

FRAMING AFRICA

AS THE WORLD EPICENTER?

Reflections from a Global South Perspective

Coordinator
José Luis Gázquez



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the World Epicenter?
Reflections from a Global
South Perspective



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Publicaciones

Catalogación en la publicación UNAM Dirección General de Bibliotecas y Servicios Digitales de Información:

Nombres: Gázquez Iglesias, José Luis, editor.

Título: Framing Africa as the world epicenter? reflections from a global south perspective / José Luis Gázquez, coordinator.

Descripción: Ciudad de México : Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Programa Universitario de Estudios sobre Asia y África, 2026.

Identificadores: LIBRUNAM 2290061 (libro electrónico) | ISBN 9786076425596 (libro electrónico).

Temas: Geopolítica -- África. | África -- Relaciones exteriores. | Cambios climáticos -- África. | África -- Condiciones económicas. | Pobreza -- África.

Clasificación: LCC DT31 (libro electrónico) | DDC 960—dc23

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ISBN: 978-607-642-559-6

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22201/pueaao.9786076425596e.2026>

This work has undergone peer review by academic specialists and has been screened for originality using iThenticate.

Publication Date, February 2026

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Coordinación de Humanidades

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Coyoacán, 04360, Ciudad de México

Editorial Coordination and Production: Andrea Reyes

Production Assistance and Proofreading: Anaelia Lazcano

Cover Design: Yussef A. Galicia Galicia.

Suggested citation: Gázquez, J.L. (2026). *Framing Africa as the World Epicenter? Reflections from a Global South Perspective*. Programa Universitario de Estudios sobre Asia, África y Oceanía, pp. 244.

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Published in Mexico/Publicado en México

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Table of Contents

Foreword	7
Introduction	11

I.

Africa as the Epicenter of a Transforming World

Africa at the Epicenter: Enhancing Strategic Autonomy in a Shifting Geopolitical Landscape	27
<i>Philani Mthembu</i>	

Reframing Africa: Reassessing Discourses and Agency in a Shifting Global Order	45
<i>Oscar Mateos</i>	

Capitalism, Development, and Climate Change in Africa: A View from a Global South Perspective	69
<i>José Luis Gázquez</i>	

II.

Global and Regional Conflicts: Effects of Russia and Ukraine's Conflict

Africa in the Inter-Capitalist Dispute: Resonances of Russo-Ukrainian Conflict	94
<i>Adriana Franco</i>	

The Russian-Ukrainian Crisis and the Global Arms Race: Implications for Security and Development in Africa	118
<i>Ahmed Taher</i>	

III.

South-South Cooperation and Climate Change

The Geopolitics of Energy Matrix Change: The Role
of Chinese Investments in Africa and Great Power Competition.....135
Óscar Ugarteche & Brandon Young

The Belt and Road Initiative of China and Low
Carbon Growth in Africa: Progress and Challenges175
Antonina Ivanova

IV.

Economic Issues in Africa: Inflation and Poverty

The Impact of the Inflation-Targeting Regime
for Economic Development: The South African Case198
Wendolyn Bravo

The Cash Crisis and the eNaira in Nigeria.....220
César Duarte

Abstracts.....240

Foreword

Alicia Girón

Africa is a continent constantly evolving, and at the same time, the epicenter of global structural changes, where the digital economy and climate change are the axes of a development project in constant motion. Simultaneously, tensions among the G7, Russia, China, India, and Brazil play out within a logic of confrontation over the continent's natural resources. The ongoing armed conflicts imply new economic policy alternatives and the independence of production chains, which are fundamental to achieving decolonization and technological innovation.

The book ***Framing Africa as the World Epicenter? Reflections from a Global South Perspective***, edited by José Luis Gázquez, allows us to take a deeper look at Africa's integration into global production and financing chains; at the economic, political, and social reshaping from the post-pandemic, and at its position amid rising tensions in the Middle East and the conflict in Eastern Europe. The book also emphasizes the importance of the Arab world and the growing influence of Islam as a bridge between the West and the East. The investments and cooperation projects of the East Asian economic powers in Africa, along with the inflation and poverty affecting the majority of the population, are not coincidental—they reflect a decolonial space striving to forge its own path.

Africa, a continent constantly evolving, demonstrates strong data in the International Monetary Fund's *Global Growth Prospects* report, presented at the spring meeting held by multilateral organizations in Washington, D.C., in 2024. Africa will outpace the growth of advanced economies, which will grow by 1.8% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the continent will increase by more than 4% of GDP by 2025.

