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Constructing a New World Order through a Narrative of Infrastructural Development: The Case of the BRICS

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Abstract**—**The aim of this research is to understand how the emerging power bloc BRICS employs infrastructure development narratives to construct a new world order. BRICS is an international body consisting of five emerging countries that collaborate on economic and political issues: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. This study explores the projection of infrastructure development narratives through an analysis of BRICS' attention to infrastructure investment and financing, its support of the New Partnership on African Development and the establishment of the New Development Bank in Shanghai. The theory of Strategic Narratives is used to explore BRICS' commitment to infrastructure development and to distinguish three layers: system narratives (BRICS as a global actor to propose development reform), identity narratives (BRICS as a collective identity joining efforts to act upon development aspirations) and issue narratives (BRICS committed to a range of issues of which infrastructure development is prominent). The methodology that is employed is a narrative analysis of BRICS' official documents, media statements, and website imagery. A comparison of these narratives illuminates tensions at the three layers and among the five member states. Identifying tensions among development infrastructure narratives provides an indication of how policymaking for infrastructure development could be improved. Subsequently, it advances BRICS' ability to act as a global actor to construct a new world order.

Keywords**—**BRICS, emerging powers, infrastructural development, strategic narratives.

I. Introduction

THIS study explores the projection of infrastructural development narratives by the BRICS grouping. BRICS is an international body consisting of five emerging countries that collaborate on economic and political issues: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The concept of Strategic Narratives by [1] is employed to identify the projection of official narratives, approved by the BRICS authorities. Strategic narratives are: ´… representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors – usually elites – attempt to give determined meaning to past, present, and future in order to achieve political objectives´. Therefore, the aim of this study is how to make sense of the development trajectory of the BRICS. There are three types of narratives: system narrative which explores the framework of the international system; identity narrative, which addresses the storylines concerning the actors that act within and upon the international system; and issue narrative, which builds on the policy discussions regarding particular topic areas [1]. The central question of this study is: How is the emerging power bloc BRICS engaging in infrastructural development narratives to construct a new world order? The issue of infrastructural development is about policy commitments for better physical connectivity. While the BRICS are committed to a wide range of issues, this study pays particular attention to this issue due to the pledge of the BRICS´ New Development Bank (NDB) to fund infrastructure projects [2] and a personal interest in transport systems. The concept of a new world order is explored under the heading of a new international system to accommodate the needs and desires of the rising nations. The methodology that is employed is a narrative analysis of BRICS' official declarations and media statements [3]. It can be argued that the projection of infrastructural development narratives under the heading of the BRICS grouping is less coherent and less reliable than it could be, and one way to address this would be to create cohesive and comprehensive communication. This article aspires to identify and evaluate the three strategic narratives projected by the BRICS. Subsequently, this study reflects on the argumentation of the narratives and discusses the employment of narrative techniques probability and fidelity. Author Walter Fisher explains these concepts as follow:

> Human communication is tested against the principles of probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability). Probability, whether a story "hangs together," is assessed in three ways: by its *argumentative* or *structural coherence*; by its *material coherence*, that is, by comparing and contrasting stories told in other discourses (a story may be internally consistent, but important facts may be omitted, counterarguments ignored, and relevant issues overlooked); and by *characterological coherence* [4].

Conclusively, this study offers tentative recommendations to make communication by the BRICS grouping more strategic.

II. System Narratives

The desirable framework of international affairs is one where reform of the existing order provides a more fair and democratic world order. The BRICS grouping proposes a dispersal of power, arguing for a more inclusive international system. A narrative analysis of the BRICS Joint Declarations

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resulted in three approaches towards a new modus operandi. First, the aspiration for a new mechanism should be considered. It is also called a new format, a new model and a new tool. The system of international affairs should refresh itself: it must be more accountable and fair. The second approach could be called the new quality of growth. This is based on the renewal and remaking of existing industries and economic sectors. It emphasizes renewable energy and the remake of the monetary and financial mechanism. The third approach of newness is the renewed commitment of solidarity towards the Global South. The new mechanism should benefit the neighboring countries. In that sense, BRICS grouping is framed as a crusader for the rights of the Global South, rather than a threat considering their economic weight regionally.

