Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies (ISSN: 2220-6140)
Vol. 8, No. 5, pp. 211-221, October 2016

Counting the Cost? A Cautionary Analysis of South Africa's BRICS Membership

Samuel Augustine Umezurike, Olusola Ogunnubi
University of Zululand, South Africa
umezurikes@unizulu.ac.za, ogunnubir@unizulu.ac.za

Abstract: BRICS is a grouping of five major developing countries that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, all with the ambition of changing the governance architecture of international political-economy but with claims to speedy industrialization, fast growing economies and relatively strong regional and global influence. South Africa joined BRICS at the invitation of China in 2010 and has shown commitment to the group through friendly relations with other member countries. The country's extensive economic links with China and the other BRICS states underpinned its strategy of diversifying its external trade especially with regard to looking away from West. This article employs content analysis to reflect on South Africa's membership of BRICS, focusing specifically on the country's relations with China. It argues that, while South Africa's economic indicators do not fit well with the BRICS grouping, China is promoting this relationship in order to counter the West's neo-imperialism and neo-liberal rhetoric. South Africa's willingness to accept Chinese superiority in the African market and to act as a junior partner in the global power configuration makes the country the perfect choice for this project.

Keywords: *Africa, BRICS, China, Investment, Neo-imperialism, Neo-liberalism, South Africa, and Trade*

1. Introduction

BRICS is a grouping that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, all of which are countries that are developing but with claims to speedy industrialization, fast growing economies and relatively strong regional and global influence. Interestingly, all the BRICS members are also members of the G-20. The BRIC league of states held its first formal summit in Yekaterinburg in Russia on 16 June, 2009. China invited South Africa to join in December 10, 2010 (Centre for Chinese Studies, 2015). South Africa has shown commitment to the group through friendly relations with other member countries. The country's extensive economic links with China and the other BRICS states are part of its strategy of diversifying its external trade especially with regard to looking away from West which currently accounts for more than 40% of South African exports (Beeson et al., 2011). Beeson et al. (2011, 1381) argue that "South Africa regards China as indispensable to the pursuit of one of the country's key foreign policy objectives: the transformation of global governance institutions to reflect the changing balance of power in the international system". Its policy makers view China is a counterweight to Europe and American power and convinced that links with China will offer the African continent more opportunities in global trade relations. Hence, with increasing economic cooperation with Africa, stronger diplomatic ties will eventually be forged. Beeson et al. (2011) note that, while trade between South Africa and China has increased in recent years, the former has lagged behind the latter. Two-way trade between China and South Africa grew from US$14m in 1991 to US$800m in 1998 at the initial stage of formal relations between the two countries and rose to US$2b in 2002 and US$11.2b in 2007. In 2009 China was South Africa's single largest trading partner, with bilateral trade to the value of US$16.3b. Furthermore, representing about 25% of overall trade of China with Africa, South Africa has become China's biggest trading partner in the continent (Beeson et al., 2011). The country's pro-China stance in trade matters arises from its goal to move away from the West and Africa in the wake of the third wave of democratization on this continent.

In 2006, more than US$180m was invested by Chinese businesses in South Africa while South African companies on the other hand invested over US$330b in more than 200 projects in China. China's volume of investment in South Africa increased significantly following a US$5.6b (20% stake) investment and acquisition of Standard Bank of South Africa by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) in 2007. The ICBC-Standard Bank deal represents the single largest Chinese investment in Africa (Beeson et al., 2011).

South Africa's special relationship with China suggests that it regards China as an economic powerhouse that is much more attractive for bilateral trade than other African countries (Umezurike, 2016). This is despite the fact that China's economic growth and expansion is taking a similar route to that of Europe in encouraging imperialism, colonialism and neo-imperialism. China accepts African countries only as junior partners that provide much desired markets (Umezurike, 2016). Indeed, the continent has become a dumping ground for inferior and pirated Chinese goods. South Africa's re-emergence at the dearth of legalised apartheid catapulted the state to the a prominent actor in sub-regional, continental and global politics wherein it was able to use its leadership profile to influence key decisions and promote the African Agenda especially at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and African Union (AU), G20 and BRICS (Uzodike, 2016). A number of rationales have been submitted for defending South Africa's BRICS membership. One of such arguments is that South Africa possesses significant reservoir of natural resources including gold, diamonds and platinum. Also, in contrast to other African countries, South Africa is shoulders in terms of infrastructural development supported by adequate regulatory frameworks, while also inheriting an advanced corporate and financial architecture that makes for ease of doing business. A second factor advanced to legitimize South Africa's membership is the symbolism of its sole representation of Africa in important multilateral forums. In this regard, South Africa is the only African representative in the G20 and IBSA. In terms of progress towards development, democracy, constitutionalism, equal rights, women issues, economic empowerment and more, South Africa seem to represent the ideal of exceptionalism which other African countries aspire to. It is on the basis of the above that South Africa is often bandied as gateway for investment into the untapped potential of African markets from the BRICS countries (Modi, 2012).