Why is it important to highlight this data and growth prospects? It is crucial to highlight these data and growth prospects, as deep reforms implemented by African countries are reflected across several key areas, according to reports from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

First, 30% of clean energy minerals are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, including extraction and processing into raw materials for export. The region's GDP could grow by 12% or more by 2050, offering an opportunity to move beyond exporting raw materials to processing industries.

Second, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa is a demographic bonus that few advanced economies, as well as the rest of the world's rapidly aging countries, have. The population will double by 2050, enabling a dynamic employment policy and accelerating production. Education is critical for the 605 million people under 25, so we should double education spending as a percentage of GDP. This makes it necessary for governments to rethink public budgets.

Thirdly, Africa is a continent that owes a social debt for the construction of ports, roads, and railways, which are necessary for equitable and sustainable development. The *Continental Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa*, as well as the *Belt and Road Economic Initiative*, have a strong presence in infrastructure for economic growth.

Fourth, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is developing an institutional architecture to increase trade, with the private sector actively participating. The African Continental Free Trade Area offers advantages by facilitating access to regional markets and is strengthening production chains across the continent, preparing for the global stage.

Fifth, financing shortages persist as governments in the region continue to face high borrowing costs and looming debt payments. Payments are needed from institutional investors whose

profit-seeking is impeding the transition to renewables, rendering coal plants obsolete.

Sixth, countries led by South Africa, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt are manufacturing cars, while the majority (around 84%) supply raw materials and semi-raw materials. The Democratic Republic of the Congo possesses about 46% of the world's cobalt. Egypt, Morocco, and South Africa excel in solar panel manufacturing. South Africa is the world's leading exporter of titanium and platinum, and the continent accounts for 12% global exports of vital minerals used in the medical industry.

China is a major player in advancing Africa's development through multilateral institutions, such as the African Development Bank, which finances and implements the African Union's Agenda 2063 (MOFA, 2021). The banks that have provided financing are the Asian Investment Bank, the African Development Bank, and the Silk Road Fund. To this end, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)¹ adopted four key resolutions: the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024), the Vision of China-Africa Cooperation 2035, the Sino-African Declaration on Climate Change, and the Declaration of the Eighth FOCAC Ministerial Conference. It is important to note that the ten cooperation plans and eight initiatives adopted at the FOCAC Summits in Johannesburg (2015) and Beijing (2018) have strengthened China-Africa economic and trade cooperation.

China has built more than 13,000 km of roads and railways and more than 80 large-scale power facilities, and funded more than 130 medical facilities, 45 sports facilities, and more than 170 schools. It has trained more than 160,000 people in Africa and built several flagship projects, including the African Union Conference Centre between 2000 and 2020. Even during the COVID-19 pan-

¹ FOCAC in English from the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

demic, China canceled the outstanding debts of 15 African countries through interest-free loans due at the end of 2020.

There is no doubt that José Luis Gázquez's reading of this book is a contribution from the academic team around the University Program of Studies on Asia, Africa, and Oceania (PUEAAO) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). This fulfills our University's mission of teaching, research, and the dissemination of knowledge to society, not only in Mexico but also in the rest of the countries that make up the "Global South."

Introduction

This book is the result of an editorial project based on the panels and papers presented at the 3rd International Colloquium of African Studies, held in April 2023 at the Institute of Economic Research at UNAM in Mexico City, and was organized by the PUEAAO. The colloquium was an international and interdisciplinary academic event with the primary goal of positioning Africa—both theoretically and empirically—at the center of a shifting geopolitical, epistemological, and scientific reality.

While most research on Africa focuses on the continent and its societies at the margins of the world, the works gathered in this volume address the need to place African political economy at the center of an evolving global political economy. In this sense, the present collective work represents a contribution to a growing body of literature that engages with a critical construction of theory from the Global South paradigm in international relations.

Stemming directly from the latter point, another primary goal of this volume is to frame the issue of global development from an African perspective, especially in a context severely affected by structural adjustment, political and economic reform models, climate change, transnational dynamics, and pandemics.

The works in this volume also aim to enhance scholarship on Global South societies—in general, and Africa in particular—by engaging modestly but critically with current research on the repercussions and challenges that major processes, such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, pose to African societies in this evolving geopolitical juncture.

The book also considers the growing importance of engaging in critical thinking about the impact of the financialization of African economies since the implementation of major economic and political reforms in the 1980s.

Finally, this work also represents a contribution to the theoretical effort to merge and project current African and Global South perspectives in the social sciences, which adopt the centrality of the African continent in current international affairs and theoretical development.

