Repositório ISCTE-IUL

South–South education relations

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Introduction

While scholarly interest in South–South cooperation (SSC) has substantially grown over the past decade, South–South education relations have received only scant attention in the Anglophone academic literatures on SSC, international development and international and comparative education. This chapter adopts an historical and global approach to this topic in an effort to contribute to closing this research gap. The chapter unfolds as follows: the first section introduces the concepts of 'the South' and 'South–South cooperation', counter-posed with practices of 'triangular collaboration' and 'best practice transfer'. On this basis, the second section conducts a critical review of existing South–South education cooperation literatures. Framed by these discussions, two case studies of contemporary South–South education relations are presented: the Cuban, globally deployed *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* (Sure, I Can!) literacy method; and the education cooperation agenda of the so-called BRICS.[1] The conclusion resumes the question of whether South–South education cooperation simply represents 'best practice transfer' or Third World solidarity for global transformation, while proposals for a future research agenda are developed.

Conceptual Clarifications

Two complementary conceptualisations of 'the South' are of relevance to this chapter. In nation-state-centric terms, 'the South' is a group of developing countries, a geographic North–South binary as depicted on the well-known front cover of the 1980 'Brandt Report'. More recently, 'global South' has also become associated with a 'relationship of inequality' not only among states but also social actors and forces within countries (Chisholm 2009, p. 3; Lechini 2012). Evoking Manuel Castell's (2000) notion of the 'Fourth World', 'global South' thus embodies socio-geographic inequalities, whereby a collective transnational political identity can be produced through people's shared experiences of exclusion, marginalisation, exploitation and disenfranchisement (Angosto-Ferrández 2014). The *global* South thus implies coexisting intra-, inter- and transnational power asymmetries and a simultaneous

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[1] The acronym 'BRIC' for Brazil, Russia, India and China first appeared in an article by Goldman Sachs consultant O'Neill (2001) when looking for potential alternative investment markets, and grouping these countries was based on demographic projections, accumulated capital models, production growth analysis, and GDP size. The first formal meeting of the four countries through their foreign ministers was held in September 2006. In 2010, South Africa joined to form 'BRICS'. On other geographies of educational cooperation, see Waters and Leung (this volume).

'possibility of solidarities' among political and social forces that resist and seek to transform these inequalities (Werner 2012, p. 142, note 1).[2]

While much of the contemporary literature speaks of 'South–South and triangular cooperation' (frequently by reference to the 2011 Busan Partnership agreement that evolved from the OECD-DAC orchestrated Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Busan, South Korea), the difference between 'South–South cooperation' and 'triangular collaboration' is crucial for analytical rigour. Grounded in dependency theory, SSC refers to the post-Second World War (approximately 1947–1981) idea of Third World emancipation, decolonisation and collective self-reliance for structural transformation toward greater political and economic independence or autonomy from the capitalist core (Chaturvedi 2012; Gosovic 2016). The principles of solidarity, complementarity and cooperation, as established in the 1967 Group of 77 (G-77) Charter of Algiers, are associated with 'equal and reciprocal relationships with other developing countries', 'non- interference' (i.e. sovereignty) and avoidance of 'political conditionality' (UNESCO 2014, p. 49). Defined thus, SSC excludes members of the OECD-DAC, instead seeking partnerships among members of the Group of 77 (G-77+China) and the Non-Aligned Movement (on these principles and histories, see Aneja, this volume; Saney, this volume; Omata, this volume). Subsequently, South– South education relations in this chapter are taken to be state-led policies (state- financed and regulated) while, as especially the case of *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* shows, other activities (provision, ownership) can be performed by collective social and political non-state actors and forces outside the logic of profit maximisation as pursued by transnational private education corporations.[3] This broadly accords with the distinction of two models of education governance, one related to neoliberal 'transnationalisation' in the interests of transnational corporations, including the establishment of North university subsidiaries in the South and the sale of academic licences; the other one to 'international' and 'horizontal cooperation', i.e. 'respectful of the idiosyncrasies and identities of the participating countries' (Tünnermann Bernheim 2009, pp. 51–52). As has been shown with respect to Brazil, the two strategies of 'commodification and solidarity' can coexist in national education policies (Azevedo 2015). It is important to highlight here that much of the international and comparative education literature speaks of 'internationalisation' (e.g., with respect to student mobility) when actually referring to transnationalisation.

