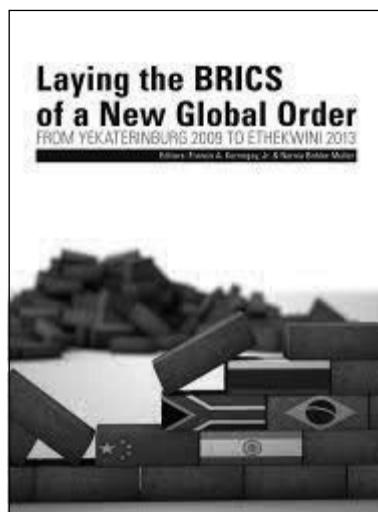


## BOOK REVIEW

### **Laying the BRICS of a New Global Order – FROM YEKATERINBURG 2009 to ETHEKWINI 2013** edited by Francis A. Kornegay, jr and Narnia Bohler-Muller

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I was first introduced to the book, *Laying the BRICS of a New Global Order*, edited by Francis Kornegay and Narnia Bohler- Muller, at the launch in 2013. My erroneous assumption of BRICS lying squarely within the domain of economics were immediately challenged as I sat listening to Dr Essop Pahad and the editors narrate the cross-disciplinary, as well as the multisectoral, relevance that such a book holds.

The term BRICS is more than an acronym for the five nations that each of its letters represents - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Instead BRICS represents a collaboration aimed at reforming global governance. Since each of the countries represented by the BRICS acronym is geopolitically as well as socio- economically and culturally situated, converging and diverging interests ensue within the collaborative framework. As such the book under review aims to situate current tensions and debate surrounding the emergence, rationale and future implications of BRICS as an emerging global order. The book offers a compilation of articles authored by a diverse collection of contributors from each of the countries represented in BRICS. The book makes clear the gap in literature that it wishes to address. The rationale for such a compilation is made explicit from a reading of the book's prologue and synopsis. In the prologue, a succinct evolution of BRICS and the context that facilitated the need for such a compilation is narrated. This narration of the context from which the book arose is balanced in its summation of the challenges that persist in bringing together BRICS countries that have divergent political, social and economic policies.

The four hundred and forty seven pages of the book are in no way intended to present a complete theorising of BRICS as the new emerging global order. Instead the editors position the contents of the book as a catalyst to invoke debate and critical reflection for the purposes of developing a collaborative BRICS framework. As such the book itself does not present a one dimensional representation of what BRICS is in theory and what the potential for BRICS may be in practice. No attempt, according to the writers, was made to influence the contributions of the book in order to present an authentic working commentary of BRICS activity.

Varied perspectives from each of the BRICS nations are indexed according to two over-arching labels viz. *The Shanghai Cooperation Dimension* and *the IBSA Trilateral Dimension*. The heading *Shanghai Cooperation Dimension* presents perspectives from China and Russia whilst the heading *IBSA Trilateral Dimension* presents perspectives from India, Brazil and South Africa. This structuring of the book immediately creates an intentional polarity between the BRICS nations described by the editors as necessary to differentiate the geo-political-ideological differences that characterise China and Russia from India, Brazil and South Africa.

It is taken for granted that the editors aimed to structure the contents of the book using systematic logic; however, a printing and compilation error made the reading experience disjointed. The first page of the book, according to the table of contents, was supposed to present an article by Francis Kornegay titled 'Laying the BRICS of a New Global order: A Conceptual Scenario'. Instead the first page of the book was replaced by page sixty five which actually presents chapter 3 of the book authored by Jian Junbo in the edition that I received. Page one instead follows after page ninety six which is the last page of chapter four. The first sixty four pages follows before the correct chronological sequence of the book begins again with page ninety

seven. It is not as confusing as it sounds and one is still able to navigate through the book. However, this publishing error did detract from the expected thoroughness one would assume would be unquestionable in a publication such as this.

Whilst the book is a compilation of varied authored perspectives, the individual articles are relatively understandable once one works through the theoretically dense, but necessary, nestling of the compilation. The articles presented, though divergent in country strategy and rationality, are unified by a common BRICS ideology. The ideological premise that unifies BRICS and the publications within the book situates BRICS as the new global order within the discourse of multilateralism. Multilateralism forms an alternative to the world's dominant financial and political systems that have polarised power historically, towards a multipolar democratic world order. BRICS nations share a common critique and rejection of Western domination of international political and financial agendas. This endeavour to revolutionise the world's financial (and inevitably the political) dominant institutional discourse thereby shifting global power is undoubtedly ambitious. The unifying strategy for this endeavour is collaboration between Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa rationalised for the purposes of these individual nations becoming the global powerhouses for market expansion as their populations expand collectively.

As individual nations, the different geopolitical as well as the ideological and culturally discursive frameworks within which each BRICS nation is enmeshed, is made obvious by the editors' remarks as well as through a reading of the articles collated in the book. The unification that the word BRICS implies is methodically debunked as conflict between BRICS nations is critically discussed from the authors' diverse geographical and secular positioning. This is a necessary conversation as it forms a directive for an agenda aimed at moving BRICS toward a productive agenda for all BRICS nations.