The “Global South Paradigm”: Evolution, Shortcomings, and Conceptual Possibilities

The first reference to the concept dates back to 1969 when the American writer and activist Carl Ogelsby used it to comment on the war in Vietnam (Ogelsby, 1969). Since the 1950s, the world has been categorized into First, Second, and Third Worlds, which emerged to describe the ideological clash of the Cold War, as well as the position of non-aligned countries with respect to this conflict. It was precisely the latter term that would come to be used to classify countries that shared specific common characteristics, such as a colonial past and the setbacks this implied for economic development. This set of countries would eventually create additional spaces and forums for association, such as the Bandung Conference (1955), the Non-Aligned Movement (1961), the G-77, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (Levander, 2011; Tickner, 2017).

Afterwards, the term became increasingly common over the next two decades, and was mainly used to refer to low-income countries. This geographic representation was based on the Brandt Report (1980), which compared the GNPs of most developed and less developed countries (Prashad, 2011). Rich countries were concentrated in the Northern hemisphere, while the poorest remained below an imaginary “Brandt Line.” This geographic demarcation showed some problematic aspects since its publication date, such as the inclusion of a country like India in the North (while being one of the countries with the lowest income per capita and a central

state in the creation of the Non-Aligned movement) or rich countries such as Australia or New Zealand in the South.

One consequence of this early conceptualization of the “Global South” or the “Global North-South divide” is precisely the strong identification of the term with poverty and/or underdevelopment (Haug, 2021). While it is true that *most* low-income countries are located in the Southern Hemisphere, exceptions such as the aforementioned have since become the primary targets of critique for a lack of conceptual precision. Indeed, the geographic inaccuracy would entail another set of critiques, such as questioning the utility of a term that groups countries that exhibit significant diversity and disparities among them. From an economic perspective, for instance, what would be the conceptual benefit of grouping together Southeast Asian (economically successful) countries with sub-Saharan African (economically distressed) countries?

There are other domains in which major divergences among countries in the Global South are identified, such as those regarding environmental, development, and energy policies. Within the mixture of states that are part of this meta-category, it is possible to find nations engaged and committed to the implementation of policies aimed at the protection of the environment and natural ecosystems, and also find countries whose governments support development policies based primarily on the extraction of minerals and fossil fuels that harm the biosphere. In fact, the issue is even more complex because within the same country, there can exist contradictions and incoherence between groups that support environmental goals and those who support development goals based on economic growth. Paradoxically, it could be argued that it is precisely the insufficiency of the term to depict the totality of the countries that supposedly belong to it, which has allowed for more visibility of the great diversity among them.

Finally, regarding the analytical depth and the geo-epistemic implications of the concept, the “Global South” has also raised doubts about the transformative and/or emancipatory possibilities for states and societies supposedly belonging to it in both the academic and the political domain. Regarding the first point, the concept of the “Global South” is, in fact, heir to problematic categorizations linked to development and progress, conceived through Western parameters and considered a crucial criterion for determining the level of advancement or backwardness of a given nation-state or society. In a world which is increasingly shaped by environmental degradation and amplifying global inequalities result of over three centuries of capitalist modes of production and exploitation of nature and human beings, it is possible to argue that the “Global South” concept and the way in which it is used runs the risk of reproducing binary visions of human societies guided by linear visions of history and progress. As for the second issue regarding the emancipatory potential of the term, it could likewise be argued that the “Global South” runs the risk of being subsumed or co-opted by hegemonic theories and research institutions of the “Global North” or of speaking on its behalf.

Another problematic issue in the conceptualization of the “Global South” worth raising here is how it is put into practice in most of its registers, especially since the exponential growth in its use during the late 1990s and the first two decades of the 21st century. As it has been observed, most published articles that refer to the concept do not define the category or explain how it enhances research. In other words, it is taken for granted without further critical engagement (Haug, 2021).

Finally, it is also necessary to draw on specific aspects of the political economy of knowledge production to highlight the existing significant asymmetries between hegemonic Northern (core) scholarship and marginal Southern (peripheral) approaches. Regarding the patterns of publication and citation of peer-reviewed

articles in the domain of the social sciences, it is observed that while US and European scholarship account for more than 82% of the total literature, Latin America and Africa account for only 1% each (Tickner, 2013).

However, despite the aforementioned weaknesses, the concept of the “Global South” may signify or imply an inflection point in the future development of the social (Western) sciences and their conventional methodologies. It is vital to underscore, as Levander and Mignolo do, that:

Global South is, among other things, a design drawn from and implemented by imperial local histories; it is part of imperial globalism. As such, “Global South” is an expression that emerges out of these forces and is bound up with this dense fabric of meaning making. But, [...] it is a term not inevitably reducible to or complicit with such frameworks. (Levander, 2011, p. 10)

First, regarding the usage of the term, it has been observed in recent years that the geographical reference has been waning away in favor of a theoretical evolution that takes into consideration the historical dimension of the capitalist system and the unequal political and economic structures that it gave birth to since its origins in the slave trade and plantation system.