SSC as Third World emancipation is distinct to SSC as 'triangular collaboration' – promoted since the late 1990s in the context of neoliberalisation – in which international agencies and governments of the North act as 'brokers' for 'best practice transfer' among developing countries (Sá e Silva 2009). An authoritative definition of 'best practice transfer', or 'policy transfer', views this as a 'process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies,

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[2] Following globalisation, human geography and global governance literatures, 'international' connotes official relations between national governments or inter-nation-state relations, while 'transnational' refers to border-crossing forces, institutions and processes, i.e. relations that traverse or interpenetrate across national boundaries and territories.
[3] Drawing from the notion of four specific sets of activities in education governance: funding; regulation (control); provision (delivery); and ownership (Dale 2005).

administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system"'
(Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, p. 5).

Two key criticisms of such practice are fundamental to our discussion of South–
South education relations in this chapter. First, 'transfer' can be of a more or less
coercive nature, ranging from voluntary 'lesson-drawing' to direct and indirect
imposition through, inter alia, international institutional pressures (e.g., OECD, IMF,
G-7, think tanks), transnational corporations, and mechanisms such as conditionalities
tied to loans and grants (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). As a relation of inequality
regarding actor autonomy, the coercive element in 'transfer' underscores the
difference between triangular collaboration and SSC as a 'counter-dependency'
strategy: unlike *dependency* as a relation of inequality that implies 'the absence of
actor autonomy', *dependence* connotes 'asymmetric interdependence' which, as a
relation of 'mutual control' and 'reliance', is legitimate if consensual (Caporaso
1978). Since autonomy or 'total self-reliance' appears illusionary for especially
resource-poor nations, 'controlled dependence' is a more egalitarian relation as the
partners can 'affect the fundamental nature of their relationships' despite the existing
power asymmetries in interdependent South–South relationships (Erisman 1991, p.
143).

Therefore, the solidarity and 'win-win' relations associated with SSC should not per
se be equated with altruism and absence of interests and power asymmetries. Rather,
while the principles of solidarity, complementarity and cooperation can imply
altruism, commercial and political interests are equally part of South–South relations
(Muhr 2016a). However, this does not axiomatically translate into a competitive
market and profit maximisation logic. For example, depending on the partner's
economic situation, Cuban socialist internationalism, which has been instrumental in
Latin America-Caribbean South–South cooperation, has at times charged (variable)
commercial rates for services, although below world market prices (see Erisman
1991; Hickling-Hudson *et al.* 2012b, p. 19). Therefore, what is decisive is whether
South–South interdependences generate South counter-dependency – that is,
collective self-reliance.

Subsequently, the second major criticism of 'transfer' views this as a depoliticisation
of SSC as merely a technicality 'no longer rooted in the political mobilization of the
South' (Sá e Silva 2009, p. 51). The instrumentalisation, cooptation and
reconceptualisation of SSC as transfer rather than 'collective process' undermines the
'organic, political and potentially innovative nature of South–South cooperation'
(Jules and Sá e Silva 2008, p. 58).

International and comparative education literatures echo these discussions. With the
World Bank adopting its self-styled role as a global 'knowledge bank' in the 1990s, it
simultaneously assumed the role of a 'monitor and lender of "best practices"'
(Steiner-Khamsi 2007, p. 285), with other organisations of global governance,
including Transparency International and United Nations (UN) agencies, following
suit. Together with such donor conditionalities as efficiency and effectiveness
(performance enhancement) and practices of benchmarking, ranking and scoring
associated with 'international standards', best practice transfer has been considered a
'unidirectional' mechanism that advances 'interstate competition, coercion and
convergence' (Steiner-Khamsi 2007, pp. 285–286). Subsequently, UNESCO has also

adopted best practice transfer 'as a tool within its overall EFA [Education for All] program and strategy' (Sá e Silva 2009, p. 50). Even in documents that make reference to the post-Second World War spirit of SSC, such as the UNESCO (2014) *BRICS: Building Education for the Future* report, the view of SSC as a technicality rather than political process dominates, stating that BRICS should 'learn from one another' for improvement of the 'effectiveness' of their cooperation programmes (p. 3).