Antagonists of South Africa in BRICS however contend that 'compared with the other BRICS countries, South Africa's size, population, and economy are quite small' and that Nigeria perhaps would be more representative of sub-Saharan Africa (Modi, 2012). South Africa also has one of the highest inequality rates in the world. It is also argued that China played a major role in pushing for South Africa's membership despite the latter not wielding significant economic clout in comparison to other BRICS members.[1]According to Uzodike (2016), the idea of 'gateway to Africa' which had political and economic implications was employed by the South African government to positively project the state to other BRICS states. This paper offers a contribution to existing discourse on South Africa in BRICS by exploring the implication of its membership in BRICS. A fundamental concern of this study is to explore the complex dynamics of South Africa's BRICS membership and its implication for the country's foreign policy. By offering a cautionary analysis of the cost and benefits of South Africa's membership of the group, a useful projection can be made of its rationality. The first part of the paper provides a context to South Africa's membership of BRICS by providing comparative insight into the economic profiles of BRICS vis-à-vis South Africa's economic position in the group. The second section examines the ensuing diplomacy between China and South Africa and the scramble for Africa's market while the third part offers an analysis of the motivation behind South Africa's soft stance towards China. The final part is the conclusion.

2. South Africa and BRICS in Context

In the 1990s, BRICS countries controlled about 11% of global GDP; between 2000 and 2011, this increased to 25% (Gauteng Province, 2013). All the BRICS countries have recorded positive economic growth from the 1990s to date. From 2000 to 2011, China achieved GDP growth of more than 102%, while South Africa recorded 3.5% GDP growth during the same period, the highest and lowest, respectively, among the BRICS countries (Gauteng Province, 2013). BRICS countries received approximately 20% of global FDI, estimated at US$ 322b in 2013 (Centre for Chinese Studies, 2015).It is forecast that, by 2050, the Chinese economy will be the largest in the world, with total GDP projected at more than US$44.4b, followed by the US, India, Japan, Brazil and Russia (Gauteng Province, 2013; Onyekwena et al., 2014). In terms of geographical spread, Russia is the largest of the BRICS countries and South Africa is the smallest at 17.1m (km2) and 1.2m (km2), respectively. China has the largest population among the BRICS member countries and the largest population in the world at 1.34b and South Africa has the smallest population among the group at about 50m. India's

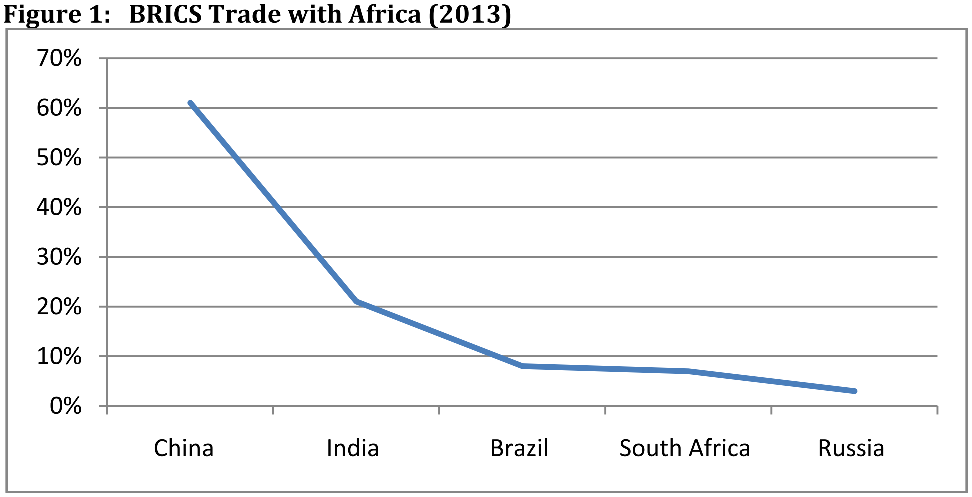
[1]Some analysts have argued that one of the ways South Africa have had to compensate for this vote of confidence into BRICS was continually refusing entry visa to the Dalai Lama and severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan. South Africa's BRICS membership has also witnessed a rising investment of Chinese businesses in South Africa making.

