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ATINER's Conference Paper Series
CBC2013-0889

Regionalism and Regionness Framing: Whither the BRICS Crossvergence?

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.

ISSN **2241-2891**
23/1/2014

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Tsheola, J., Mabila, C. and Mtsweni, S. (2013) **"Regionalism and Regionness Framing: Whither the BRICS Crossvergence?"** Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: **CBC2013-0889.**

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Abstract

Despite the long history of regionalism discourse, the question of whether 'regionness' has to be envisioned in singular terms of coherence and uniformity of approach and dynamics, or if it should be considered as a pluralistic development process of both diverse, divergent and convergent futures, remains unresolved. The formation and glorification of BRICS has once again thrust this philosophical question about regionalism and 'regionness' into sharp focus. In principle, BRICS is projected to create a virtual political and economic cooperation space for the relevance of each member state in the international affairs. But the disparate BRICS grouping has remained non-cohesive in the demographics, politics, security, economics and trade. Besides Goldman Sachs' hyperbolic projections, BRICS has not evinced pragmatism for regionalism and 'regionness'. Its potential for amalgamation crossvergence, wherein member states conform in unison to 'the body of ideas, values and concrete objectives' aimed at transforming the geographical territory into a clearly 'identified regional space', is absent. This paper examines the three fissures apparent in BRICS to demonstrate that the grouping's crossvergence would inevitably involve diverse and divergent, rather than convergent, futures in the most critical demographic, economic, trade, social and political variables of regionalism and 'regionness'. Drawing from discourses of regionalism and 'regionness', the paper concludes that BRICS is a 'no-place' rudimentary international geopolitics.

Keywords: Regionalism; 'Regionness'; Crossvergence; Amalgamation; Pluralism; BRICS

Introduction

Discourses of regionalism assert that the lack of complementarity of economies, production and trade structures dominated by importation of manufactures and exportation of primary commodities as well as import demands that increasingly exceed capacity to generate revenue from exportation, are key structural constraints to 'regionness' among emerging economies (Tsheola, 2010). Todaro (1997:421) advises that emerging economies need to 'look outward but in a different direction (towards trade and cooperation with other LDCs) and inward towards each other as members of a group of nations trying to integrate their economies and coordinate their joint development strategies in an effort to achieve greater collective self-sufficiency.' It should be asked if the agglomeration of the emerging economies in BRICS is framed for this same goal. Five of BRICS's ten guiding principles beg for close scrutiny in the context of this paper; and, they are: centrality of multilateralism on global issues; mutual respect for one another's choice of the development path; openness; non-bloc nature; and, neutrality with regard to third parties. From regionalism and 'regionness', the question of framing of BRICS grouping is inescapable. Collectively, these principles point to BRICS's hope of adopting pluralistic regionalism for diverse and divergent 'regionness'.

BRICS remains non-cohesive because of its non-amalgamation principle and repugnance for unison conformity to 'the body of ideas, values and concrete objectives' (Grant & Soderbaum, 2003:7). Its framing in the five principles entails 'nominal regionalism' agglomeration. Unsurprisingly, Tendon & Shome (2009:276) argue that 'the strength of the BRIC economies as a sustainable entity in the future is perhaps weaker'. This paper examines the framing of BRICS from the regionalism and 'regionness' perspectives to demonstrate that it does not conform to the conventional G-6, G-8 or the traditional Eurocentric regional integration model. The next section discusses regionalism and 'regionness' to establish analytical tenets for the theorization of BRICS. The third section examines BRICS guiding principles to determine their philosophical orientation on amalgamation and pluralism crossvergence. The fourth section presents concluding remarks.

Regionalism and 'Regionness': Theorizing BRICS Framing

This paper discusses amalgamation and pluralism theorization of regionalism and 'regionness' to contextualize the framing of BRICS. Regionalism refers to 'the body of ideas, values and concrete objectives that are aimed at transforming a geographical area into a clearly identified regional space' (Grant & Soderbaum, 2003:7) involving complex, multifaceted processes (Ramutsindela, 2005). Discourses of regionalism are intricately intertwined with contestations of development, primarily between modernization and dependency theories (Gibb, 2009). The post-War era discourse of regionalism approaches was dominated by development cooperation, market integration, ‘open’ and ‘new’ regionalism (Grant & Soderbaum, 2003; Iheduru, 2003; Fawcett, 2005; Gibb, 2009; Bachmann & Sidaway, 2010; Tsheola, 2010). But the modernist market-led integration approach became hegemonic in its calls for liberalisation and abolishing of discrimination between member states (Mistry, 2000; Fawcett, 2005; Gibb, 2009; Tsheola, 2010). Open regionalism, which emerged in the early 1990s as an aggressive variant of the market integration approach, and as a symbolic return to ‘neoclassical economic agenda’ and modernisation thinking, has sought to rejuvenate multilateral trade liberalization and ultimate ‘integration’ of states and constellations thereof into the world-economy (Gibb, 2009; Tsheola, 2010). It espouses the notion of regionalism and ‘regionness’ as suboptimal solutions and steps towards the ultimate optimal multilateral neoliberal globalization, as provided for in the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) Most Favoured Nation principle (MFN) for regional integration arrangements (Tsheola, 2010).