Second, the construction of the “Global North-South divide” has demonstrated an increasing heuristic capacity to question and debate dominant and hegemonic visions within the conventional paradigm of the social sciences, particularly in the discipline of International Relations (IR).

Third, the concept of the “Global South” has been increasingly used in recent years to designate societies and territories that were forcibly drawn into the political and economic organization of the (Western) nation-state and/or the (Western) economic capitalist system.

It is important to highlight, as well, the issue of the role and position of a country such as China in the “Global South” paradigm. In the first place, China, like India, is located in the Northern hemisphere. Second, while China was never under a foreign colonial occupation/rule, its society was forced to participate in the capitalist system since the 19th century through unequal commercial treaties provoked by armed conflicts with Western powers, such as the Opium Wars. Third, while China’s economic and political history seems to mirror that of other countries belonging to the “Global South” category, the last four decades have witnessed the spectacular emergence of this country as an economic global power that can hardly be compared to other regions and countries of the South nowadays. Finally, while China considers itself a member of the “Global South” or even a self-proclaimed leader of this category, its economic growth and global presence have raised questions about hegemonic pretensions behind its actions.

Beyond the territories that were absorbed by the imperialistic and colonial European drive since the late 15th century onwards, and the postcolonial countries that the category is said to encompass, the current development of the “Global South” has also enabled us to shed light and build critical understandings of (nation) state-building processes of the “Global North.” This has allowed us to determine both the historicity of the cultural communities that succumbed to nationalism in Europe, and academic efforts to deconstruct such processes and achieve greater visibility of “other Souths”—geographical and epistemic—present at the hegemonic centers of the system.

Another positive aspect of the “Global South” is its potential as a relational concept rather than a precise objective depiction of the places, territories, or regions that it represents.

Adopting the “Southern lens,”

reveals two complementary and otherwise neglected aspects of North/South relationality: the coloniality of the institution of citizenship, and the impact that (de)-colonial contestations and reinterpretations of citizenship rights have had on the *longue durée* (Boatcă, 2021, p. 1982).

Africa in the Global South Paradigm

African societies, as the rest of the global spaces considered as the composing units of the Global South’s multiple and diverse contemporary geography, have been subjected to the capitalist modes of production since the 15th century and to nation-state modes of political governance since the last quarter of the 19th century. The difference between Africa and other regions/spaces of the Global South is that economic, political, and epistemic subjugation and marginalization have pushed this space further into the peripheries of the international system in all its dimensions than any other postcolonial region, continent, or state.

This triple marginalization, as widely documented, has positioned—from a Eurocentric perspective—the African continent as the most economically backward, the least “democratic” politically, and the least relevant epistemologically. Furthermore, European colonialism and, later, the decolonization process, transformed the African continent into the most divided territory in the world, hosting 54 nation-states that contain a great diversity of communities within their borders, adding even more fragmentation. However, if the perspective shifts to place African dynamics (historical and contemporary) at the center of global ones, the analysis changes significantly. Not only does it allow for a more precise appraisal of the place of African civilizations in world history, but it also enables the deconstruction of reductionist, dichotomist notions,

such as progress/backwardness, development/underdevelopment, democratic/autocratic regimes, functional/failed state, sovereign/collapsed or quasi-states. Additionally, positioning Africa at the epicenter of the emerging Global South paradigm not only shifts it into the most relevant category of analysis but also helps the social sciences successfully frame issues differently and thus evolve beyond the narrowness of its classical, Eurocentric representations.

While contributions in this volume do not systematically provide a historical context for the African postcolonial situation, they do critically address contemporary issues derived from it. The main objective of this book is to contribute to the ongoing process of framing African realities at the center of analysis and, in this way, contribute to the ongoing debate and critical construction of the Global South concept and perspective.

Book Structure and Overview of the Chapters

The works gathered in this volume are divided into four sections, mirroring the structure of the colloquium panels. The chapters in the book's **first section** focus on theorizing about Africa from a Global South perspective.

In Philani Mthembu's article, an important analytical perspective is introduced through the concept of Africa-at-the-epicenter to affirm the need to de-marginalize Africa. For Mthembu, as for others in this volume, there has been "a growing interest in countries and regions of the Global South," which has coincided with "efforts undertaken to problematize the Global South concept." In fact, in this work, it is argued that in the process depicted as the "rise of the Global South"—which has been in progress—since the last decade, some countries of the Global South have taken the lead in the transfer of knowledge and resources in a way that would benefit both the Global North and South regions and countries.