The BRICS group is dedicated to multilateral approaches to reach agreements in the areas of trade, global governance, and sustainable development. In that sense, BRICS´ commitment to a multilateral approach is more pervasive than the aspiration for a multipolar world. As one could counter argue that this idea is shortsighted, the official agreements and media statements hardly mention it. Therefore, it is more an issue of a new mechanism than a joint vision of power distribution in international affairs. The following commitment connects multilateralism to specific modus operandi: ´We do not support plurilateral initiatives that go against the fundamental principles of transparency, inclusiveness, and multilateralism´ [5]. The BRICS aim for an inclusive and transparent operation of global institutions and discussions. Constructive outcomes can only be achieved if all actors in international affairs are given a voice in the decision-making processes. Multilateralism is associated with democratic governance, peace, and order.

The official declarations do not communicate the aspiration for a new world order as such. The projection of a new system of international affairs is phrased in unprovocative wording, disguised under the heading of democratizing the world. The analysis identified a subtle departure from the existing structure, while avoiding a confrontational approach. The official declarations reinforced BRICS commitment to the New Economic Partnership for Africa´s Development (NEPAD). In addition, the ´new´ adjective is visible in the joint operation of the New Development Bank that was launched in July 2015 [6]. These institutions reinforce BRICS´ aspiration for new mechanisms to facilitate development. As it is in BRICS joined interest to maintain economic growth, there is the wish for empowerment in global institutions in terms of voting rights and representation. The BRICS aim to create a system where they have more governing and executive power in light of the financial and monetary hardship caused by the economic crisis in 2008 and onwards.

The BRICS envision an alternative mechanism, which coexists harmoniously with global governing bodies. Reform of the existing structure should be attentive to the desirable improvement of voting and representation power for the BRICS governments. The following commitment exemplifies BRICS view towards the World Bank: ´The IMF and the World Bank urgently need to address their legitimacy deficits´ [7]. Media statements by leaders provide a more sentimental motive: ´The reform of international financial institutions remains a thorn in the flesh for us in the developing world' [8]. In that sense, BRICS do not only envision new mechanisms, but request the restructuring of existing models. Law-abiding state behavior, policies for sustainable development and compliance with the UN Charter are key priorities within this restructuring process.

The system narrative of a new reality emphasizes the transitional phase of international affairs in the Twenty-First Century. Not having identified a literal projection of a narrative of Western decline, the new reality represents the changing global economy foremost. The production and consumption of these new emerging countries has altered the center of international affairs. The following media statement reiterates this argument: 'in recent years, we have seen changes in the quota shares at the IMF, reflecting the changes in the global economy. We welcome these changes as they reflect a new reality' [8]. The idea of a new reality references a shift in power distribution in international affairs, without being conclusive of its new status quo. The role of the G20 is highly appreciated, as it represents a larger share of the new powerful nations in the world. As stated: ´Compared to previous arrangements, the G-20 is broader, more inclusive, diverse, representative and effective´ [7]. BRICS is loyal to the G20 due to the broad-based support for global economic governance. This transitional phase fosters a reality where the proliferation of new groupings accommodates the changing distribution of economic power.

III. Identity Narratives

The identity narrative of the BRICS collective is based on their joined aspiration for sustainable and inclusive development. The storylines that accommodate the diverse identities of these five countries are based on five key features. It is based on their image of emerging countries; the narrative of preferred inclusion; the collaboration of the five leaders which is most visible during the BRICS summits; their commitment to the United Nations; and their strong defense of state sovereignty.

First of all, the BRICS represent a concept of emerging countries in the world order. This is based on their mutual but country-specific development phase. This approach accommodates the diversity among the five states; each member is walking its own development ´path´. President Putin addressed the issue of diversity tactically in a media statement: ´The agenda of the BRICS summit was very busy and substantive, which is a direct reflection of the diversity and depth of interaction between our five countries' [9]. The diversity aspect is tackled through the wide-ranging agenda. There are many challenges that deepen the quest for joined collaboration.