The new regionalism approach is founded on the rejection of the state-centric model of integration (Boas, 2003; Grant & Soderbaum, 2003; Iheduru, 2003; Lee, 2003; Ramutsindela, 1995; Gibb, 2009). It strives to transcend the conventional formal state-centric model of trade regionalism by integrating post-structuralism and postmodernism (Grant & Soderbaum, 2003; Gibb, 2009; Simon, 2010). Ramutsindela (2005:107) observes that the conception of new regionalism is itself ‘imbued with varied assumptions and interpretations of what is ‘old’ and ‘new’ as well as questions about the potential for regionness’ for most emerging economies, especially those in Africa. Theorizing regionalism through the limiting prisms of state or non-state actors, alliances and networks remained superficial, misleading and futile. Thus, the market-led approach and the attendant neoclassical discourse on trade regionalism have remained hegemonic; consequently, theorization of regionalism and ‘regionness’ continues to be locked into ‘a set of ill-defined development objectives, more often than not centred on market integration and modernity’ (Gibb, 2009:706). But the hegemonic discourse of regionalism and ‘regionness’ does not account for BRICS framing; perhaps, due to the grouping’s conflated character.

Traditional Customs Union Theory on Regionalism and ‘Regionness’

Market integration theory attained hegemony within the modernization theory of development, whereas global predominance of trade regionalism drew from the traditional customs union theory (Todaro, 1997). The foundational principles of the hegemonic trade regionalism have, therefore, infused neoclassical economics and international trade theory, modernist assumptions and values, the concepts of customs union, trade creation and trade diversion, and free trade with notions of ‘predetermined and inevitability of modernity’ (Gibb, 2009:708). Accordingly, trade regionalism emphasizes liberalization of intra-regional trade, promotion of exportation, exploitation of comparative advantage, establishing free movement of factors of production and harmonization of policies (Todaro, 1997; Gibb, 2009). On its part, theorization of market integration promoted notions of its universality, and prescribed for the transposition of Eurocentric values to emerging economies' trade regionalism and 'regionness' (Simon, 1998, 2010; Sidaway, 2002; Taylor, 2005; Bachman & Sidaway, 2010; Ramutsindela, 2010b). The framing of BRICS, though, does not fit the logic of the traditional customs union theory nor the emulation of the European Economic Community (ECC).

Gibb (2009:707) demonstrates that the market integration theory provides for a 'deterministically linear' 'progression of increasingly more complex integrative steps towards full economic and political union'. It prescribes a six-step hierarchical inevitability of regionalism and 'regionness' progression from preferential trade, through free trade association, customs union, common market, and economic union, to political union (Todaro, 1997; Lee, 2003). Whereas preferential trade provides for partial removal of internal quotas and tariffs, free trade association involves their complete elimination; customs union entails the establishment of a common external customs tariff, whilst the common market allows for free movement of commodities, labour, capital and services; and, the economic union harmonises economic policies and development of the regional institution, whilst political union provides for unification of politics and power (Todaro, 1997; Lee, 2003; Gibbs, 2009). This prescribed finality, predetermined and inevitability of modernity through regionalism and 'regionness' does not account for the framing of the BRICS.

Theorized as 'state-centric and elite-driven phenomena, focused on inter-state and inter-governmental relations', market regionalism and 'regionness' assumes that 'the integration process generates a form of economic determinism that will eventually bind sovereign states into ever-closer union' (Gibb, 2009:708). But state-centric or 'elite-led' regionalism entails concessions of state authority, power and sovereignty to the regional entity (Sidaway, 1998, 2002; Boas, 2003; Taylor, 2005; Bachmann & Sidaway, 2010). Whilst agreeing that 'states should continue to form the focus of attention', Gibb (2009:714, 715) criticizes traditional regionalism theories' uncritical and simplistic assumption that state interests are 'national self-interests', as well as the acceptance of the notion that 'states co-operate' over regionalism because 'it is in their best interests to do so'.

The exercise of state sovereignty among emerging markets is inextricably intertwined with regionalism and 'regionness', thereby allowing for rhetorical commitments and configuration of sovereignty without ceding authority (Bachmann & Sidaway, 2010). This description appears to fit the BRICS framing because member states do not plan to share sovereignty, thereby rendering the grouping 'nominal regionalism' and a mechanism for 'mobilizing resources and asserting state sovereignty' as well as support for state self-interests (Bachmann & Sidaway, 2010:1). According to Sidaway (1998:571), emerging markets regionalism functions to inscribe state powers wherein the state elite exercises and reasserts sovereignty, as a 'set of processes by which sovereignty is confirmed'. Such regionalism is, therefore, 'a way to demonstrate and bolster sovereignty through participating in practices only open to state actors' (Bachmann & Sidaway, 2010:4).

South Africa's application for and ceding of BRICS membership against modelling by the Goldman Sachs, together with the 2013 decision to establish a BRICS bank whose funding and relations with the existing international funding institutions remains untested, affirm the suspicion that emerging states have historically seemed to use regionalism as a fund-raising strategy (Ramutsindela, 2010b:93). Nominal regionalism provides a useful form of 'non-threatening' legitimacy without imposing the requirements for democracy, sharing of sovereignty or genuine development (Sidaway & Gibb, 1998; Sidaway, 2002; Boas, 2003; Fawcett, 2005; Ramutsindela, 2009). Indeed, regionalism is not the preserve of state actors (Ramutsindela, 2005) because 'commercialized non-state actors' have marked progress where they operated without hindrances of official state policy (Simon, 2010:101). But the notion of BRICS being 'nominal regionalism' cannot be tenably dismissed, especially with China and Russia rising as authoritarian capitalist powers on the global stage.