Literature review

With the conceptual discussions of the previous section in mind, the following analytical literature review limits itself to contemporary academic publications that relate to SSC as a state-interventionist policy and potentially counter-dependency solidarity effort. Projects and relations within the market rationale of privatisation and commoditisation, such as the Turkish government's educational cooperation with the Turkic Republics (Yanik 2004), are not considered. As such, the review serves to set up the context for the case studies to follow, and no claims to completeness are made.

From a scoping of the literature, it appears that the only current academic book in English that signals the mere existence of the field of South–South education and development cooperation in its title is Linda Chisholm and Gita Steiner-Khamsi's (2009) volume *South–South Cooperation in Education and Development*. While raising important questions regarding definitions of 'the South' and practices of policy transfer, however, the assembled case studies barely transcend triangular collaboration initiatives and those involving OECD-DAC members (such as Japan), transnational corporations, and private and NGO actors (also see Heyneman 2010). Among the literature that engages with South–South education relations without necessarily making this explicit, two broad camps can be discerned: a mainstream approach, embedded in liberal and (neo)realist international relations theories; and a critical theory approach, associated with counter-dependency thinking. In what follows, we discuss both.

Most generally, the mainstream literature relies on a methodologically nationalist 'country' approach as a basis for comparison (e.g., Robertson and Dale 2008), frequently with liberal and (neo)realist underpinnings of nation-state competition and behaviourist 'soft power' (states viewed as subjects that have the ability to affect other states to 'obtain preferred outcomes by co-option and attraction' (Nye 2010, p. 216). Much of this literature concentrates on higher education in the BRIC/BRICS grouping, and individual members thereof, especially China and Brazil. A close look reveals, however, that major publications in this area are simply collections of individual country studies without exploring relations, agendas and synergies generated among South actors. For example, Carnoy *et al.* (2013) compare 'BRIC state behaviour' (p. 26) in national higher education policy-making 'to develop a broad picture of the higher education system in each country' (p. 4); Altbach and collaborators (Altbach *et al.* 2013) compare 'the academic systems and challenges of each of the BRIC countries', pointing to 'aggressive international strategies' by each of these 'countries' to 'compete with each other for prestige and placement in the global rankings' (pp. viii–ix); and, Oleksiyenko and Yang's (2015) special issue

collection of a 'comparison' of BRICS members' higher education 'internationalization policies' is mostly concerned with transnational, North-oriented and neoliberal cooperation initiatives and 'soft power diplomacies' (p. 3).

Inherently Eurocentric, this literature takes the established global ranking and benchmarking regimes and/or North (higher) education systems as references for comparison. As Carnoy *et al.* (2013) insist, 'the BRIC countries will likely have to make some major investments in order to bring their higher education systems in line with the U.S./European models of research universities' (p. 14). Similarly, while Lane and Kinser's (2013) comparison of 'nonpublic' (i.e. non-state) forms of 'provider-based cross-border higher education' recognises the dominance of Western governments and NGOs in shaping African higher education, they equally view Chinese, Brazilian and Indian state cooperation with African governments in this sector as driven by 'economic competitiveness and soft power' (pp. 106–107, 119). And, by reference to the two contributions in their collection that engage in some detail with SSC in education (China, Chapter 8; India, Chapter 10), Cheng and Chan (2015) conclude that 'China and India are intent on aid intervention in education as a soft power to reidentify themselves as education hubs and regional leaders exerting greater influence over developing Asia' (p. 246).