population is 1.24b; Brazil 192m and Russia 142m (Gauteng Province, 2013). The large population of BRICS countries offers an economic advantage as it provides a large market for trade among the member countries. In this regard, South Africa's population of about 50m could be viewed as a major shortfall.

Savings and investment levels among BRICS countries have generally remained high. In 2009, China was in the lead, with 54% savings in relation to GDP, but this declined to 50% in 2012 and investment driven by savings stood at 48% in relation to GDP in 2012 (Gauteng Province, 2013). South African savings in relation to GDP stood at 16% and 15% in 2012, the lowest among the BRICS nations. In summary, South Africa aims to benefit from membership of BRICS by attracting increased FDI from other BRICS members and at the same time encourage South African firms and companies to invest in these countries. Other benefits include trade opportunities with BRICS especially in terms of South Africa's rich natural resources including platinum, diamond, gold, coal, and now oil (Onyekwena et al., 2014). South Africa's membership of BRICS will also expose the country to the global economy, improve its competitiveness via trade and investment and boost the country's potential as a major player in global affairs. All these factors could lead to economic growth which will assist in addressing persistent developmental problems such as unemployment, crime and poverty (Gauteng Province, 2013). Between 1995 and 2009, before it joined BRICS, South Africa had large trade deficits with member countries. While the country recorded steady and significant trade deficits with China, there was a dramatic turnaround after its inclusion in BRICS in 2010 (Onyekwena et al., 2014). In the same manner, South Africa's trade deficit with Russia changed to a comparative surplus in 2010, but trade with Brazil remained in deficit from 1997 to 2011 (Onyekwena et al., 2014). Nonetheless, South Africa's membership of BRICS has resulted in a drastic reduction in the aggregates of its general trade deficit in recent years.

In 2013, natural resources accounted for more than three-quarters of Africa's export trade (Gumade, 2014; World Bank, 2014) and most of the $43b FDI in African countries in the same year targeted extractive industries (World Bank, 2014). Given their hunger for natural resources to feed their industrial activities, BRICS countries are major investors in Africa. In 2013 alone, BRICS member countries' trade with Africa stood at $350b (Gumade, 2014; Standard Bank, 2014). Figure 1 shows that China's share of BRICS-Africa trade in 2013 was 61%, with India at 21%, Brazil 8%, South Africa 7% and Russia 3%. The BRICS countries' share of total global output was 20% in 2013 (Gumade, 2014). Over a 10 year period, Brazil cancelled the $US900m debt of 12 African countries in 2013 and increased its trade relations with Africa from $US4.2b to $US27.6b (Stolte, 2012; AFP, 2013; Gumade, 2014). Brazil's import from Africa is sourced mainly from natural resources which account for up to 90%. In turn, its export to Africa includes manufactured products such as vehicles, machinery and goods as well as agricultural goods such as dairy products, meat and sugar (Gumade, 2014).

Figure 1: BRICS Trade with Africa (2013)



The value of India's trade with Africa increased from $3b in 2002 to $62b in 2011 (Standard Chartered, 2012; Gumade, 2014). The Indian government aimed to increase this to $90b by 2015. Primary commodities made up about 91% of African countries' exports to India, and oil alone constituted 61% of exports in the 10 years from 2002- 2012 (Gumade, 2014). In 2012, Russia cancelled African countries' debt of over $20b (Pravada, 2012). Bilateral trade between Russia and Africa increased to the highest ever recorded from $740m in 1994 to $7.3b in 2008, a more than tenfold increase (AFDB, 2011; Fundira, 2012; Gumade, 2014). Eighty per cent of Africa's exports are agricultural products, mainly edible fruit and nuts (29%), cocoa (16%) and tobacco (9%) (Fundira, 2012; Gumade, 2014). According to Gumade (2014), Russian exports to Africa are mainly processed goods, especially cereals (31%), machinery (3%), wood (12%), iron and steel (11%), fertilizers (6%), and mineral oil and fuel (22%). Russia has also dramatically increased its military cooperation with Africa in the form of sales of arms and military equipment and providing military training to African countries. The country accounts for almost 15% of African arms purchases (Gumade, 2014).