BRICS identity narrative builds on the shared experience of neglect and peripheral positioning in international affairs. The BRICS project a narrative of preferred inclusion. Following a history of power struggles, the sentiment for recognition is based on shared anti-colonial statements as this statement

exemplifies: ´India's relations with Africa are rooted in the history of our solidarity against colonialism and apartheid´ [10]. Similar experiences offer the foundation for recognition and mutual trust. It creates leverage for overcoming diversity among the five states. The aspiration of inclusion is based on their prosperity, their structural progress over the last decade and the sentiment of economic and political maturity. This narrative of preferred inclusion is extended to the Global South of which they pledge solidarity for.

Third, their identity is based on the collaboration of the five leaders (since 2011 when South Africa was invited as a member of BRIC). Each of the BRICS Joint Declarations start with a similar statement: ´We, the leaders of the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa … ´ [11]. It is the leaders that are elected to govern the country and solicit for beneficial international arrangements that are at the heart of BRICS group identity. It can be argued that this idea is reinforced by the imagery of BRICS summits where the five leaders are standing side by side as equal partners. The BRICS countries have developed a range of ministerial consultations, working groups and industry-specific meetings at these summits. However, it is argued that it is at the annual BRICS summit where we see by far the most visible interaction. Furthermore, what joins them is their shared commitment to uphold the UN Charter. The United Nations represent a fair and multilateral mechanism: 'We affirmed the need for comprehensive, transparent and efficient multilateral approaches to addressing global challenges, and in this regard underscored the central role of the United Nations in the ongoing efforts to find common solutions to such challenges' [2]. The identity narrative of the BRICS is based on their group image as well as their intra-BRICS behavior with respect to the UN. One of these examples is in the area of security, in which Brazil, India and South Africa aspire to be permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: ´China and Russia reiterate the importance they attach to the status and role of Brazil, India and South Africa in international affairs and support their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN´ [2]. BRICS´ commitment to the United Nations is repeatedly articulated in public documents.

Last, the importance of state sovereignty ties in with the fair executive power of the UN. Equality and autonomy are important principles in the decision-making processes. The prosperity and development of each state individually is to be respected in the international arena. The narrative of non-interference is of great importance to all five BRICS governments. This commitment is not only applicable in terms of their state sovereignty. It also concerns other states, as the following example illustrates: 'With regards to Syria, our view is that her transformation process should be primarily a home-grown one, with the support of the global community, in order to ensure that Syrian society as a whole accepts ownership of the outcome of the process'[8]. This statement exemplifies their agreement to respect state sovereignty, while reinforcing their own strong hold to autonomy.

IV. Issue Narratives

The BRICS group is committed to a range of issues ranging in the field of global governance, security, trade, monetary mechanisms and sustainable development. The analysis of BRICS documents suggests a central role for the issue narrative of infrastructural development. The following statement by the Russian President Vladimir Putin reinforces this view: 'Thus, the New Bank will start funding joint large-scale projects in transport and energy infrastructure and in industrial development. We plan to develop a long-term list of specific projects, the so-called roadmap of investment cooperation by the end of the year' [9]. Therefore, infrastructure is a central issue in accommodating BRICS vision and long term objectives. The narrative is based on shared rights and responsibilities to facilitate large-scale and capital intensive projects.

The declarations and media statements address infrastructure from the angle of foreign direct investment and long-term financing. In addition, it is related to the sectors of transport, energy, and communication. The need for infrastructural development is particularly emphasized in order to address the infrastructure gap in Africa. Enabling infrastructure is seen to foster trickle-down effects in terms of job creation, sustainable development, and poverty eradication among others. The key facilitator to accommodate the issue narrative is through the mechanism of the New Development Bank. As the NDB is still in its initial phase, the selection of projects and the conditions for execution are unknown at time of writing. The bank is considered an alternative to the existing institutions of which the need for infrastructure by the Global South was not met sufficiently. In that sense, the issue narrative of infrastructural development is that of sheer necessity to enable sustainable development.

BRICS envisions complimentary and comprehensive collaboration in which each member is strengthened by their partner´s complimentary industries and sectors. Collaboration is subjected to multiple principles ensuring the beneficial participation for all five member states. The following example illustrates this: 'Their cooperation should be based on the principles of voluntary participation, equality, mutual benefit, reciprocity and subject to the availability of resources for collaboration by each country and having in mind the variable geometry of the research and development systems of the BRICS member countries' [12]. The documents are also attentive to competition challenges. Collaboration addresses fair competition policies. In that sense, collaboration has many appearances. The facilitation of issues draws on mutual beneficial approaches to accommodate the needs and challenges of each member state.