As Jules and Sá e Silva (2008) highlight in their review of different disciplinary approaches to SSC and transfer, within the (neo)realist view of nation-states as homogeneous, rationally behaving units locked into permanent struggle for survival and domination ('power politics', e.g., Buzan *et al.* 1998), 'real cooperation is unlikely' (Jules and Sá e Silva 2008, p. 53). Within this approach, SSC is a state's tool to pursue its interests, and 'soft power' depicts power as a unidirectional mechanism (rather than relational-dialectical) in which the affected is inherently objectified. As King (2013) points out in his *China's Aid & Soft Power in Africa*, 'soft power' means a 'winner-loser' relation that rules out the essence of SSC, namely, of common or mutual interests (such as the objective of self-reliance), solidarity, equality, win-win cooperation and mutual benefit (pp. 10–11, 193–194). Probably the most thorough analysis available on South–South education relations, King's six-year research 'safari' (ibid., p. 208) from 2006 and 2012 conducts a historically grounded critical comparison of 'the difference and similarities of China's cooperation with that of traditional [OECD-DAC] donors' (ibid., p. x), distinctly through 'China's lens on cooperation' in education and training (which the Chinese government refers to as 'human resource development') (ibid., p. ix). This permits identifying 'policy learning' as *mutual* or bidirectional learning, rather than 'policy transfer'. While King detects contradictions in China's more recent official SSC discourse, and proposes an ambiguous 'soft soft power' or 'soft power "with Chinese characteristics"' (2013, p. 207), the book as a whole in fact refutes the transfer of the notion of 'soft power' from the USA's foreign policy discourse to China's cooperation practice. Even less doubt about this is left in Niu and Liu's (2016) historical account of Chinese-African education relations grounded in the Confucian philosophy of peace and harmony, friendship and mutual benefit (on China's philanthropy over time, see Reeves, this volume).

Other critical education work adopts a more explicit counter-dependency approach. Most prominently, perhaps, is Hickling-Hudson's prolonged research into education in the Cuban Revolution, which has evolved into an edited volume that

comprehensively illuminates the multi-dimensionality of Cuban 'internationalism integrating solidarity and South–South cooperation' in education, 'based not on market-norms (profits and competition)' (Hickling-Hudson *et al.* 2012a, pp. 4-5) – in partner countries such as Bolivia, Jamaica, Ghana, Namibia, Timor-Leste and Venezuela. Similarly, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's (2015) multi-sited ethnography conducted since 2001 in Algeria, Cuba, Lebanon, Libya and Syria thoroughly visibilises socialist education internationalism in the form of the Cuban and Libyan state-provided free-of-charge primary, secondary and tertiary education to Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees within and beyond the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. A relational analysis of the refugee-students' mobilities disaggregates the 'trans-regional, intergenerational and multi-directional' (ibid., p. 6) complexities of these education programmes while identifying contradictory outcomes regarding self-sufficiency and dependency on Northern aid. Finally, there is a body of critical work that approaches South–South cooperation through the lens of regional integration (regionalisms) and multi-scalar governance. This includes the deprivatisation and decommoditisation of education, and enhanced equity in access to education in/through the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – Peoples' Trade Agreement (in its Castilian acronym, ALBA-TCP) and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) (e.g., Muhr 2010, 2016b); and, as an expression of the overt class struggle in Latin America-Caribbean, contesting political projects of higher education governance in MERCOSUR (Azevedo 2014; Perrotta 2016).

Case studies of South–South education relations

On the basis of the preceding review, the following case studies of the *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* global literacy campaign and the BRICS education agenda seek to underscore the relevance of education as an indispensable dimension in SSC as a 'political project of emancipation, liberation, political and economic independence' and 'system-changing process' (Gosovic 2016, pp. 733, 740). Arguably, this objective requires a holistic approach to education that includes formal and non-formal modalities at any level of the educational process. Thus the two case studies extend the reductionist focus on South–South *higher* education relations that dominates the existing literature.