In 2012, Africa – with the exception of South Africa – accounted for more than 15% of all BRICS imports, constituting over $US420b of $US2.8t (Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa, 2013; Gumade, 2014). However, most were sourced from a few countries producing minerals (primary goods). Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Libya and Nigeria provided crude oil and gas; the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia exported copper while Liberia, Mauritania and Sierra Leone exchanged iron ore and concentrates. In 2013, South Africa-Africa stood at $US25b (Gumade, 2014). South African exports to other African countries are mostly finished products because it remains the most industrialized country on the continent while Nigeria has been de-industrialized (Aremu, 2013; Umezurike and Asuelime, 2015). According to the report of the IDCSA 2013 report, the top five South African exports to Africa in 2012 were machinery (22%), base metals (14%), transport equipment (14%), chemical products (11%) and mineral products (10%) (Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa, 2013). An estimated 80% of all South African imports from other African countries were from extractive industries, especially oil and other minerals (Gumade, 2014).

BRICS' total trade with Africa now exceeds trade among BRICS member countries. For example, in 2012, BRICS' total trade with Africa stood at $340b but trade among BRICS member countries amounted to about $310b (Freemantle and Stevens, 2013; Gumade, 2014). In 2012, South Africa's trade with BRICS countries accounted for about 19% of the country's total trade. In 2011, South Africa recorded $US504m in trade with Russia, $US6.6b with India, $US2.2b with Brazil and $US22.6b with China, its largest trading partner (Freemantle and Stevens, 2013; Gumade, 2014). Interestingly South Africa was able to run a trade surplus with Russia of $120m in 2011 (Davies, 2012; Gumade, 2014), but it had a trade deficit of $2.2b with China in the same year. In similar vein, South Africa's trade deficit with Brazil and India stood at $732m and $588m, respectively, in 2011. As noted earlier, South Africa's main exports to China and India are minerals, especially iron-ore and concentrates, and coal (Davies, 2012). In 2012, about 46% of South Africa's exports to China were iron-ore and concentrates, and 11% were coal products (Gumade, 2014). In the same year, 53% of its exports to India were from iron-ore and concentrates, and 6% from coal (Gumade, 2014). Exports from South Africa to Brazil are more diversified and include finished goods which create jobs and higher income, as well as primary goods. Transport-related machinery, including vehicles, made up 28% of this trade while agro-industrial goods accounted for 40% of South Africa's exports to Russia in 2012 (Gumade, 2014).

The interest of BRICS members in Africa as a new investment destination has stimulated western countries including the US, Japan and the EU as well as oil-rich Middle Eastern states to accelerate business interest on the continent (Gumade, 2014). South Africa's inclusion in BRICS has acted as a stimulus for FDI in Africa. For South Africa and its colleagues in BRICS, Africa is the new desirable market. Arguably all these BRICS activities, especially the role and place of South Africa, have led to economic growth in Africa. Thus, it is not surprising that even though South Africa and BRICS engage in the anti-thesis of Western imperialism in the global order, they have engaged in similar notions of neo-liberalism and globalization that have continually disadvantaged Africa. A closer examination of the BRICS group's attractions and South Africa's soft stance in relation to China captures this perspective.

3. Methodology

This article is mainly a qualitative study and thus relies on secondary data ranging from published and unpublished manuscripts, newspapers, government report among others. Content analysis is employed to offer a critical reflective analysis on South Africa's membership of BRICS. Specifically, it focuses on South

Africa's political-economic relations with China. The authors provide arguments, and supported by evidence suggesting that, while South Africa's economic indicators do not fit well with the BRICS grouping, China is promoting this relationship in order to counter the West's neo-imperialism and neo-liberal rhetoric.