In fact, the African continent has been struggling to achieve more strategic autonomy since it was dragged into the capitalist and international system. However, as others in this volume have stressed (see Gázquez), its societies face a high degree of political fragmentation as a direct consequence of colonial occupation and the decolonization process, the latter of which accentuates division among sovereign nations.

In this important contribution, Mthembu introduces heuristic methodological and conceptual tools such as “Island Africa” and “Africa-at-the-epicenter” to represent the continent from the standpoint of the Global South paradigm of International Relations. Contrary to the conventional paradigm of the discipline of International Relations, in which the dynamics of states and nations in the South are not relevant for theory production, placing Africa-at-the-epicenter shifts the attention from the margins to the center of theory creation. This, in turn, enables the continent to be represented geographically as an Island (the biggest one in the world), engaging actively with external powers through various forms of partnerships in a shifting geopolitical landscape. Adopting this viewpoint is important for several reasons. First, in this paradigm, Africa occupies the center both geographically and theoretically because its landmass can be represented as an island and because its region hosts the most countries of the Global South. Second, through this conceptualization, African countries could be depicted as essential players in the international system that should pool resources in order not only to achieve more strategic autonomy but ultimately a truly continental sovereignty. Currently, this initiative is in progress and in the hands of the African Union. As Mthembu concludes, this organization will be responsible for the difficult task of defragmenting the continent’s diverse regions from the political divisions created by European colonialism during the 19th century.

However, this centrality, and the richness and vastness of its natural and human resources, represent it as well as its weaknesses. Indeed, as Mthembu argues, if African resources continue to be extracted and exploited for the private gain of the capitalist powers with no concern for the environmental degradation through their practices and African youth continue to be marginalized or excluded by global labor markets, the very forces and potentialities of Island Africa will continue to be the drivers of its calamities.

As for José Luis Gázquez, he explores some aspects of the long-standing effects of colonialism in his chapter. Colonial legacies in Africa are discussed, including the export-oriented economic model introduced by Western powers and the French monetary system adopted in its colonies at the eve of the decolonization process and maintained during the postcolonial period. He argues that African independent countries under the current global economic system have to carry the historical weight of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism, and that is what makes them particularly vulnerable in the current context of climate change and the global capitalist economy. It is argued that while Africa is the most affected region in the world by climate change dynamics, it is the least responsible for it and the one that benefits the least. Examples are provided of capitalist activities carried out by powers—Western and non-Western as well—that have a profound impact on the environment and African societies.

Finally, he focuses on the problematic issue of achieving development for African countries—especially bridging the energy gap between the continent and the rest of the world—while also protecting the environment. He further argues that their capacity to conceive and implement economic models that seriously take into account indigenous knowledge systems rooted in local environmental and societal needs will be key for the African continent and its countries in the current shifting geopolitical landscape.

In the **second section**, composed of two chapters, the main topic under analysis is the multidimensional impact of the shifting geopolitical landscape, provoked by the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, on the African continent (Franco, Taher).

While maintaining Africa's centrality in her analysis, Adriana Franco offers a different view about the nature of excellent power relations on the continent. In her work, she argues that Africa has been and continues to be a key space for reproducing the capitalist international economic system, imported and imposed by European powers between the 19th and 20th centuries, and how other geo-economic and geopolitical actors have joined the West in Africa in an inter-capitalistic dispute for its resources since then. The chapter, in particular, focuses on Russia, another great power whose energy policy shapes its interests and relations in Africa.

Another idea introduced in this chapter and discussed in other texts in this volume is the African countries' position on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The chapter highlights the fact that support from African countries to Ukraine and the West has not been the norm and that the war has not damaged Russia's image. On the contrary, as informed by this chapter and other authors, West African, Sahelian governments have come to rely on the Russian private security corporation Wagner in their fight against terrorism, as the image of former colonial powers like France has continued to deteriorate.

Finally, assessing the differences in the involvement of China and Russia in Africa, the chapter considers Russia's presence mainly motivated by security concerns (its position as the second-largest arms seller on the continent) and energy concerns (specifically, uranium extraction for the construction of nuclear reactors). In contrast, the former's presence is mainly motivated by the extraction of energy resources (and other resources) in exchange for arms and infrastructure for governments.

In fact, as other authors in this volume argue, the changing nature of relations between African countries and great powers results from a shifting geopolitical context that shapes the configuration of partnerships and models of cooperation. The war in Ukraine seems to have catalyzed these dynamics of changing interactions, with impacts that extend beyond the conflict's epicenter. As Ahmed Taher underscores, division among African countries could stem from rivalry between great powers and "reflects a political dilemma experienced by the continent in how to interact with a global crisis."

Another relevant subject raised by these chapters is the economic impact of the war in Ukraine on African countries' wheat importers, whether from Ukraine or Russia, thereby adding an important nuance to the analysis.