¡Yo, Sí Puedo!: global SSC for literacy[4]

¡Yo, Sí Puedo! was developed in the early 2000s by Leonela Relys Díaz at the Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute (Instituto Pedagógico Latinoamericano y Caribeño, IPLAC), which belongs to the Cuban Ministry of Education. Although *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* is often used synonymously with the associated literacy campaigns or programmes, strictly speaking the name denominates an alphanumeric method that makes use of audio-visual technology. The focus here, however, is neither the method itself nor its quantitative achievements. Rather, this section contests two interrelated assumptions: that the globalisation of *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* simply constitutes policy and/or

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[4] This section is based on Muhr (2015). The interested reader is pointed to this article for background literature to the argument developed.

best practice 'transfer' (see Jules and Sá e Silva 2008, p. 57; Sá e Silva 2009, p. 52; Steele 2008, p. 36); and that 'the quest for Third World autonomy' is merely 'part of the discourse' of SSC (Sá e Silva 2009, p. 53), rather than really existing practice.

The globalisation of *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* originates in the Cuban Revolution's decades-long South–South solidarity in education, and it is worth recalling that historically Cuban 'internationalism' always involved interstate relations as well as transnational support to revolutionary movements. Accordingly, *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* has been globalised through inter-governmental SSC, especially among the 11 member states of the ALBA-TCP, founded by the Republic of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2004. In fact, the first internationalisation of the method occurred in the form of the Venezuelan government's national literacy campaign *Misión Robinson* (Mission Robinson), launched on 1 July 2003. Subsequently, and increasingly also with Venezuelan support, to date *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* has been deployed in at least 27 Latin America-Caribbean countries by both governments and non-state actors (such as Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, *MST*), as well as in Africa (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa), Asia (especially Timor-Leste), and in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Spain and the USA. In most – if not all – of these cases, cooperation has been requested by global South political and social actors and forces – community- and movements-based groups and associations (rather than NGOs and for-profit business sectors), political parties, and/or sub-national political entities such as municipal governments. Thus, the globalisation of *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* is a demand-driven, purely voluntary and conditionality-free process, whereby the Cuban solidarity cooperation typically comprises advisors and logistics (TV sets, video players, teaching materials, in some cases solar panels for energy generation in remote zones, general health checks including eyesight tests, and reading glasses). Importantly, it is the partners that take the lead in contextualising (assuming ownership) and implementing the campaign in their localities (delivery). By 2015, the method had been adapted to at least 14 different socio-linguistic contexts, including Aymara, Creole, English, Guarani, Portuguese, Quechua, Swahili, Tetum and Braille.

The Nicaraguan case is illustrative of this while underscoring the difference between instrumental 'lesson-learning' and 'collective process' (cooperation) grounded in political mobilisation. Following a cooperation request by the Managua-based Carlos Fonseca Amador Popular Education Association (*Asociación de Educación Popular Carlos Fonseca Amador*) in 2005, the Cuban government provided the *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* method alongside six advisors and resources for 5,000 so- called 'literacy points'. The following two years, *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* was implemented through an alliance of the Cuban state, the Fonseca Amador Association and Nicaraguan municipal councils, whereby the Fonseca Amador Association was responsible for technical and pedagogical coordination, training and evaluation, while the participating municipalities established Municipal Commissions for Literacy. With the return of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to national government power in 2007, and Nicaragua joining the ALBA-TCP, *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* was universalised as the national literacy campaign 'From Martí to Fidel' (launched on 23 June 2007), supported by 86 Cuban advisors and 61 Venezuelan *brigadistas*. By 2009, when UNESCO declared Nicaragua as illiteracy-free, 57,631 voluntary literacy workers had been mobilised; in 2013, 13,519 literacy points actively involved 75,018 learners. While Nicaragua might not be representative of all contexts in which *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!*

is deployed – due to the nation's historical trajectory of socialist revolution – over 1.1 million people (of a total population of about six million in 2014) are annually mobilised in organised, collective solidarity action (rather than liberal individualistic charity), not only in the literacy campaign but also in other state and ALBA-TCP promoted schemes related to reforestation, public health care and social inclusion (of, for instance, street children).