4. China-South Africa Diplomacy and the Scramble for African Market

The African consumer market is attractive and estimated to reach $US1.4t by 2020, with approximately 128m households expected to have disposable income in the same year (Elumelu and Oppenheimer, 2013). African markets are regarded as investment friendly destination for South African companies to invest in as they offer high profits and are almost competition free. It is forecast that by 2030; close to 50% of Africa's population will be living in cities (Elumelu and Oppenheimer, 2013). However, challenges to Africa's development in the form of poverty, poor infrastructure, corruption and political instability could discourage potential investors. In a move to benefit from the African market and due to its impressive capacity, in 2009 alone South African multinationals invested $US1.6b in FDI outflows into other African markets including popular and lucrative telecommunications industry, MTN, dominating the African market with business presence in more than 21 countries on the continent (Elumelu and Oppenheimer, 2013). Regional efforts to create common economic markets resulted in the formation of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC) (Wentworth, 2012; Elumelu and Oppenheimer, 2013). A common customs union is planned by 2018 (Wentworth, 2012). This will widen the existing business opportunities for South African companies that already dominate the SACU. However, Ashman et al (2011) note, between 1994 and 2011, South Africa lost over 20% of its GDP either legally or illegally although attempts by the government to ease exchange controls have increased the legality of this capital outflow (Hart & Padayachee, 2013). The rationale is to encourage South African businesses to invest outside of the country. This would require a declaration of deals; formerly illegal deals have been granted amnesty. This opens the door for South African compradors to move capital from South Africa to invest elsewhere in Africa.

South African and Chinese economic and diplomatic relations can be viewed from two perspectives; divergence or competition, especially on the African continent. According to the Centre for Chinese Studies (2015), competition between China and South Africa is most visible in the manufactured products China markets in Africa. This led to South Africa losing more than US$ 900m in trade with African countries between 2001 and 2011 (Centre for Chinese Studies, 2015). South Africa's exports to its 10 major trading partners in Africa would have been roughly 10% higher from 2001 to 2010 were it not for market losses to China (Centre for Chinese Studies, 2015). On the other hand, Chinese exports to sub-Saharan Africa increased substantially from US$ 4.1b in 2001 to US$ 53.3b in 2011. South Africa lost major market share to China in Angola and Tanzania, while minor losses took place in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi where South Africa has maintained its hold (Centre for Chinese Studies, 2015). However, this situation has not prevented a high level of co-operation between these two countries at both bi-lateral and multilateral levels. Their common vision for transformation of the world order binds China and South Africa together. Thus, in general, contestation for the African market has not led to friction or confrontation.

The Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and BRICS has therefore been of special interest to South Africa and China and has provided special opportunities for China-Africa partnerships. China and South Africa are involved in a scramble for the African market, and the continent has been disadvantaged by unequal relations with both countries. China and South Africa have the capacity to produce finished goods and the African market remains an attractive one for these goods as well as the primary resources they require to feed their industries, especially the extractive industry. China-South Africa cooperation might not be problematic as they are happy to work together at both bilateral and multilateral levels and to share the African market. However, like any other country in Africa, South Africa remains a junior partner to China in terms of trade relations at both multilateral and bilateral levels. This is mainly expressed in South Africa's loss of markets to China in Africa, South Africa's membership of the BRICS group and South Africa's soft standpoint in relation to China.

South Africa's Soft Stance towards China: China supported the struggle against the apartheid regime. South Africa's freedom fighters engaged the world during this struggle especially through the anti-imperialism thesis. Russian and Chinese support may well have been based on the assumption that a free South Africa would follow the socialist path and remain anti-West. While this only happened at the level of rhetoric, China did not lose hope in South Africa. This could be one of the reasons why China has continued to draw closer to South Africa in global affairs. Jordaan (2008: 547) notes that “middle powers are supreme bridge-builders and multilateralists that characteristically perform two important tasks in the international system: they try to increase order in the international system, which includes legitimizing the norms espoused by the hegemon; and they perform morally commendable tasks for the good of international society”. Jordaan identified South Africa as a middle power based on the country’s foreign policy in the Middle East in reference to its overall foreign policy strategy, its role as a bridge-builder and an advocate for multilateralism since 1994. South Africa has frequently offered itself as a mediator in the various conflicts in the Middle East region albeit with little impact. Jordaan maintains that South Africa‘s foreign policy is anti-imperialist, although it is at best limited to opposing US and Western allies on major issues around the world (Umezurike, 2016). Another good example of South African anti-imperialism is that, in Jordan’s (2008) words, it talks left while walking right. According to Jordaan, this is clearly captured in the ANC government’s neo-liberal economic policies, as well as by South Africa’s role at the World Trade Organization.