In the texts comprising the **third section**, Óscar Ugarteche and Antonina Ivanova reflect on the much-debated issue of China's growing presence in Africa over the last three decades and the possible economic and political effects of its investments, including mega projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

From a Great Power Competition perspective, Óscar Ugarteche and Brandon Young interpret China's presence in Africa as strategic rather than tactical, just like Western powers. It is important to underscore the value of classical IR theories in the discussion of current political and economic affairs and their impact on the African continent. This chapter addresses questions that figure prominently in the discussions raised by other works in this volume, such as a possible hegemonic transition unfolding between China and the United States and its specific impact on Africa in a shifting geopolitical landscape. Specifically, the chapter examines how GPC politics are deployed within the energy sector, which is central to shaping geopolitics and international relations.

However, China's involvement in Africa extends beyond the scheme of bilateral cooperation with individual countries. As An-

tonina Ivanova demonstrates, the BRI, launched by the Chinese government in 2014, is a sign of China's emergence as a global power in politics and economics over the past few decades. By focusing on this mega project, Ivanova analyzes China's framework for cooperation with the African continent and questions whether it belongs to the emergent domain of South-South Cooperation or, instead, it represents a political and economic tool for advancing its own interests without providing real development benefits for the African population of the countries involved in the initiative. Furthermore, besides the issue of a possible increase in debt distress in the countries participating in the BRI, Ivanova holds that there is a growing literature that suggests that this project could result in higher risks to biodiversity and indigenous land destruction due to a growth in carbon dioxide emissions and air pollution as a result of BRI's infrastructure (because energy finance has been centered around fossil fuel infrastructure).

In the **fourth section**, composed of two texts, financial and monetary policies and issues are explored in the African cultural context. One of the goals of the present volume is to exhibit some of the longstanding effects of the structural adjustment reforms and Washington Consensus policies implemented in Africa over at least four decades. The chapters by Wendolyn Bravo and César Duarte are two case studies that provide an example of how measures like the adoption of policies such as the inflation-target regime in South Africa or the introduction of the cryptocurrency e-Naira in Nigeria are the kind of economic policies that are not rooted in African realities and dynamics but in the interests of great powers.

In the first case, Bravo demonstrates that, to maintain the goal of remaining within an inflation range, the monetary policy governments must sacrifice other objectives of the national economy, such as growth or employment. This kind of monetary policy is similar to other economic measures of austerity adopted since the

introduction of structural adjustment reforms in African countries, which have resulted in damage to the welfare of their citizens.

Another example of how the actual capitalist system in its digital phase is not a model that suits or is not adapted to African contemporary societies is the case of the introduction of the crypto-currency e-Naira in Nigeria by the Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDC) in 2021, while at the same time, the physical money was being pulled out of circulation. The policy resulted in a cash crisis in a society where cash transactions overwhelmingly exceeded those mediated by digital technologies such as smartphones. While the digitalization of the economy holds a great potential to bring more financial inclusion to rural populations where banking services are not present (or at a great distance), the substitution of physical currency for a digital one also revealed other problems that face the Nigerian population, like owning a smartphone or having access to internet, which would eventually lead to the cash-crisis situation.

This book is the result of an editorial project based on the panels and papers presented during the 3rd International Colloquium of African Studies, held in April 2023 at the Institute of Economic Research at UNAM, Mexico City, organized by the PUEAAO. The colloquium was an international, interdisciplinary academic event whose main goal was to position Africa at the center of a shifting geopolitical, epistemological, and scientific reality.

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I.
Africa as the Epicenter of
a Transforming World

Africa at the Epicenter: Enhancing Strategic Autonomy in a Shifting Geopolitical Landscape

Philani Mthembu¹

Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing interest in individual countries and regions of the “Global South.” At the same time, there are efforts to problematize the very concept of the Global South, especially as leading developing countries enhance their material and knowledge capabilities to compete with counterparts in the global North across various sectors and areas of innovation (Ero, 2024). Whereas the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) saw a disproportionate amount of responsibilities assigned to developed countries to transfer resources and knowledge to developing countries to support their development paths, their successor through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have coincided with the rise of the Global South, whose leading countries are now looked upon for imparting their own resources and knowledge to other developing countries in contributing to their efforts to alleviate poverty. Indeed, the experience of leading countries of the Global South is no longer only relevant for counterparts in the developing world; it also offers important lessons for counterparts in the developed world (Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2020). In recent years, leading Global South countries have also had the opportunity to preside over structures such as the G20, as the G20 Presidency passed from Indonesia to India, then to Brazil, and then to South Africa. As a result, these economies were tasked with facilitating critical policy engagements on the global economy while ensuring the priorities of their regions were not ignored.