Even though the political purpose of *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* is rarely made explicit, the available case studies highlight the social mobilisation and emancipatory and empowering elements of the popular education method. For example, as Boughton and Durnan (2017) conclude on the basis of their involvement in *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* in Timor-Leste and Aboriginal Australia, Paulo Freire's 'theory of liberation' becomes 'liberatory practice' in a 'pedagogy of international solidarity' that 'support[s] the development of participation by the least literate in the political processes available to them' in their specific contexts, or 'own existing conditions' (pp. 45–46). Rather than a unidirectional technical transplant driving competition and convergence, *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* epitomises South–South cooperation as a locally appropriated collective process with the potential of building a transnational political identity for global structural transformation toward a socially just and democratic world order.

BRICS: toward a common education cooperation agenda

This case study is a first approximation to the BRICS education agenda, and can be viewed as a response to the relevant literature in two main ways: first, methodologically, to overcome the practice of simply grouping together individual BRICS country studies without exploring common projects, relations and potential synergies within BRICS as a unit. Second, to challenge the reduction of education to *higher* education in the academic literature on BRICS, alongside such premature judgements that 'grouping them [the BRICS countries] for analytical purposes in higher education is simply not relevant' (Altbach and Bassett 2014, p. 2).

An analysis of the seven BRIC(S) declarations and respective action plans between 2009 and 2015 (BRIC 2009, 2010; BRICS 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a) reveals a discursive shift toward a more pronounced and assertive SSC agenda over time. While this is a hybrid discourse that also integrates elements of the 'best practice' discourse, the SSC discourse became increasingly dominant over time.[5] Materially this is underscored by an effort to build a counter- dependency structure. Most significantly, in reaction to the reluctance of North governments to 'reform' (i.e. democratise) the World Bank and the IMF, most vocally called for by the BRIC(S) between 2010 and 2012 (and subsequently largely abandoned), the establishment of the 'New Development Bank' and the 'Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) amongst BRICS countries' emerged on the agenda in 2012, and entered 'into force' in

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[5] For example, the 2015 Declaration is the first and only Declaration in which 'South- South cooperation' and 'win-win' relations are overtly stated. The frequency of the South-South cooperation principles of 'solidarity', 'complementarity', 'mutual benefits' and 'friendship' (as used in China's discourse, see King 2013) in total increased from zero in 2009 to 11 in the 2015 Declaration, just as reference to 'common interests' (or 'mutual' or 'shared' interests) increased from a maximum of one in each of the 2009–2014 Declarations to 10 in 2015.

2015 (BRICS 2015a, Point 2). Pursuit of a more emancipatory politics of the South is further reflected in the objective of enhancing 'the collective role of our countries in international affairs' by, inter alia, consolidating relations with other regional organisations such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (BRICS 2015a, Point 3), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) (BRICS 2014, Point 3). Evoking the idea of the UN New International Economic Order (NIEO), it has been stated that '[i]mproved regulation of the derivatives market for commodities is essential to avoid destabilizing impacts on food and energy supplies' (BRICS 2012, Point 38). Therefore, 'state enterprises' and, to some extent 'cooperatives' (BRICS 2010, 2013, Action Plan), are attributed prominence over private capitalist enterprises and NGOs (see BRICS 2013, Point 18; 2014, Point 23). As Varghese (2015) affirms, BRICS cooperation 'may be seen more through the lens of cooperative development than through the prism of profit operated market operations' (p. 49).

