



GLOBAL SOUTH RISING?

**BRICS and the Reconfiguration of
Knowledge Systems**

Edited by
Ari Sitas • Weibke Keim



Global South Rising? BRICS and the Reconfiguration of Knowledge Systems

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*It is to this struggle [over knowledge] that
Global South Rising?
so compellingly summons us all –
not as passive readers, but as active participants
in the unfinished project of decolonising
knowledge and, through it, the world.*

In the combined yet uneven terrain of global intellectual production, where the hierarchies of empire persist within the very categories through which we comprehend the world, *Global South Rising? BRICS and the Reconfiguration of Knowledge Systems* represents a bracingly necessary intervention. Edited by Ari Sitas and Wiebke Keim, this substantial volume assembles 11 chapters from nine contributors to interrogate what is perhaps the decisive question of our geopolitical conjuncture: does the ascendance of the BRICS bloc portend a genuine transformation in the global political economy of knowledge, or does it merely renovate institutional façades whilst leaving intact the deeper



structures of epistemic dependency that have historically subordinated the world majority and the global South?

This is not merely an academic exercise of institutional chronicling. Spanning the arc from BRICS's formal inauguration in 2009 through to our contemporary conjuncture, and situating this trajectory within the deeper lineage of South-South solidarity reaching back to Bandung in 1955, the collection undertakes a rigorous analysis of how geopolitical realignments intersect with – and are mediated by – the social relations of intellectual production.

The editors' introduction forthrightly acknowledges the project's fourfold rationale, situating it within a tradition of engaged and progressive scholarship whose analytical dividends become apparent throughout. The authors deploy scientometric data to quantify shifting contours of scientific and technological output across the BRICS nations, whilst simultaneously subjecting these very metrics to critical scrutiny. The volume thus functions as both empirical repository and theoretical intervention, documenting the active engagements that have enabled the emergence of BRICS, and subsequently BRICS+, as a major platform for deliberating the political, social, economic, and ecological dimensions of international transformation.

The theoretical architecture underpinning this inquiry draws productively upon the apparatus developed in the *Routledge Handbook of Academic Knowledge Circulation* (Arvanitis et al., 2023), to which several of the present volume's authors contributed. The preference for 'circulation' over 'diffusion' or 'transfer' is theoretically significant: it insists upon the possibility of reciprocities, competition, and socialisation across disparate social spaces, refusing the unidirectional assumptions embedded in diffusionist models that have historically served imperial epistemologies. Knowledge moves, but in its movement, it is transformed, as are the places and persons through which it passes.



The five methodological requirements derived from this framework – the identification of particular instantiations; the dissection and situating of knowledge spaces and actors; the grounding of channels of circulation; the determination of historically delimited moments; and sustained sensitivity to power dynamics – prove indispensable for interpreting the empirical data that pervade the collection, anchoring observation within a coherent theoretical architecture.

A principal contribution of the volume lies in its sustained confrontation with the persistence of Eurocentric epistemological frameworks. The framing compels us to reckon with what might be termed the ‘curse of epistemicide’ that besets our contemporary conjuncture of neocolonial subjugation.

Drawing upon Aníbal Quijano’s foundational articulation of the “coloniality of knowledge” and its subsequent elaboration by Walter Dignolo, several chapters document how inequality is constituted and reproduced through publication patterns, academic mobility, and the dynamic circulation of knowledge and people. The evidence reveals an unmistakable unevenness in praxis – yet this unevenness is not merely to be lamented. On the contrary, it re-emphasises the importance of plural perspectives arising from the differentiated experiences within BRICS and across world-systems, challenging the norm-setting narratives propagated by a mainstream media increasingly consolidated under conditions of monopoly and homogeneity.

The volume’s most provocative implication is that the emergence of multipolarity remains an incomplete and contradictory process. The segregation of world-systems through their differential categorisation by capital accumulation, and the international division of labour reinforced through unequal exchange, demands far greater analytical attention than it has thus far received from those who recognise



that history did not end with the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Maharajh, 2026a).