V. Discussion on Credibility and Comprehensiveness

This section provides a critical analysis of BRICS official strategic narratives. First, it is important to emphasize that BRICS strategic narratives are not entirely inconsistent. As one can witness the renewal of commitments in consecutive years, it enforces the credibility of their intentions. It can be

argued that the projection of infrastructural development narratives under the heading of the BRICS grouping is less coherent and less reliable than it could potentially be. To illustrate this argument, the concepts of probability and fidelity are used to evaluate the BRICS strategic narratives.

Comprehensive collaboration is from an idealistic perspective the most effective way to move forward. However, in spite of these good intentions, BRICS collaboration does not have visible beneficial impact on individual member states' aspirations. In terms of security, the solicitation of India, Brazil, and South Africa for permanent seats of the UNSC is blocked by at least two of the five BRICS members [13]. While BRICS´ commitment is preceded with the necessity for a more representative and efficient functioning of the UNSC, the commitment only reinforces a greater role for these countries in the UN [2], [5] [7], [11]. Membership of the BRICS does not effectively enforce reform if national power is negatively affected. The commitment to the UN is therefore not holistic, but council and case specific. Therefore, a realistic approach is advisable to empower BRICS strategic narratives. Another issue is the execution of a fair process in order to improve characterological coherence. BRICS narrative is devoted to fair and democratic decision-making processes. However, what is BRICS´ approach towards the tension between national and international law? Also, how are they approaching bureaucratic procedures that are in each country different? Diversity in terms of socio-economic and political practices might not be a problem rhetorically. However, it can become a problem in terms of practical collaboration among lower level bureaucrats. How are language and different business cultures addressed accordingly? It would be advisable to address the different cultural characteristics in their strategic narratives in order to execute collaboration effectively.

What jeopardizes the coherency of the BRICS strategic narratives is the negative approach towards the United States in terms of sustainable development. While the US is an important stakeholder for most of these member states, the country is framed as the obstacle to their aspiration for global governance reform. In particular, with the 2010 IMF reform promises that have not been executed in 2015. The development paradigm does not include the engagement of the advanced countries. This results in a dialectical conflict in which aspirations of inclusive global governance coexist with narratives of exclusion. This tension might temper the will of the United States to ratify the agreements. In terms of Europe, this continent is addressed in a more favorable light due to the representation of Europe through Russia´s membership in the BRICS: ´The BRICS countries represent Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, which gives their cooperation a transcontinental dimension making it especially valuable and significant´ [12]. As Western-Russia is officially part of Europe, contemporary political and economic tensions undermine the representation it aspires. It could be argued that Russia´s participation is more seen as the intensification of Asian relations than a transcontinental dimension that is Europe-inclusive.

In terms of the execution of the projects, how are these countries reconciling competition policy and a history of corruption in both public and private agencies? This question deals with probability, how is the story hanging together? How to enforce competition in line with oligopoly of particular industries? In the case of infrastructural development, Brazil has only a handful of corporations dealing with large-scale construction and development projects internationally. How is BRICS enforcing a competitive climate? Given BRICS endorsement of state owned enterprises, what are the accountability mechanisms in light of contemporary events such as Operation Car Wash (Petrobras scandal) in Brazil? This raises the question; how are they truly innovating development? While the public statements acknowledge the different availability of resources that each country has at its disposal, it can alter the collaboration due to power struggles. It is argued that features such as competitiveness and accountability are not enough addressed.

The strategic narratives are arguably aimed at the elites of these five member states. One needs high education, access to information and power to execute commitments for the declarations to be meaningful. While this is not necessarily a problem, it brings tension in terms of sustainability. Are these narratives transferrable to lower management? It can be argued that in the current state they are not. In that sense, the strategic narratives are less truthful to the public. A counter argument could be that the BRICS authorities are having a different audience in mind. In that case, the narratives coincide with the target audience.