Education is considered only twice in the general BRIC(S) declarations up to 2013 (BRIC 2009, Point 11; BRICS 2012, Point 48). With the 1st Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Education in Paris in November 2013, within the context of the 37th session of the UNESCO General Conference (which formed the basis of the aforementioned UNESCO (2014) *BRICS: Building Education for the Future* report), intra-BRICS education cooperation gained momentum, and a common education agenda was established in 2015 via the 2nd and 3rd Meetings of BRICS Education Ministers and a Meeting of the BRICS Working Group on Education (BRICS 2015b, 2015c, 2015d). This agenda is framed by the hegemonic 'Education for All', 'Millennium Development Goals', and the 'Sustainable Development Goals' with their contradictory association of sustainable development with economic growth (BRICS 2014, Point 56; 2015a, Point 63; 2015e). However, the UNESCO Constitution and the 1998 *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century* are also stated as reference points (BRICS 2015e). Thus appearing more conservative than the general BRICS SSC discourse, a discursive shift can be observed that reinforces this tendency. All three documents emphasise 'lifelong learning opportunities' (BRICS 2015b, 2015c, 2015d), while 'sharing' and 'exchanging' best practices among BRICS members (BRICS 2015b, Points 3, 13) have been replaced by 'implementation' of 'international best practices' (BRICS 2015c, Point 14; 2015d, Point 11). Furthermore, neoliberal 'benchmarking' and 'excellence' entered the discourse in November 2015 (BRICS 2015d, Points 2, 13, 14), as did the view of education as an 'investment' for the 'development of human resources' (BRICS 2015d, Point 17). In this respect, even 'pre-school education' becomes instrumentalised for 'skills and competencies development indispensable for innovative activities' (BRICS 2015c, Point 8) – that is, for economic growth. Simultaneously, references to 'mutual interest' (two instances) and 'synergies' (one instance) (2015b, Points 1, 8, 12), as indicators of a pursued counter-dependency strategy, diminished between March and November to just one entry of 'mutual interest' (BRICS 2015d). In this case, however, 'mutual interest' is stated right in the introductory statement of the Declaration, thus assuming an agenda-setting position, i.e. providing the overall frame of reference for the entire Declaration (on hierarchy and hybridity in discourse studies, see, e.g., Fairclough 2003).

This hybrid discourse, however, gains in complexity by the claim that the 'development of joint methodologies for education indicators' through 'collaboration'

in the form of 'mutual technical support' serves 'to support decision making in BRICS member states' (BRICS 2015b, Point 2; 2015c, Point 7). This suggests that rather than developing indicators for competitive ends, as in the neoliberal project, here *collective development* is pursued: 'cooperation in social and labour relations for establishing full-scale social, political and cultural cooperation and ensuring a qualitatively new level of external relations for BRICS' (BRICS 2015c). As Dilvo Ristoff, Head of the Brazilian delegation in the BRICS meetings until 31 August 2016 (during the Rousseff government), reports, the atmosphere in the meetings of BRICS representatives were always very cordial and productive. The BRICS partner countries treated each other 'as equals and they were looking for a project of mutual interest, a university project that would contribute to the development of all the countries involved' (personal communication, 17 September 2016).

In policy terms, four key cooperation areas are outlined: *Higher Education*; *Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET)*; *General Education*; and *Educational Policy Strategy* (BRICS 2015d). However, 'higher education and research is a priority' (BRICS 2015b, Point 8), whereby the BRICS Universities League (an 'association of BRICS universities' (2015b, Point 9)) and the BRICS Network University (BRICS NU) have been created to drive internationalisation through academic mobility and the establishment of research networks 'in areas of mutual interest' (BRICS 2015b, Point 8): energy; computer science and information security; BRICS studies; ecology and climate change; water resources and pollution treatment; and economics (BRICS 2015e). As the key institution so far, the BRICS NU is not a supranational institution but an international structure among BRICS NU National Coordination Committees, created in each member state by the education ministries, and financed by the participating universities (BRICS 2015e, Article 13). At its foundation stage, this Network University integrates a maximum of 12 state universities from each BRICS member. However, other initiatives within the BRICS education cooperation structure, such as the BRICS Scientific, Technological and Innovation (STI) Framework Programme (for the promotion of joint research projects among partners from at least three BRICS members), are also open to private though not-for-profit institutions (see BRICS 2016). Ristoff, in personal electronic communication with the authors, reveals that Russia proposed the BRICS Network University and China contributed with the idea of a BRICS Universities League, with the understanding that 'both are projects that complement each other' (personal communication, 17 September 2016).