Essentially, emerging markets' regionalism discourse and practice assumed that the EU model was globally relevant and applicable (Gibb, 2007, 2009). Consequently, regionalism has been judged on the acceptance of 'the rules-based and legally enforceable regional governance structure, together with sharing of sovereignty' (Gibb, 2007:433). Its failure among emerging markets is blamed on the reluctance of states to cede and share sovereignty at the regional scale. Is there any chance that BRICS member states could volunteer to cede and share sovereignty as a grouping? BRICS guiding principles affirm that it does not aspire for such regionalism or 'regionness'. It has to be asked if BRICS was framed to be a G-5 version of the conventional G-77, G-20, G-8 and G-6?

Regionalism Jurisdiction for 'Regionness': Amalgamation versus Pluralism?

Simon (1998:6, 2010:97) frames a pertinent question about post-apartheid 'regionness', whether a region is to be envisioned in singular terms of 'a coherent or uniformity of approach and dynamic', or if it should be considered as 'more diverse, pluralistic development processes which permit divergent as well as convergent futures'. Whereas pluralistic regionalism provides for member states to retain separate jurisdiction of activities such as trade, amalgamation makes for collectivism and jurisdiction by supra-national institutions (Olivier, 2001; Tsheola, 2010). Pluralistic regionalism makes it virtually impossible for regions to create intra-bloc trade expansion-friendly environment (Njinkeu & Fosso, 2006). Whilst boosting inspirational regionalism qualities, the EU has, having incrementally forged towards amalgamated jurisdiction over a variety of activities, remained an unsuccessful amalgamation, whilst simultaneously circumventing the limiting features of pluralism. Underlying amalgamation and pluralism are 'regionness' development philosophies that manifest in comparative advantage and factor proportions theories as well as open and protective regionalism.

Open regionalism's primary goal is to enforce the MFN principle, rather than establish a protective CET against third-parties (Davies, 1996). Intra-bloc trade preference is, therefore, assumed to be a temporary passing phase and process of mutual regionalism which strengths and extends 'regionness' in pursuit of a generalized and significantly lower CET (Oyejide, 2000; Olanrewaju, 2007). Embedded with such regionalism is the curtailment of 'regionness' because the MFN principle 'actually means non-discrimination', equal treatment of 'virtually all countries' (Olanrewaju, 2007:6). Thus, GATT provides that existing regional groupings amounting to a departure from the MFN principle are only acceptable if 'the tariff applying to external parties is not, on the whole, higher than the tariffs previously in force' (Davies, 1996:34). Protective regionalism entails, as Ralinala (2004:131) argues, that 'the first goal for a regional grouping should be to maximise intra-regional trade rather than trading with third-party countries at the expense of the region'. It requires that intra-regional trade be promoted by trade preference, removal of trade barriers within the region and a protective CET (Oyejide, 2000). The inward-oriented trade regionalism is expected to create 'sufficiently large market size to generate lower production cost that might enable the region to compete better with the rest of the world' (Oyejide, 2000:5). Whereas China offers vivid lessons of protectionism, authoritarian capitalism and fast economic growth, BRICS does not have the preconditions for imposing an effective CET 'regionness'. Given its guiding principles, BRICS is destined to support the MFN principle and globally open regionalism. It does not seek to be a bloc, meaning that in trade and international security matters, there would be no collective action. Politically and economically, BRICS could be a G-5 version of the G-8, G-20 or G-77. Equally, examination of BRICS will show the irrelevance of comparative advantage and factor proportions theories as analytical tools.

BRICS's Guiding Principles: Divergent, Static or Convergent Crossvergence?

BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) was identified by Goldman Sachs in 2001 as one of the two conglomerations of emerging economies, on account of large population sizes and investment potential (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003; Wilson, Kelston & Ahmed, 2010), 'that would become increasingly important in the world economy' (Haq & Meilke, 2009a:2; 2009b:2). Indeed, the power of emerging markets 'in the evolving structure of global governance' was increasingly recognized through China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico, the self-described G-5 of 'big emerging states', characterized as the B(R)ICSAM (Cooper, 2009:n.p). The latter was, however, overshadowed by the famous BRICs (Cooper, 2009; Haq & Meilke, 2009a, 2009b; Tandon & Shome, 2009; Wilson, Kelston & Ahmed, 2010; Bell, 2011; Cameron, 2011; Cairns & Meilke, 2012), which is forecast to become the engine of future global growth with the proviso of four core factors (macro stability, institutions, openness and education) (Bell, 2011:19). Goldman Sachs' framing of BRICs does not entail conventional regionalism or 'regionness'; instead, it was heralded as one of 'the growth centres of the future with the potential to stimulate increased demand for a wide range of commodities' (Cairns & Meilke, 2012:n.p). That is, buying power and global capital interests were paramount in the framing of BRICs. With South Africa, the BRICS consists of disparate states that are generalized as emerging markets; and, its 2009 establishment had virtually nothing to do with the 2001 Goldman Sachs modelling. Only the CIGI extended and accentuated BRICs framing in B(R)ICSAM to encompass diplomacy and include Mexico and South Africa, (Cooper, 2009). Adopting population size as the conceptual foundation, whilst excluding Nigeria and Mexico, raises epistemological questions about BRICS framing.