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It is within this context that African countries and institutions have sought to strengthen their own agency and the material resources needed to exercise greater strategic autonomy in global affairs. Drawing on their abundant natural and human resources, the opportunities offered by modern technology, and their geographically central position in the international political landscape, African state and non-state actors have increasingly explored ways to leverage the continent's comparative advantages to advance its development agenda. Given its central geographical position—and constant interest from external powers—efforts to navigate an evolving geopolitical landscape will need to be pursued with a high level of diplomatic skill and discipline to ensure that the continent can manage its external relations in a way that contributes to its development prospects instead of further contributing to its political fragmentation as a continent. Efforts to enhance regional integration and grow intra-African trade through mechanisms such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) are essential to strengthening the continent's agency in global affairs.

Groupings such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) have recently expanded to include Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia (BRICS South Africa, 2023), and, more recently, Indonesia. These groupings have intensified their focus on the Global South, especially when factoring in a shifting power configuration moving toward a multipolar world order—one underpinned by the inability of any one country or grouping to impose its will on others (Klomegah, 2024).

Such a world will require greater diplomatic efforts and deeper cooperation to address various regional and global challenges. The question thus remains whether Africa can strategically navigate this changing geopolitical landscape to advance its interests and reposition itself within the international system.

The African continent has not been a mere spectator in these tectonic shifts. It has sought to enhance its ability to exercise great-

er strategic autonomy by avoiding alignment with any one bloc or grouping of countries. For example, during the war in Ukraine, Africa has largely avoided taking sides in the conflict. Instead, African countries, including those that condemned Russia, have mostly sought to remain non-aligned and avoid participating in the sanctions and other penalties imposed by Western countries on the Russian Federation (Mthembu, 2023).

African countries have instead led their own peace initiative in Ukraine, speaking directly to President Putin of Russia and President Zelensky of Ukraine about the consequences of the war and efforts to create the conditions for dialogue. This demonstrates a growing eagerness not only to weigh in on African conflicts but also to find its voice on external matters that have direct and indirect impact on African development efforts. In the case of Ukraine, African countries have witnessed an increase in input costs to agriculture, including fertilizers (Jobson, 2022). They have also seen a rise in fuel prices, food inflation, and rising interest rates, all of which negatively impact their ability to repay loans denominated in dollars. It is thus broadly in Africa's interest not to support any one side in prolonging the conflict, but to seek a peaceful resolution instead by addressing its root causes. This will ultimately mean addressing both the concerns expressed by Russia and Ukraine (Mthembu, 2023).

This effort to resolve a conflict in Europe has been met with mixed reactions, as European countries and the United States (US) have sought to apply diplomatic and financial pressure on African countries, leading to a position of non-alignment (Pecquet, 2023). South Africa has particularly borne the brunt of these diplomatic and economic pressures, as various efforts by members of the US legislative bodies (Foreign Relations Committee, 2023) have drafted bills that threaten to remove certain benefits South Africa has through initiatives such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This pressure has escalated under the second

Trump administration, which has imposed steeper tariffs on trade as the US seeks to reorder international trade. Despite this external pressure, which at times finds internal outlets through opposition parties and non-state actors, South Africa has continued to stand firm in its non-aligned position. It remains to be seen whether this will indeed herald a more confident era of Africa's place in the world, one that sees the continent moving away from the periphery in political terms and closer to the center as it navigates the various interests of the great powers, which often play themselves out within the continent.

It should, however, not come as a surprise that African countries have sought to be more proactive rather than rely entirely on external powers to act as catalysts for the continent's development—a formula that has not worked in the past and has instead created unhealthy dependencies. Indeed, Africa's geographic position in the world places it at the crossroads of the interests of various great powers and regional groupings. While geography matters, it is also important to note that many of the natural resources used to fuel modern technologies are found on the continent in large quantities (Hlatshwayo, 2024), reinforcing the idea that Africa is at the center of various global dynamics. Whether it is policies and actions related to digital transformation or climate change and the just energy transition, the African continent will play an important role in the global supply chains; however, it will be important that the continent can move up the value chains and reconfigure the disadvantaged and extractive manner in which its economies are inserted into existing global value chains.

A challenge for the continent over the last few centuries, since the onset of colonialism, has been its inability to exercise greater strategic autonomy in shaping the terms and conditions of engagement with external powers. These external powers have also recognized Africa's centrality to their economic strategies, even though from a weaker position. Overcoming the political fragmentation,

which weakens the continent's bargaining power against external powers, will thus have to constitute an important part of efforts to ensure that Africa is taken more seriously on the global stage. This will ensure that, given its geographic centrality and large number of countries from the Global South, the region moves from the political periphery to the center of major policy discussions that shape the development prospects for the global South.