South Africa’s foreign policy has made it the most unsuitable candidate to be an impartial peace broker in the various Middle East conflicts. The country’s stand on various issues in the Middle East has clearly shown that it cannot do much to ensure a peace deal. It has supported Iran’s nuclear ambitions; it condemned the US invasion of Iraq in 2003; it supports the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and in recent events involving Lebanon, and in Hamas’s 2006 electoral victory, it opposed the Israeli position (Jordaan, 2008). In the Middle East, South Africa speaks when it is not expected to or is unable to bear any costs and where quiet diplomacy could be interpreted by the Arab countries to mean support for Israel, South Africa speaks out. In return, it gains access to Arab markets and gains oil concessions from Arab countries. The anti-imperialism thesis may not be the only reason why China has maintained good relations with South Africa. Alden and Schoeman (2015) are of the opinion that South Africa’s position in Africa constitutes ‘Symbolic Representivity’, using its membership of BRICS and G20 to make their point. Some scholars also note that Chinese calculations could be based on the fact that South Africa is generally regarded as the gateway to Africa. However, Alden and Schoeman (2015) observe that both India and China have proved this assumption incorrect, as many countries in Africa have the necessary capacity including the expertise and resources to occupy the gateway position (Alden and Schoeman, 2015). For example, following the re-calculation of its GDP towards the end of 2013, Nigeria is now rated the largest economy on the continent and it has a far larger population than that of South Africa. Nigeria therefore offers a bigger market than South Africa. For example, it has the largest market for the mobile communications business in Africa. South African telecommunications company, MTN has more than 52m customers in Nigeria, exceeding the entire population of South Africa (Chidozie et al., 2015).

In the days of apartheid, South Africa had close relations with Taiwan because both countries were facing isolation in global affairs; in the case of South Africa, this was due to the adoption of racial segregation as the official policy while Taiwan was isolated because of China’s claim that the country is an integral part of China. In the 1970s, the United Nations Security Council withdrew its resolution supporting Taiwanese independence and recognized the country as an integral part of China (Grimm et al., 2014). As pariah states, South Africa and Taiwan had a successful relationship until the 1990s when the former gained freedom and established popular rule. China and Taiwan then entered into a race to determine who would win and maintain diplomatic ties with South Africa. China put pressure on South Africa and made it clear that it would not tolerate the country maintaining diplomatic ties with Taiwan, although it was prepared to accept other forms of relationships with Taiwan as long as the latter does not lay claim to sovereignty of any kind in its relationship with South Africa (Grimm et al., 2014). South Africa chose to severe former diplomatic ties with Taiwan (Schraeder, 2001). The pragmatic South Africa chose socialist China that does not share its ideology over Taiwan that has the same capitalist point of view. This demonstrates that South Africa is a realist state that makes choices in line with national and economic interests.

South Africa’s foreign policy is very unsteady on several fronts. For example, its refusal to issue a visa to the Dalai Lama to attend Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu's birthday party in Cape Town surprised Tutu as well as other human right activists (Umezurike, 2016). Tutu stressed that South Africa should be supportive of the Dalai Lama because it shared similar political history given that it recently emerged from a struggle against a repressive regime. South Africa refused the Dalai Lama a visa twice in two years (Fairbanks, 2012). Here South Africa clearly chooses economic ties with China over morality and human rights. Its trade relations with China must be maintained even at the expense of morality and human rights issues in Tibet in as much as such violations do not extend to South African territory. The new South African visa regulations offer special concessions to BRICS member countries. The Minister of Home Affair, honourable Gigaba announced in February, 2015 that ports of entry visas will be issued to those from BRICS member countries (SAPA, 2015). The visa may not exceed 10 years. As a member of BRICS, China is likely to profit from this move.

Fairbanks (2012) notes that, by any standard, South Africa has the smallest economy among the BRICS nations. This implies that what South Africa enjoys most about its membership of BRICS is that its acceptance by other global emerging economies suggests that it is the most viable economy in Africa. Another reason for the current ANC leaders' fondness for BRICS might be that it represents a break from President Mbeki's dominant ideas in relation to foreign policy, especially in terms of the African Renaissance. Membership of BRICS is thus a milestone in South Africa's foreign policy and role in the global political economy. However, while the country is proud of this achievement and parades itself as the African representative, a close examination of socio-political indicators suggests that it does not fit well with this group. Alden and Schoeman (2013) observe that:

South Africa does not come anywhere near the other members by tangible power indicators in terms of territory, population size, size of the economy, and other related factors that mark the other four countries out as being 'special' and on their way to domination of the global economy within the next three to five decades. Thus its BRICS membership becomes both proof of its status and an instrument for reinforcing this status. It is also a new front in South Africa's foreign policy.