Indeed, the first BRICs summit (June 2009, in Russia) on financial matters revealed deep geo-political discrepancies (Cooper, 2009; Tandon & Shome, 2009). Yet, Goldman Sachs express an enthusiastic projection of impending potential of BRICs states to dominate the global economy, by comparison with G-6 of France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom and the United States (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003; Wilson, Kelston & Ahmed, 2010). Realistically, G-6, G-8, G-20 and G-77 are not regionalism agglomerations; and, BRICS is a version of neither the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) nor the EU. Additionally, Cooper (2009) raises concerns with BRICs' external and internal 'club' competitions, respectively, between G-8 and G-20. Whereas all BRICS countries are members of G-20, only Russia belongs to the G-8, which raises questions of its standing as an emerging economy. In this context, five of BRICS's ten guiding principles beg for close scrutiny; and, they are: centrality of multilateralism on global issues; mutual respect for one another's choice of the development path; openness; non-bloc nature; and, neutrality with regard to third parties (BRICS, 2013). These principles enforce diverse and divergent, rather than convergent, futures. Unsurprisingly, BRICS has become famous simultaneously as its strength weakened and as member states 'displayed differential rates of growth in most macro indicators' (Tandon & Shome, 2009:273). BRICS's potential for convergent, rather than divergent, crossvergence is critical for 'regionness' to effect change in the global power balance and interstate system. Cooper (2009:n.p) concludes that 'although more striking for its declaratory than operational force, the BRICs at least sets up a scenario in which the relationship between the West and a big state component of the Rest is based on competition not cooperation'. Pragmatically, BRICS does not hold the potential for transforming the global political-economy. Hence, Cooper (2009:n.p) observes that:

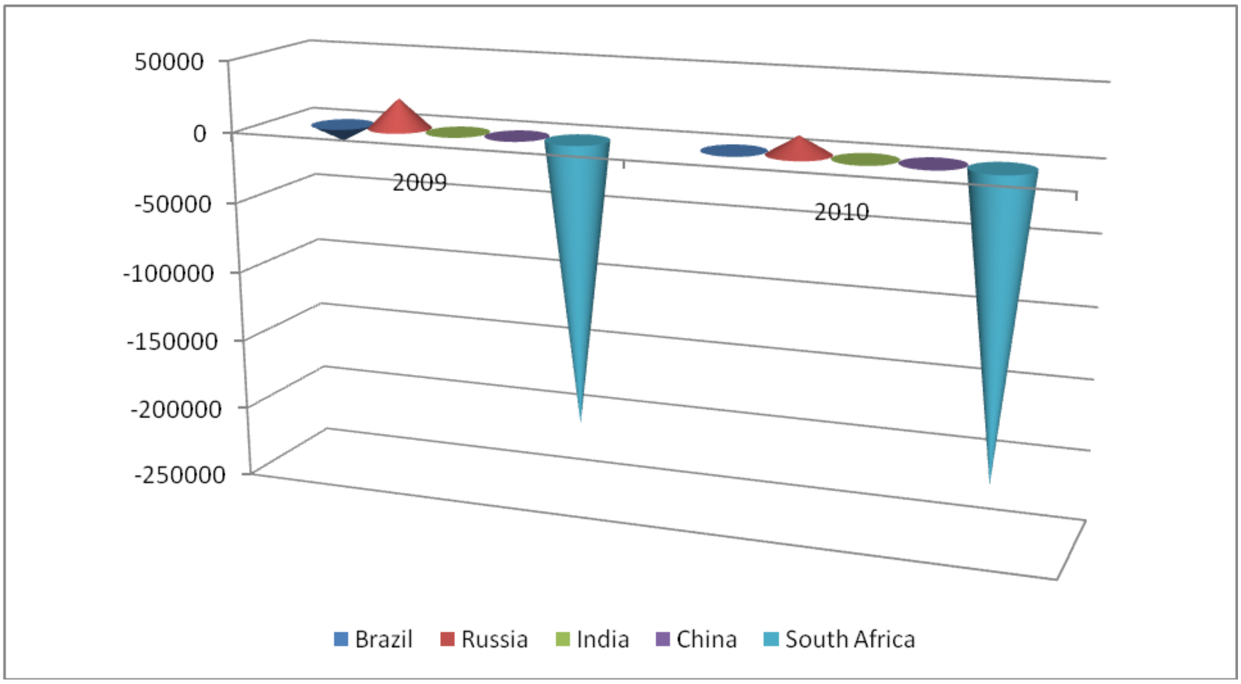
> *'Although sharing some common characteristics in their diplomatic styles, the emerging states were more marked for their differences. Located in dissimilar regions, with unique historical circumstances, it was the individual uniqueness of these countries rather than a sense of collective identity that seemed to stand out'.*

Given the absence of the necessary conditions for ‘regionness’, BRICS provides for ‘nominal regionalism’.

