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 323).[32] More significantly it is the potential for the RSA to draw on its own constitutional and banking experiences in good governance, to promote the structures and procedures which the developing world claims are absent from institutions such as the World Bank.

Other Issues

In the absence of a significant administrative infrastructure and of sufficient common interests in the BRICs, South Africa might also involve itself in single issue topics arising within the forum. These have already been foreshadowed by the establishment of groups on, inter alia, urbanization and local government, both pressing issues in the RSA. A focus on such 'overt' but no less significant issues could lead to drafting policy declarations on the single issue topics, and eventually to model laws. Here South Africa would be both a recipient and a donor of expertise and experience. A more remote possibility is the development of dedicated dispute resolution processes for dealing with intra-BRICs disputes.

RESOLVING INTRA-BRICS DISPUTES

It is trite to observe that common membership in a grouping such as the BRICs does not obviate the need for dispute resolution procedures. At present there is no provision for dedicated dispute resolution procedures in the BRICs, as is the case with other G-groups. This is, however, unlike the situation with other regional groupings such as the EU, the SADC and the NAFTA.

As regards investment disputes among member states, only China is a member of the predominant dispute resolution services provided by the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID, n.d.),[33] and there is no reliable indicator of the extent to which other members are involved in such disputes. As to trade conflicts, some indication of the propensity for involvement in these disputes by and among the five member states is provided by the figures in Table 7.5, with respect to matters brought before the WTO.[34]

These statistics confirm the truism that BRICs membership is not incompatible with the invocation of external dispute resolution systems among members. Each member state has a history of involvement as

Table 7.5 The BRICS and the WTO (December 2012)

Member as a complainant	Member as a respondent						
		Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	Any country
	Brazil	–		–	–	1	26
	Russia	–	–	–	–	–	–
	India	1	–	–	–	1	21
	China	–	–	–	–	–	11
	South Africa	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Any country	14	–	21	29	4	–
Member as a complainant	**Member as a third party**						
		Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	Any country
	Brazil	–	–	4	3	1	26
	Russia	–	–	–	–	–	–
	India	2	–	–	3	–	21
	China	6	1	3	–	–	11
	South Africa	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Any country	73	6	80	92	2	–

Source: WTO (2013).

complainant, respondent or third party in the WTO's dispute resolution system, although, as indicated in Table 7.5, in only three instances have the BRICs members faced off against each other.[35] While the grouping as yet has no significant infrastructure, it might be conjectured that at some stage in the future consideration will be given to an internal mechanism for dealing with intra-member trade, and especially investment disputes of the nature referred to in the next section.

The BRICs and Chicks

On 21 June 2012, Brazil notified the WTO of a dispute relating to the export of its frozen chickens to South Africa (WTO, 2012). Prior to this, in February 2012, South Africa had imposed provisional antidumping duties on frozen chickens and chicken pieces which originated or were imported from Brazil. At the time South Africa contended that these imports created unfair competition within its domestic markets (see preliminary findings of the International Trade Administration Commission of South Africa, ITAC, 2012). Brazil, the complainant in the matter pending before the WTO, argues that in imposing duties on the imports, South Africa is acting in contravention of its obligations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (1994) and the Agreement on Implementation of Article VI of GATT 1994 (WTO, 2012).

Brazil and South Africa are both members of the WTO. In the absence of a BRICs-based dispute resolution mechanism, or even of an informal infrastructure for dealing with the chicken dumping dispute, it was perhaps predictable that once diplomacy failed, a WTO complaint would begin. In this regard one may query whether the BRICs will develop systems for facilitating the future resolution of inevitable trade and investment disputes among member states, as have occurred in other regional groupings. The WTO matter is yet to be determined.

CONCLUSION

As an intergovernmental network the BRICs constitutes a small reconfiguration of the global order which currently provides largely indeterminate benefits for all its members, including its latest and smallest. Conversely South Africa's influence and benefits within the grouping cannot be identified in definitive terms and will depend on future political and economic developments.

This chapter contends that the BRICs association provides some institutional and political space for a voice otherwise relatively muted in international relations. More particularly South Africa could, through its BRICs membership, attempt to strengthen its political and diplomatic relations and promote its policies of sustainable economic development, to contribute to the agenda of global governance, to reframe the prevailing discourse in parts of the international political economy, to promote a degree of surveillance and accountability in relation to policy decisions, and to promote principles of good governance in the BRICs. Moreover for the RSA its BRICs membership provides not only international diplomatic leverage but an opportunity to exploit its comparative advantages in the services sector through its 'gateway' into Africa role. This occurs at a time of immense geopolitical and economic change, partly as a consequence of the GFC.

As regards the future of the BRICs there has been extensive speculation over additional memberships. Inclusion and exclusion are sensitive themes in contemporary intergovernmental networks, whether in the G7, the G20 or the BRICs. Inclusion in the BRICs might assist relevant member countries economically, and could have negative implications for developing economies continuing to be excluded. South Africa's inclusion suggests some degree of idiosyncrasy in relation to membership, with the sponsorship of a dominant existing member and an eclectic range of attributes providing limited predictability for the future. The self-selecting nature of groupings such as the BRICs precludes any political or legal challenge from those excluded.

Inclusion has significance for the extent to which it allows different states and groupings to operate within traditional international institutions in the global political economy, or to challenge existing principles and paradigms. For these reasons countries such as South Korea, Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey, already members of the G20, might have an interest in inclusion in the BRICs. Further afield, countries such as Malaysia, Poland and African contenders such as Nigeria – which could, over the next two decades, challenge South Africa's economic dominance on the continent – might also seek inclusion. Here a noticeable point of difference is that the US will have less direct influence over membership directions in the BRICs than it had in the G20.[36] In this context South Africa may have an influence over the addition of new bricks to the BRICs.