While South Africa has adopted overt strategies on how it engages with the world, including BRICS, this new alliance might not prove effective in reforming global power relations (Bond, 2013). For example, Bond (2013) suggests that the degree to which BRICS has recently accommodated imperialism, especially in terms of economic and ecological issues, is remarkable. This suggests the need to carefully analyse the general problem of the sub-imperial re-legitimization of neo-liberalism which BRICS may be part of. It is doubtful whether BRICS has the will power to change the world order as it claims. The decision to form a BRICS Bank parallel to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), combined with its anti-imperialism rhetoric may not be sufficient to challenge current power relations. In other words, the modus operandi of the BRICS Bank will not differ much from the World Bank and the IMF. It is more about the formation of a sub-imperial organization and bank that could continue to exploit weaker economies, especially developing countries. This reflects South Africa's determination not to relinquish its sub-imperial position in the world order, even after the demise of apartheid. Bond suggests that the problem requires a theory of sub-imperialism that is sufficiently robust to cut through the internal and external policy claims made by the BRICS regimes, among which South Africa is the most compelling because of its post-apartheid leadership elite's ubiquitous 'talk of left, walk to right' tendency and the extremely high levels of social protest against injustice that are on-going in the country.

The leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) have been successful in reshaping the country's foreign policy and South Africa's profile as a regional and global player is rising. Ngubentobi (2004) for instance argues that South Africa has acted as a bridge between the South and North. It has trade relations with the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) and South-South co-operation features prominently in its foreign policy options. South Africa's global bilateral and multi-lateral relations are on the increase, while its membership of BRICS is of particular significance. In general terms, the real challenge confronting South Africa's foreign policy is not that the policy objectives are vague or unattainable but that the internal leadership struggle in the ANC is reflected in the conduct of the country's international relations. During Mandela's presidency, his international reputation dominated South Africa's foreign policy (see Umezurike, 2016). His ideals included morality based on respect for human rights and the rights of minorities, and the maintenance of the global status quo through good international citizenship (Fourie, 2013). When Mbeki, who is a philosopher and trained economist, took over, he used Marxist rhetoric to call for change in the global status quo (Fourie, 2013).

However, in practice, South Africa's foreign policy does not seek to change this status quo but to regain what was lost in the international political economy during apartheid isolation. For instance, under President Mbeki's leadership, South African companies' penetration of the world economy surpassed all previous efforts. They did so by exploiting weaker economies in both developing and developed countries, a strategy that is similar to the West's approach to relations with Africa (Fourie, 2013). The end result of such relations is the continued unequal division of labour in the international market especially where South Africa is able to dominate markets in the Southern African sub-region and the continent in general. While President Zuma's administration has adopted a similar foreign policy stance as that of Mbeki, given the current ANC leadership's criticism of Mbeki while he was President, it does not do so in the open. It is felt that unabashed continuation of Mbeki's foreign policy position would be an indictment of the ANC leadership who fired him. Thus, the leadership allows events to unfold in the foreign policy realm while relying on the strategies of Mbeki's administration to resolve problems that may arise (Fourie, 2013). This has led to the current administration finding itself at serious odds with African countries. For example, the current administration has maintained Mbeki's approach of quiet diplomacy in response to the Zimbabwean crisis. In the case of the yellow fever diplomatic feud with Nigeria, South Africa realized that a diplomatic spat would not benefit the country; in light of strong business interests in Nigeria, an apology was quickly forthcoming (Umezurike and Asuelime, 2015). This was the same foreign policy strategy as that which prompted South Africa to oppose the late General Sani Abacha military junta's human rights abuses in Nigeria and the hanging of the Ogoni 9, including environmental activist, Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995 (Banjo & Omidiran, 2000; Adebajo, 2007; Banjo, 2010). President Mbeki's outstanding achievement in international affairs speaks for itself and dwarfs any efforts that the present leadership could make.