BRICS Crossvergence: Convergent, Static or Divergent Futures

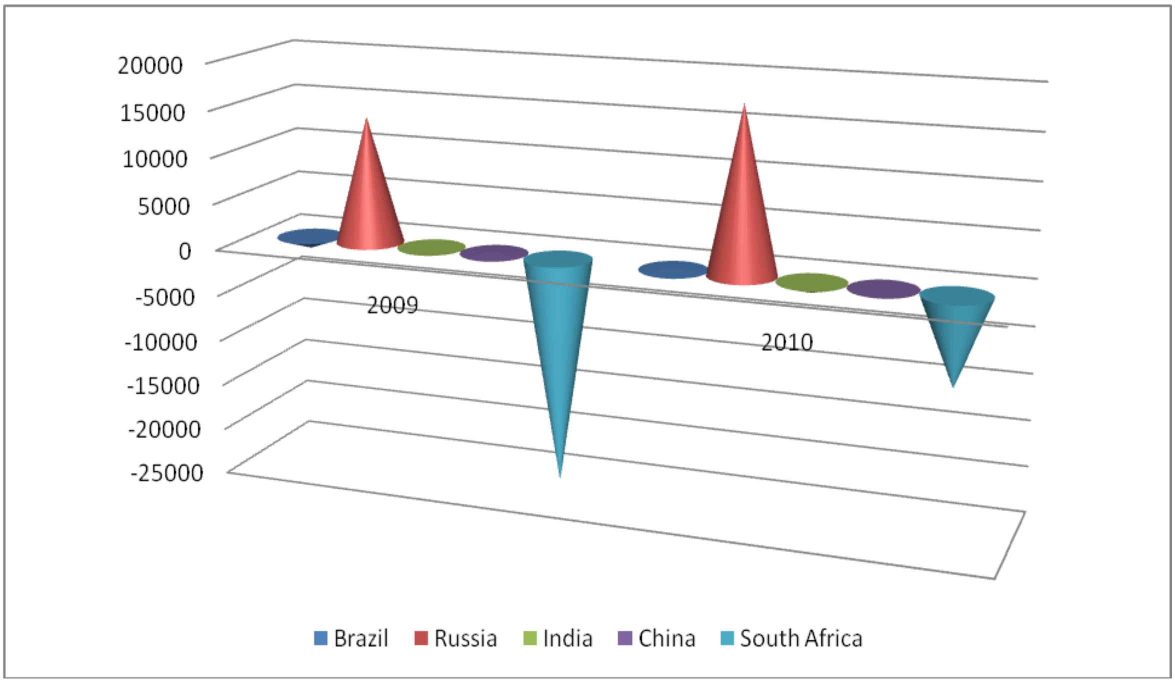
The potential for convergent ‘crossvergence’ of BRICS grouping is virtually non-existent because there are deep discrepancies. Hence, the Standard and Poor Report dismisses its recognition as a grouping (Tandom & Shome, 2009). Conversely, prospects for divergent, or perhaps static, futures are relatively stronger. With the exception of South Africa, one conspicuous commonality among BRICs states is in their current accounts. For Brazil, India and China, they are virtually zero at break-even point, whereas that for Russia is a negligible surplus (figure 1). South Africa’s current account deficit is extraordinarily large and unique in BRICS. These current accounts status are a reflective of the balance of trade (figure 2). There are three different sets within BRICS, one for South Africa with large deficits, then Russia on its own with reasonable surplus, and the third for Brazil, India and China with almost zero break-even point values. These diverse and divergent characters mean that BRICS’s hope of shaping the global political-economy is more sentimental than a potent operational pragmatic force. The potential for divergent futures is affirmed through the different development trajectories, notwithstanding member states trotting different varieties of state capitalism (Yi-Chong, 2012; Tsheola, 2013).

Figure 1. *BRICS Countries Current Account (USD Million), 2009-2010*



Source: Trading Economics (n.d, a, b, c, d, e)

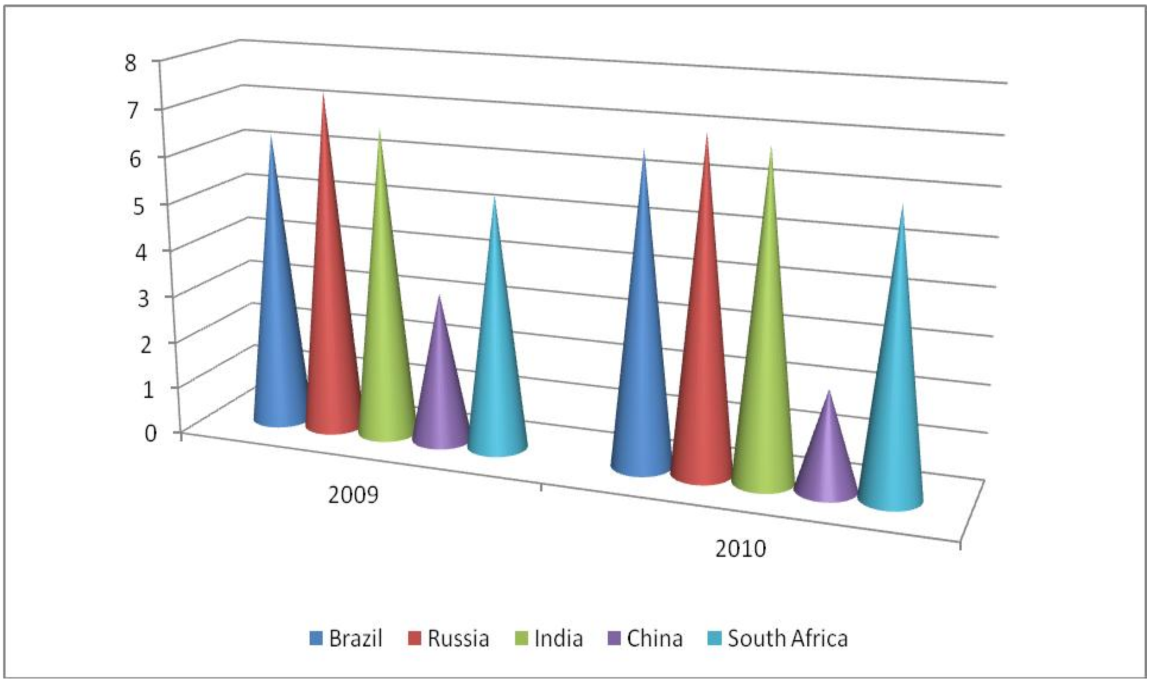
Figure 2. *BRICS Countries Balance of Trade (USD Million), 2009-2010*