The expansion of improved productive capacities is undoubtedly necessary to redress material inequalities in the quality of life yet it remains profoundly insufficient as a defence against the violence unleashed by settler-colonial regimes and their collaborators, who seek to perpetuate their hegemony through genocide and illegal attacks on sovereign nations, including against another member of BRICS+. The volume thus enjoins us to think the economic and the epistemic together, as moments of a single though contradictory totality, in a dialectical movement that refuses to compartmentalise material and intellectual production.

Professor Sitas offers a sober and characteristically incisive assessment in the concluding chapter, questioning both the depth and spread of transformations currently emergent across the BRICS formation. Invoking the biological concept of ‘autopoiesis,’ the systemic capacity to maintain and reproduce itself as a heuristic for understanding emergent dynamics of increasing relative autonomy in knowledge production, Sitas nonetheless cautions that many initiatives and agreements reached at BRICS summits require substantially greater attention from national systems of innovation and must be more thoroughly incorporated into the research agendas of public institutions.

Empathetic listening and people-to-people engagement, he suggests, offer a pathway toward appreciating the profound changes emanating from BRICS agreements, whilst simultaneously affording deeper insight into the intransigent elements that continue to constrain transformation. This dual movement, simultaneously appreciative and critical, holds considerable promise for the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and for the praxis of what Mignolo has termed “epistemic



disobedience” – the deliberate delinking from dominant narratives and a decisive advance away from the world we do not wish to perpetuate.

Yet herein lies a fundamental conundrum, and one that the volume’s contributors confront with admirable candour. As Sitas candidly acknowledges, academics of the BRICS+ have generally not found an epistemic coherence backed by sustained and longitudinal cooperative work. This verdict is borne out by the empirical record: South Africa’s national system of innovation has consistently failed to meet its stated target of allocating 1.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to research and development, nor the African Union’s goal of 1%. The Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators has measured South Africa’s Gross Expenditure on Research and Development as a percentage of GDP at a mere 0.62% for 2023/24, a figure that starkly illustrates the gap between aspiration and material capacity.

Beyond these quantitative indices, however, the volume urges us to also attend to the *quality* of investments in science and technology development, a consideration rendered all the more urgent by NATO’s recent commitment to raise member-state military expenditure to 5% of GDP. Given that the combined GDP of NATO countries stood at approximately US\$51 trillion in 2025, this implies an intended nominal outlay of at least US\$2.55 trillion on warfare, a staggering sum that lays bare the material priorities of the existing world order and exposes the ideological function of the austerity discourse in the global South. In contrast, Roshni Sahoo and colleagues have estimated that it would cost just (sic) US\$318 billion per year, or 0.3% of global GDP, to almost eradicate all extreme poverty globally (reducing the rate to 1%) (Sahoo et al., 2025).

The lesson to be drawn from *Global South Rising?* is thus both urgent and profoundly serious. We would do well to resist the austerity strictures of national treasuries and instead expand cooperation in the co-



construction of knowledge that supports endogenous development, without perpetuating the unequal exchanges that have historically structured world-systems (Maharajh, 2026b).

The flourishing of new ideas, attentive to respective nationally determined priorities yet oriented toward the collective redress of epistemicide and the improvement of the quality of life for all, including the novel inter-species relationships mentioned in the book demands nothing less than a fundamental reorientation of our intellectual and material commitments.

In this regard, the book stands as an indispensable contribution to the literature. The collective effort of Sitas, Keim, and their wide network of collaborators merits our sincere gratitude and, more importantly, our sustained critical engagement. For the struggle over knowledge is inseparable from the struggle over the social relations that produce, circulate, and legitimate it. It is to this struggle that *Global South Rising?* so compellingly summons us all – not as passive readers, but as active participants in the unfinished project of decolonising knowledge and, through it, the world. The volume reminds us that the transformation of the political economy of knowledge cannot be divorced from the transformation of the political economy of capital itself, and that both remain tasks for which we are, as yet, only inadequately prepared.

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