In the final analysis, South Africa's foreign policy is static, not because of the issues involved but because the current leadership does not want to further compromise its popularity which is already threatened. Promoting a political rival's work which it previously condemned would suggest that firing Mbeki was the wrong decision. However, President Zuma's administration has found a new foreign policy option in BRICS. When South Africa joined BRIC to form BRICS, this was regarded as an important moment in the country's branding (Fairbanks, 2012). BRICS remains the only major new front in South Africa's foreign policy since President Zuma took office. Indeed, the country's current leadership seems to be drunk on BRICS. For example, during Nelson Mandela's state funeral in December 2013, all the BRICS leaders delivered orations. Leading countries in Africa like Nigeria that played a crucial role in the struggle against apartheid were not given such an opportunity.

South Africa's claim to regional hegemony and leadership is often contradictory because of its internal shortcomings. For example, unlike any of the other BRICS members, South Africa's 'Great Power' and 'emerging economy' claims have their origins in its ability to act as a symbolic representative (Alden and Schoeman, 2015) rather than in its economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The sources range from South Africa's military dominance in the first and second world wars, to its Cold War alliance with the Western block, its weight as Africa's largest economy, and its involvement in continental peace-making and peace-keeping efforts (Alden & Schoeman, 2013). Indeed, South Africa's capitalist outlook is ahead of any other African country when measured by its economic indicators — organized financial systems, investment capital, corporate presence, and infrastructure. These indicators may have been the reason why China chose South Africa as the African country to join BRICS. There have been suggestions that African countries, especially Nigeria, would fit better into BRICS. Nigeria's new GDP calculation towards the end of 2013 saw the country emerge as the biggest economy in Africa (Umezurike and Asuelime, 2015).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

BRICS is a formation that is made up of five fast growing economies that claim to pursue a new world order. However, it is unlikely that its members will succeed in transforming global power relations. BRICS aims to create a forum that will enable the group and its members to play a bigger role in the international political economy. China hopes to use BRICS as one of its tools to emerge victorious as the largest economy in the world. In order to do so, China is in search of reliable partners who are willing and able to stand firm in creating a parallel institution to the IMF and World Bank. However, BRICS will not be able to change the way the world works and the BRICS Bank will not be able to alter the way the global economy operates. Both the

BRICS group and its member countries' economies have incorporated elements of neo-liberalism and neo-imperialism, especially in their relations with Africa. This has continued to undermine weaker African economies, especially in their trade and investment relationships with BRICS members. As Mhandara et al. (2013) point out, the dynamism of China-Africa relations requires constantly monitoring and a reassessment of various agreements in order to ensure consistency in the principles and practices of the long history of co-operation. Africa has become a major investment and trade destination for China and South Africa as well as other BRICS members. While South Africa lags behind China in investment and trade in Africa, the two countries are keen to cooperate at all levels in order to optimally exploit the opportunities offered by African markets. China's choice of South Africa to join BRICS does not mean that it is the best qualified country to occupy this position. South Africa's willingness to accept Chinese superiority in the African market and to act as a junior partner in the global power configuration makes the country the perfect choice for this project. In terms of economic and social indicators, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia or Nigeria may have been better qualified to join BRICS but China regards South Africa as the best junior partner because it is much more committed in terms of anti-West rhetoric. South Africa's concessions to China in the form of immigration visas, the Tibet question and sacrificing full-blown diplomatic relations with Taiwan are evidence that it is a junior partner that is committed to friendly relations with China, notwithstanding the cost. South Africa and China have adopted an anti-imperialism and anti-West stance in order to create opportunities for their entrance to the global economy; be it South-South or South-North. The anti-thesis of imperialism and neo-liberalism they propound is simply not realistic because of their economic ambitions in the global economy.
From the above discussion, we propose that the survival of South Africa in BRICS would in foreseeable future depend on the following recommendations:

- Addressing domestic impediments that question the legality of its BRICS membership– a claim which analyst believes disqualifies its membership.
- Adopting a firmer foreign policy posture that does not pay lip service to its commitment to the African Agenda.
- Faster economic growth that compares favourably with its BRICS counterparts.
- Deepening its claim to regional hegemony through greater political commitments and economic diplomacy in Africa.
- Showing a greater commitment to speak on behalf of Africa rather than secure its own economic national interest.
- Developing and implementing a more consistent foreign policy in its relations with its multiple partners.
- Building a soft power capacity that conveys credibility and legitimacy on its status.

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