With the renewal and remake of established industries such as banking and the energy sector, one must wonder what is different in BRICS´ approach from previous development structures. This is an example of material incoherence. As renewable energy is a relatively new field in which collaboration is desired among the five, the reform of the banking system is based on the same economic and financial principles. If the banking system is based on neoliberal policies, is the BRICS approach a significant new model? In that case, the development paradigm is merely played by different actors; it didn´t change the game as such. In addition, it is envisioned that democratic governance would result in better regulation and procedures. The BRICS governments do not have a strong heritance of democratic administrations [14]; how is democracy better executed by these five in the international arena? BRICS introduced the idea of a BRICS Cable in 2012. It highlights BRICS desire for physical connectivity in line with the issue narrative of infrastructural development: 'Finally, cooperation on another crucial infrastructure project is underway, requiring our collective involvement — the proposed high-capacity marine cable system linking the BRICS countries. This will address the connectivity challenges which have featured as impediments to intra-BRICS trade' [15]. However, this plan has disappeared from their agenda. What does that say for future

infrastructure plans? It could be argued that the BRICS grouping was not ready to execute together an infrastructure project of significant capital proportions in 2012. The question is what has changed in the last three years for them to be ready now? Considering the economic distress, the countries are arguably in a worse condition than three years ago. While it could be considered as a plus for democratic decision-making processes, results are falling behind.

It can be argued that the narratives are less coherent. One way to address this would be to create cohesive and comprehensive communication about BRICS aspirations. While each of the five countries represents a continent in this world, it does not guarantee that there are enough bases for a broad-based support. What does the selection of issues say about BRICS´ issue narrative? Are these issues chosen due to the current neglect in international affairs? Do they foster economic growth? Are these issues the ones that they agree on? The broad agenda presents a picture of good intentions accommodating each country´s challenges. The lack of prioritization is arguably causing a halt or a delay on results. There are differences between the five governments in terms of BRICS´ membership and foreign policy. New initiatives and institutions, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the One Belt One Road Initiative, might cause the reprioritization of engagement. While the BRICS are still important for all five governments, the fluctuation of leader´s commitment could be foreseen in the future.

VI. Tentative Recommendations

Having identified the official system, identity, and issue narratives by the BRICS group and critiqued it in the previous part, this part provides some tentative communication recommendations to support BRICS´ political objectives. It is argued that a sophistication of the storylines, accommodating general perception and expectations is advisable. In addition, it is recommended to adjust the narratives considering the political and economic distress of these countries in the year 2015. Examples are, among others, the corruption scandal of Petrobras and the impeachment of President Rousseff in Brazil, and the tensions between Russia and European Union due to conflicts about Ukraine and Syria. Whether ´new´ is not a consistent objective in the declarations, the quest for reform provides new changes to the present structure of political governance and economic development. In that way, the narratives are not presented as a challenge but rather as an alternative to the existing structures. The alternative adjective is arguably not as strategic as it could be. Strategic narratives should be employed to provide new norms that are sustainable and accommodating international audiences. It requires a critical reflection of each member states´ negotiating behavior both domestically and internationally. The addressing of key challenges to foster collaboration is necessary before a new world order paradigm becomes dominant. Furthermore, what is less clear from the narratives is the dialectic between central and decentralized organization. To what extent are the issue narratives facilitated by hierarchical forms of coordination and others based on the market mechanism? If the market is to be included, it is advisable that the strategic narratives are inclusive and responsive to the market´ needs. It is not only a matter of creating beneficial conditions in place; it should be accommodated by clear storylines. In that sense, more actors can identify themselves with the BRICS strategic narratives.

VII. Conclusion

This study evaluated the projection of infrastructural development narratives by the BRICS to enable a new world order. It is argued that the strategic narratives of the BRICS are less coherent and less reliable than they could potentially be. The tension within and between each narrative can be improved with the projection of a convincing argument for a new world system. As 2015 has shown, all member states have experienced some form of political or economic hardship, impacting their leverage globally. This instability affects the BRICS group identity and inherently its projection of system and issue narratives including that of infrastructural development. Therefore, an active commitment to shape a comprehensive BRICS image is advisable for its communication to be strategic. While the Memorandum of Understanding on the Creation of the Joint BRICS Website [16] drafted in 2015 is a good step to coordinate communication efforts, the strategic narratives of the BRICS should be attended first.

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