Source: Trading Economics (n.d, a, b, c, d, e)

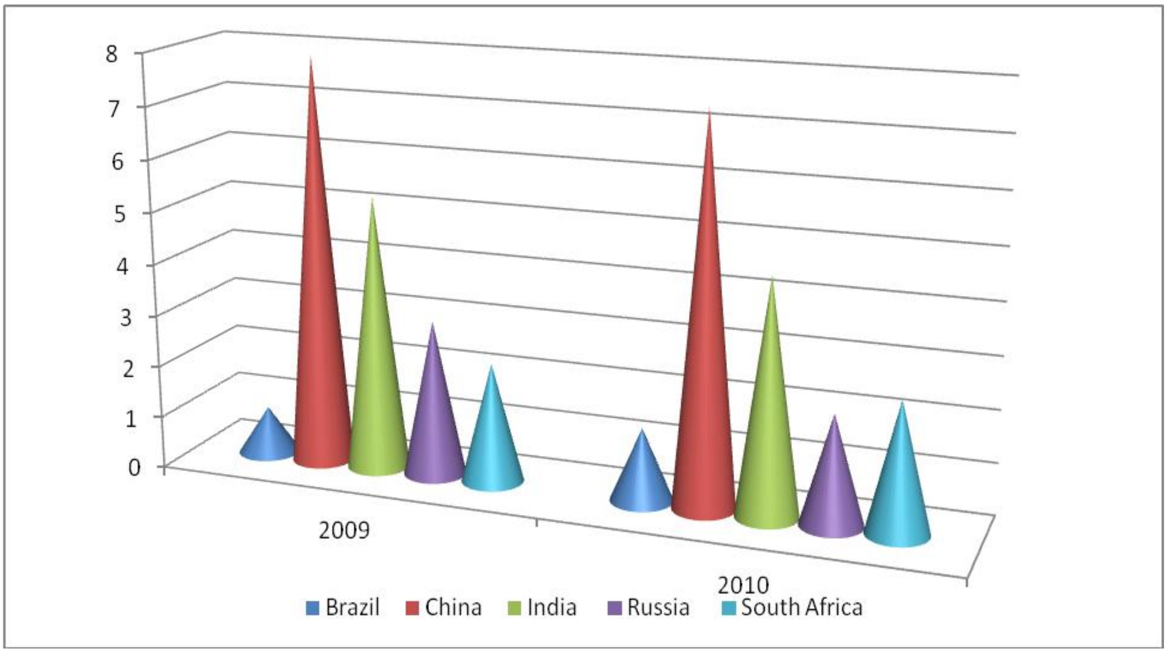
Uniformly, BRICS economies have inflation rates that persisted above 5%, except for China whose system is characterised as socialist 'Red Capitalism'. Russia, which is the only BRICS state with a positive but negligible current account and surplus balance of trade, has had the highest inflation rate (figure 3).Whereas Russia is divergent from BRICS, China and India too are on different development trajectories, respectively, described as 'Red Capitalism' and 'capindialism' (Yi-Chong, 2012). From an economics perspective, BRICS does not have the capabilities for convergent futures; hence, the propensity for different development trajectories to cause uniformly undue yet diverse inflationary pressures. Whereas Russia experiences the highest inflation rates of all BRICS states, its GDP growth rate has on average been around 2% (figure 4). The grouping's GDP growth rates reveal at least four categories: China on its own growing at rates above 7%; India in the 4%-5% range; South Africa and Russia in the 1%-2.5% range; and, Brazil below 1.5%. China has not adopted the economic freedom policies for openness; yet, it has been the fastest growing economy with the lowest inflation rates for the BRICS. According to the 2014 Index of Economic Freedom, BRICS is led by South Africa at 75, Brazil at 114, India at 120, China at 137 and Russia at 140 (Miller, 2014); yet, China grows fastest. This reality could motivate for convergent futures wherein other member states emulate China's 'Red Capitalism'. That is, convergent futures are probable in spheres that would not necessarily conform to the four criteria set by the Goldman Sachs.

Figure 3. *BRICS Countries Inflation Rate, 2009-2010*



Source: Trading Economics (n.d, a, b, c, d, e)