This occurs 'in accordance with national guidelines, norms and regulations in each of the BRICS countries' (BRICS 2015e, Article 11). For example, as Ristoff (2016) shows in a contribution to a newsletter published by the Ural Federal University (Russia), with respect to Brazil, the BRICS Network University and BRICS Universities League are in line with other internationalisation efforts as considered in the National Education Plan 2014–2024: '*(a) to promote scientific and technological exchange, national and international, between universities and (b) to raise the quality and quantity of scientific and technological activity of the country ... expanding scientific cooperation* (p. 17, emphasis in original).

Although it is early to reach even an intermediate conclusion, despite ambiguities and potential contradictions, we nonetheless perceive BRICS education cooperation to contribute to building a counter-dependency structure. While individual member

governments may drive integration in the North-dominated global higher education market such as China and India as 'major "sending" countries' of international students to 'major English-speaking universities' (Altbach and Bassett 2014, p. 2), BRICS cooperation seeks to build on and generate 'synergies' (BRICS 2012, 2015a, 2015b). Since synergies are generated through cooperation *relations*, as in the BRICS Network University, researching these requires a relational methodology rather than a comparison of individual country studies.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the question of whether South–South education relations simply represent 'best practice transfer' or whether they provide an alternative to the commoditisation and privatisation of education, building a counter-structure to the political project of neoliberal global governance of education. Despite noting the dominance of a Euro- or North-centric bias in the Anglophone literature on the topic, we have also identified a body of literature that underscores that the South–South principles of solidarity, mutual benefits and efforts of self-reliance are very much practised. However, claiming that these projects advance a structural challenge to the interests of global capitalism would be far-fetched. Much of the literature reviewed in fact confirms the instrumentalisation and cooptation of SSC as 'triangular collaboration', including through ongoing North-driven initiatives that actively seek to integrate South education systems and cooperation projects into the global neoliberal education circuits. The literature review and our case studies, however, equally reveal that there is more to this picture than meets the eye. In developing some propositions for future studies, this final section draws attention to South–South education projects and relations that receive only marginal attention in the existing literature or are altogether invisibilised by dominant discourses.

First, with respect to bilateral relations, India's SSC in TVET with such partners as Afghanistan, Indonesia, Maldives, Mongolia, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Vietnam and Zimbabwe (Tilak 2016, p. 312) appears under-researched, as are China's education relations with non-African South partners. Equally, entirely absent from academic discussions is Venezuela's large-scale education cooperation initiated in the 2000s with almost all African states (sketched out in some Latin American literature, e.g. Lucena Molero 2013), alongside the Vietnam-Laos and Vietnam-Cambodia SSC in 'education and training and human resource development' (People's Army Newspaper 2016).

Second, with respect to regional formations, while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) receives considerable scholarly attention, the ASEAN education objectives of building an 'ASEAN identity rooted in friendship and cooperation' and 'to promote cooperation and solidarity among scholars, academicians and researchers in ASEAN member states' (Chao 2016, pp. 131, 132) have empirically remained unexplored. The same appears to be true of the African Union sponsored Pan-African University, to which Lane and Kinser (2013, p. 110) point, once envisioned to further 'African emancipation and liberation' and 'challenge the citadel of Eurocentric paradigms and western "scientistic" epistemologies of knowledge' (Nabudere 2003,

p. 2). Likewise, the Pacific Islands Development Forum as a potential scheme for South–South education cooperation (Fox 2014) has largely gone unnoticed.

Third, regarding global multilateral SSC, research gaps persist with respect to the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) Dialogue forum, which, according to Tilak (2016), 'stresses that education is vital for development' (p. 312); and the tri-annual Africa-South America Summits (ASA) among the member states of the African Union and the Union of South American Nations (Unión de Naciones Suramericanas, UNASUR), whose education agenda seeks to, inter alia, 'foster networks of higher education institutions', including the Pan-African University, 'to expand access to higher education, especially for vulnerable groups' (ASA 2013).

Future studies, as this chapter has suggested, will have to be conducted from and by the global South to reclaim the idea of SSC from neutralisation as 'South–South and triangular cooperation'. That is, 'to decentre the hegemonic stranglehold of the Eurocentric epistemological order – to construct more empowering knowledges for the South and symmetrical forms of internationalisation' (Zeleza 2012, p. 5).

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