NOTES

1. In economic terms, the Republic ranks as the twenty-seventh largest economy in the world. All other BRICs members rank in the top ten. In terms of population, it is considerably smaller than the other four. While India and China are its major trading partners, South Africa has more limited trade with Russia and Brazil. In relation to the G20, South Africa's membership was justified in terms of its developed financial system and expertise and not its overall economic size.
2. South Africa has become a member not only of the BRICs but also of the G20 (seen domestically as a more politically important membership) and has long been a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU), the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank.
3. There is a vast body of literature on regionalism, see for example Shaw, Grant and Cornelissen, 2012, p. 3.
4. Brazil, India, and to a lesser extent South Africa have lobbied for permanent representation on the UN Security Council, alongside Russia and China. This was not supported by China.
5. For example the IBSA group of countries, comprising Brazil, India, and South Africa, was established in 2003 to provide a combined voice on international issues and to enhance relationships among member economies. The IBSA also has various projects with smaller developing countries. However the future of the IBSA has become less certain now that all its members are in the BRICs.
6. It is not unusual in the state clubs for the rotating chair to have a prerogative to invite other states, and for this attendance to lead to membership. China invited South Africa when it was the chair, and was the major 'sponsor' of South African membership.
7. South Africa had previously been appointed to the G20 in 'preference' to larger economies but this was based on its financial status when the G20 comprised mainly finance ministers during its pre-GFC stage.
8. As of 2009, Africa's population exceeded 1 billion, much of which is located south of the Sahara (World Population Review, 2012).

9. It is also involved in the tripartite discussions among the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Eastern African Community (EAC) for the creation of a super-regional body.
10. For instance the African Development Bank has reported the BRICs' increasing interest in trading and investing with North African countries (Castel, Mejia & Kolster, 2011). Geographical proximity to the EU and the Middle Eastern markets is one of the region's many attractive features.
11. This concept has been articulated by high-ranking South African officials.
12. It is sometimes overlooked that the biggest investor in Africa is not China but South Africa, with over 1200 companies currently operating in most parts of the continent.
13. The main countries in Lusophone Africa are Mozambique and Angola, both with booming resource-based economies.
14. The Bank of China and Standard Bank of South Africa.
15. Mauritius has also developed the gateway pathway for investors, and has been relatively successful in acting as a conduit for investment from India – including that directed to South Africa.
16. For example outreach initiatives by some of the BRICs members include the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, India-Africa Forum Summit, African-South American Summit, while non-BRICs countries such as Japan have also responded to African economies with initiatives such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development.
17. There are strong regional differences in this pan-African indicator, with countries in North Africa, and ironically South Africa itself, growing well below the continental average.
18. While China is South Africa's largest single trading partner, the EU is collectively a larger trading partner.
19. Base metals accounted for over 35 per cent of South Africa's exports in 2011 (World Bank, 2011b).
20. That is China and India. In the same year the other four BRICs members accounted for less than 20 per cent of South Africa's trade (World Bank, 2011b).
21. According to the World Economic Forum, the 'goods market efficiency' pillar is denoted by indicators such as intensity of local competition, extent of market dominance, effectiveness of market antimonopoly policy, extent and effect of taxation, etc.
22. With respect to the nominations for the World Bank Presidency, South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, in his official address at the BRICS Delhi Summit 2012, made the point that the BRICS should work together to support a candidate, particularly one nominated from the developing world (Zuma, 2012).
23. Trevor Manuel was South Africa's Treasurer and wrote a reform paper for the IMF (Manuel, 2011).
24. The BRICS Delhi Declaration (2012a) applauds Russia's Presidency of the G20 in 2013 and provides its commitment to support the institution.
25. In his presentation to the 2012 BRICs forum, President Zuma emphasized the following factors: multilateralism, conformity with the rule of law and comprehensive reform of the UN and international financial institutions (Zuma, 2012).
26. An FTT, even if levied at a very small rate, could generate extensive revenue for economic development or for mitigating climate change's effects, and serve to impose a check on financial volatility.
27. The G20 has a financial inclusion expert group and various sub-groups.
28. Thus the UNCTAD report referred to in the text (2012) emphasizes economic development and the reservation of policy space for host states, both of which are important priorities for developing and emerging economies in IIAs.
29. The Seoul Consensus has nine focus areas, including infrastructural development, human resources development, trade, private investment, job creation, food security and growth with resilience (G20 Seoul Summit, 2010).

30. A term which has acquired a solely negative connotation that is difficult to challenge is 'protectionism'; a term such as 'safety measure', used in respect of the same phenomenon, has a more positive connotation.
31. This is not to overlook the role of domestic and international NGOs in monitoring and reporting on countries' compliance with their international commitments.
32. With respect to global competitiveness, South Africa scored extremely high (fourth out of 142 countries) in relation to financial market development. Of particular interest regarding this pillar of competitiveness is the availability of financial services, financing through local equity market, soundness of banks, and regulation of securities exchanges.
33. With respect to ICSID membership, China signed and ratified the Convention in 1993. Russia has signed the Convention, but is yet to ratify it. Brazil, India and South Africa are not signatories of the Convention.
34. WTO membership has for some time included Brazil, India, China and South Africa. Russia was an observer government until formally approved for an Accession Package in December 2011. Russia ratified its accession in July 2012.
35. South has been a respondent to complaints brought by both Brazil and India, while Brazil has been a respondent to a complaint brought by India. A contributing factor to the infrequency is that Russian's WTO accession occurred only in 2012.
36. It is suggested that Indonesia's inclusion in the G20, over the claims of neighbouring Malaysia, was a result of US preferences.

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