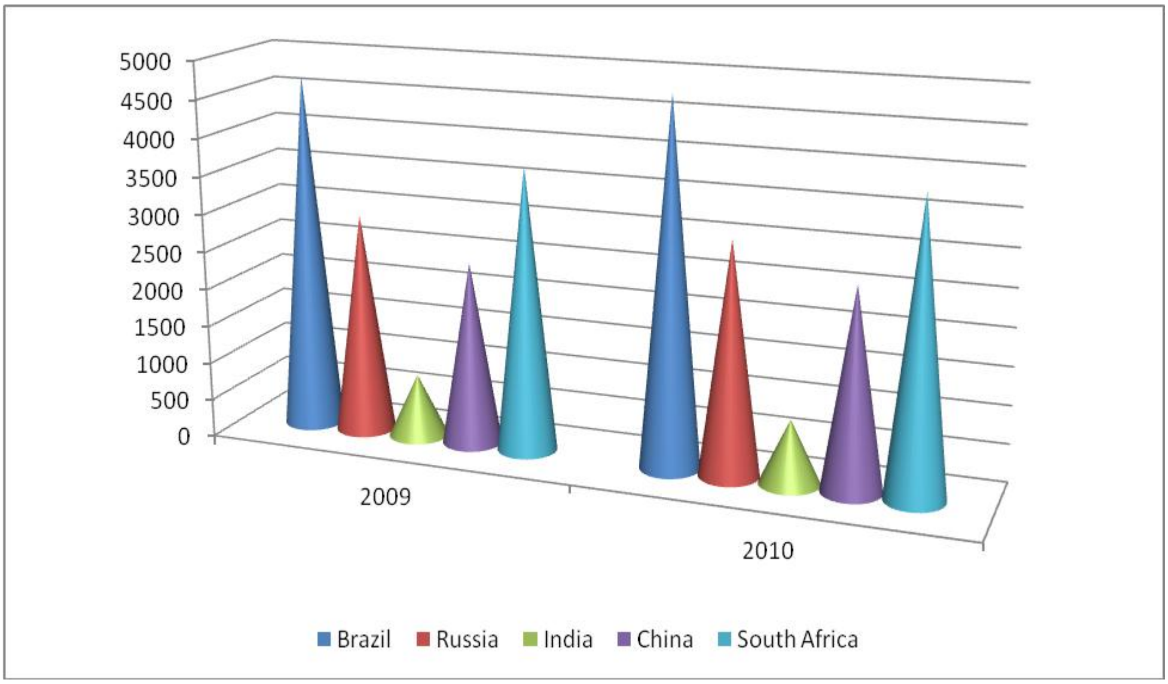
Figure 4. *BRICS Countries GDP Annual Growth Rate, 2009-2010*



Source: Trading Economics (n.d, a, b, c, d, e)

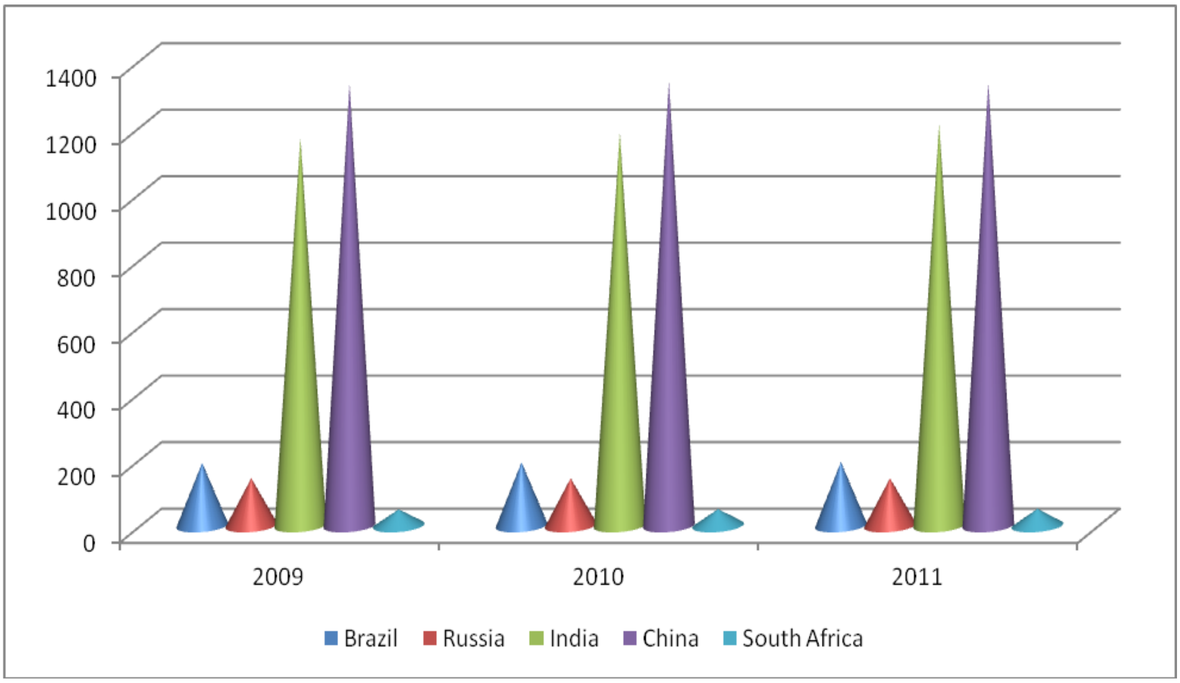
Whereas the economies of China and India are growing faster than that for South Africa, the latter's per capita GDP has been the third highest for the BRICS (figure 5). Brazil, whose GDP growth rate is the lowest of BRICS, has one of the highest GDP per capita of the grouping, together with Russia. The combination of low GDP growth rate and high per capita is understandable for South Africa whose population size is far below all of BRICS. However, the same cannot be said about Brazil whose population size is the third largest in BRICS after India and China, respectively. This scrambled picture of BRICS on development trajectories, GDP growth rates, per capita and population size should, at the minimum, render convergent futures virtually impossible. The disparate nature of BRICS begs vexed questions of what form of 'regionness' is possible. Goldman Sachs' modelling of BRICs emphasizes population size; yet, three categories are discernable in this regard. In 2010, China and India were home to over 1.3 and 1.2 billion people, respectively, compared to 196 million for Brazil, 141 million for Russia and 49 million for South Africa (figure 6). South Africa's population size is far below those of the other four BRICS states; and, this observation affirms the reasoning behind its exclusion from the Goldman Sachs modelling. The questioning becomes persistent as to why BRICS, with South Africa, was established. Evidently, BRICS is nothing close to a G-5 of the calibre of G-6, G-8, G-20 or even G-77. Equally, it does not have the capabilities for 'regionness' of the form of the EU, NAFTA, Association of South East Asian Nations; African Union, NATO, MERCOSUR and so on. Notwithstanding the ambition to establish a bank, the question remains: what is BRICS?