The first chapter of the book, under the title 'BRICS: THE TERRAIN' provides a summary of the socio-economic context of the BRICS nations, highlighting political and even religious concerns. Trust and power issues stemming from within and between individual BRICS nations are discussed using Foucault's concept of sovereignty. The obvious tension with regard to the concept of BRICS arising from the western capitalist domain is also addressed. The intent for BRICS to effect change at the global governance level generally as well as specifically at the economic governance level is also highlighted. Debate surrounding the addition of South Africa into what was initially the BRIC quartet is introduced. This provides a necessary foundation for the reader who has no previous knowledge of BRICS as well as for the reader who is critical about the very neoliberalist ideologies associated with BRICS.

The second part of the three part book titled 'The Shanghai Cooperation Dimension' consists of three chapters representing the interests of China and six chapters representing the interests of Russia. There is a clear over-representation

of Russia within this country grouping of articles. A consideration of the possible political implications thereof is a point of reflection. The third part of the book titled 'The IBSA Trilateral Dimension' consists of five articles representing the interests of India, five articles representing the interests of Brazil and four articles representing the interests of South Africa. This indicates a more uniform distribution of articles across India, Brazil and South Africa.

A vast array of critical focus areas for each BRICS country is discussed. The reading of each article becomes tedious if attempted to follow in quick succession of each other. A possibly less daunting approach to reading the book would be to start by perusing the titles of each article from the table of contents and then reading the articles in order of personal priority. A collective summary of each BRICS country's salient points would have been a very useful way of tying critical individual country perspectives together, be they divergent or complementary.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this review to critically summarise the salient points from each country perspective, selected issues arising from a reading of these articles will be discussed within the next few paragraphs. These selected issues are discussed from the articles from China since it is the largest economy and arguably the most powerful nation of influence within BRICS. Articles from South Africa will also be reviewed since South Africa's involvement in BRICS is highly contested and controversial.

A reflection on the articles representative of the Chinese interests in BRICS raises concerns of transparency and potential power conflicts. With reference to transparency, it is of marked interest to note the fact that all three of China's articles relate more broadly to international relations and China's overall positioning within BRICS as opposed to in- country dilemmas and conflict or critique. This is in contrast to the other BRICS countries' articles that present within- country dilemmas and conflict more transparently in addition to engage with BRICS global governance and international relations concerns.

Obvious potential power relationships between China's positioning within BRICS are questioned from China's plans (Chapter 3) to expand engagement with Indo-pacific nations for the purposes of ensuring domestic economic and political security. Debate and resistance will most certainly ensue from thinkers concerned with BRICS becoming China's "constructive tool" (p. 78) to promote its own self-preserving and -serving interests that may possibly lead to their future domination of the BRICS collaboration. China's presentation of their currency becoming an international currency adds to the potential of this becoming a real risk with global implications that extend beyond BRICS. It would be erroneous to assume any BRICS country involvement as altruistic, but the positioning of China's articles within this book lack the self- critique and reflection in relation to international relations that other countries have actively sought to engage with.

A major problematic that was discussed in the prologue and that persists in the South African narrative, is the controversial inclusion of South Africa, which is the smallest emerging economy of the BRICS partners, into the BRIC quartet. Key concerns discussed include South Africa's democratic human rights culture which may be at conflict with Russia's and China's (and BRICS as a collective's) economic, trade, technological and investment priorities. This deserves attention since BRICS countries are inevitably also joined politically. The pressures of such partnering may be already manifest in what Greg Mills argues as South Africa's progressive foreign policy denigration with a decreased commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law as South Africa moves towards government sovereignty like Russia and China (Chapter 20).

Debate surrounding South Africa's positioning as the representative or proxy of the African continent is discussed citing the potential for continental rejection (at the extreme) of such positioning in Chapters 20 and 21. Other points of contention surround South Africa's historical productive (or lack thereof) involvement with political and economic affairs on the African continent; South Africa's trade relations with China; the potential manipulation of South Africa in advancing the agendas of more powerful BRICS nations; (Chapter 21); and the piggybacking of South Africa on the backs of the individual and combined power of the four BRICS nations contributed in part by a lack of clear direction or consensus on South Africa's actual contribution in bringing about a new BRICS global order (Chapter 22). It must be noted that South Africa's involvement in BRICS is complex and there are a number of concerns that have not been mentioned above that are raised in the book. The articles included in the book offer a constructive evaluation of the critiques and benefits of South Africa's inclusion, forming the foundation of what is needed to forge a path forward that will prevent South Africa becoming the token African puppet.

The book is not the most pleasant of reads. The extensive use of legal jargon and Latin words does require having Google on call. You most certainly will not be staying up past your bedtime in eager anticipation of what lies beyond the next page. The book, however, is not meant to be a mainstream page turner. It is practical and complex in its objectives to educate, to defuse and ignite apprehensions, as it is in its encouragement for further debate and dialogue. Whilst the book, as the editors express, is not meant to be the final word or book written on the subject of BRICS, it serves well as a book that is essential reading for any persons interested in BRICS and its claim of bringing forward a new global order.

**Title:** *Laying the BRICS of a New Global Order - FROM YEKATERINBURG 2009 to ETHEKWINI 2013*  
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