Figure 5. *BRICS Countries GDP per Capita, 2009-2010*



Source: Trading Economics (n.d, b, c, d, e)

Figure 6. *BRICS Countries Population Size (Million), 2009-2011*



Source: BRICS (2013)

Regarding the overall standing of BRICs, Cooper (2009:n.p) makes a revealing observation thus:

> '*In many ways, nevertheless, the BRICs are more interesting for their differences than their similarities. Brazil and India are robust democracies. Russia is a managed democracy. China is a one party state. India has a fast rising population. Russia is in serious demographic trouble with a sharply reduced life expectancy. Brazil and Russia are resource rich. India and China are resource dependent'*.

Evidently, the business economics and financial ideals of the framing of BRICS are questionable; and, there is suspicion that the 2003 and 2010 Goldman Sachs Reports are equally 'peppered with subtle sales pitches' for global securities related to BRIC states (Bell, 2011:24). Convergent futures require a degree of shared development properties. Whereas the strength of Brazil and Russia is in 'natural resources', that for India and China draws out of their 'fast consuming populations' (Tandon & Shome, 2009:273-274). The *Financial Times* (08 February 2006) concludes that 'BRICs joined non-places such as Emea, Asean and Nafta in the acronym-crazed geography of international management'. Competition among BRICS states, externally between G-8 and G-20, internally between G-8 and G-5 as well as within BRICSAM, render BRICS a sideshow to the main 'club' contestations (Cooper, 2009; Bell, 2011). Other than the disparate nature of the grouping, pluralistic regionalism evident in BRICS guiding principles is destined to promote divergent futures. By perpetuating pluralistic jurisdiction, BRICS would undermine its potential for 'regionness'.

The notion of 'non-discrimination, (and) treating virtually all countries equally' (Olanrewaju, 2007:6) together with the GATT, now WTO, requirement that existing regional arrangements amounting to a departure from the MFN principle would only be acceptable if 'the tariff applying to external parties is not, on the whole, higher than the tariffs previously in force' (Davies, 1996:34), would enforce dangerously lower tariffs for BRICS. In terms of the 2014 Index of Economic Freedom, South Africa is 39 score points above the second nearest BRICS state, Brazil, 45 above India, 62 over China and 65 above Russia (Miller, 2014). This index attests to wanting potential for BRICS convergent crossvergence. Pluralistic regionalism trajectory on its part would also mean that self-selecting member states such as South Africa and Brazil could individually enter into trade negotiations and arrangements with the EU, NAFTA, Association of South East Asian Nations or the MERCOSUR, thereby rendering regionalism of BRICS a non-pragmatic operational force. Pluralistic regionalism tends to strengthen the existing varieties of vertical trade linkages and identities that emerging economies hold largely with their former colonial powers. BRICS is destined to become a nominal 'rudimentary', 'non-place' geographical configuration as member states' existing relations with extra-grouping parties persist, because the adoption of economic freedom policies will make 'cross-border trade merely derivative from general trade liberalisation' (Weeks, 1996:105). Pluralistic regionalism is 'methodologically and theoretically' inappropriate for emerging economies (Oyejide, 2000) and for BRICS. The question of BRICS framing as the G-5 version of G-6, G-8, G-20 or G-77or regionalism akin to EU, NAFTA and so on, has to be answered in the negative.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the theorization of emerging economies' regionalism and 'regionness' has not critically explored uniqueness of their varied and complex contexts. Based on the economic theory proposition that 'income is an important determinant of trade in middle and high-income countries' (Haq & Meilke, 2009a:12; 2009b:14), it is assumed that 'the combination of higher economic and population growth in the N-11 and BRICs, coupled with a larger proportion of income spent' could translate into significant increases in expenditure on global products in the future (Cairns & Meilke, 2012:3). Hence, Goldman Sachs' modelling forecasts BRICs as one of the engines of future global growth. Already, Tandon & Shome (2009:275) conclude that 'the BRIC nations … (are) no longer showing much unison'. Logically, it means that if BRICS were to realize crossvergence of any form other than being static, it would be divergent rather than convergent.

The paper asserts that BRICS has no 'regionness' merit and that it has no regionalism capabilities necessary for giving character to regional spaces because it does not meet the basic preconditions underlying the customs union principle. The latter provides that 'states have to have broadly comparable levels of development for integration to succeed' and to promote 'a tendency towards agglomeration' because 'polarized economic development is likely to occur that will favour the developed at the direct expense of the underdeveloped' (Gibb, 2007:432). BRICS is notable for the uniqueness of member states; hence, even the extremes of G-6 and G-8 or G-77 agglomerations do not justify its framing. Further, five of BRICS's ten guiding principles are at best counter forces to regionalism and 'regionness'. By creating 'non-place nominal rudimentary regionness' and adopting principles for divergent pluralism, BRICS framing has failed the regionalism crucible.

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