The following chapter seeks to reflect on the economic and political dynamics unfolding across the African continent amid a changing geopolitical landscape. The core issues considered will include the challenges and opportunities presented by Africa's central position in a changing geopolitical landscape. It unpacks the meaning of the idea of Africa being at the center, while identifying ways the continent can move toward greater strategic autonomy in global affairs. As the region with the largest number of countries in the Global South, the region offers various opportunities to shape the discourse and practices of South-South Cooperation, which will also influence how leading countries of the global North relate to Africa.

The chapter argues that some of the continent's strengths can also become a source of weakness in a changing geopolitical landscape. Africa is geographically centrally located on the map and thus wellpositioned to connect various regions of the world. However, this central position also attracts keen interest from the great powers in those regions, especially given the vast continent's resource endowments. Additionally, Africa's demographics can also be seen as a double-edged sword, with rising expectations among the continent's youthful population towards its respective governments. A failure to create decent jobs for this young population could thus lead to further unrest in several countries, especially those that have created limited job and education opportunities. In order to harness its strengths while minimizing its identified weaknesses, Africa will have to enhance its internal capacity to exercise greater

agency so that initiatives such as the African peace initiative are not merely one-off events but represent an increasingly confident continent that understands its value and centrality in global value chains. This would ensure that the continent is not only a central actor in the extraction of natural resources but also in the creation of value and the rise of livelihoods in a manner that contributes to achieving the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Africa at the Epicenter: Challenges and Opportunities

In the edited book volume *Africa and the World: Navigating Shifting Geopolitics* (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 2), the first chapter, titled “Africa at the epicentre: Exploring Shifting Global Political Geographies in a Changing Strategic Landscape”, outlines the geopolitics of a global strategic landscape in transition. It tackles this from the perspective of the challenges facing Africa and how these intersect with, and are moreover shaped by, external agendas. This remains as relevant today as when it was originally authored. The next chapter expands on this while incorporating recent developments relevant to Africa's efforts to achieve a higher degree of strategic autonomy and the related responses from some of the continent's key external partners.

Geographically situated in the “Global South” as the geological extension of the Afro-Eurasian landmass, the African continent sits at the center of historic and contemporary global strategic dynamics, which at times place it at the crosshairs of tensions amongst the great powers. Examples include the ongoing war in Ukraine and continuing tensions between the United States and China on one side and the United States and Russia on the other side. Recent efforts to avoid tensions among the great powers have sparked backlash from the likes of the United States and its transatlantic allies in Europe (Panchia, 2023). However, the continent

has much to gain by avoiding becoming a battleground for geopolitical competition, which can only be achieved by ensuring greater internal capacity, fostering robust coordination, and skillfully managing its partnerships with external powers.

While some saw President Donald Trump's first term in office as an anomaly, he continued to cast a shadow over the Biden Administration and US politics (Mthembu, 2012) and has made a dramatic return to the White House with unfinished business at home and abroad to take care of. As an unconventional politician who takes pride in being considered an "outsider", President Trump's first administration saw major disruptions by unravelling the American-constructed postwar system, including through the questioning of existing alliances within structures such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the renegotiation of agreements such as the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and questioning of transatlantic relations with the European Union (EU) and its major economies such as Germany and France. Critics have argued that such a disruption in the second term may accelerate the West's relative decline. However, whether it leads to a relative decline or not, the strategic imperative of African strategic autonomy will remain. Indeed, President Trump has drawn lessons from his first administration and applied them in his second, with wide-reaching implications. With tariff rates being revised and increased for most of the US's trading partners, it has become even more critical for African countries to grow intra-African trade, support cross-border infrastructure projects, and invest in technology to reduce border wait times.

The changing domestic political and social landscape in the United States, along with similar dynamics in the UK and Europe, is unfolding amid complex challenges to Euro-American hegemony from China and Russia. These shifts place a "peninsular" Africa interactively at the epicenter of the changing strategic terrain, making it what might be seen as the authentic "Middle Kingdom"

(Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 3). Africa's ability to navigate this landscape by maintaining strategic, development-oriented relations with all major actors will ensure that it is better able to guarantee that its international relations benefit its citizens. The converse is also true: if Africa cannot shape its international relations, it will experience greater fragmentation and continued exploitation of its natural resources, benefiting a few external actors rather than its own citizens.

History shows that no single colonial power on its own has ever managed to conquer all of Africa. Many suffered defeats in well-documented battles across different continental regions, where any number of indigenous regional imperiums held sway. Examples include the defeat of the British by the Zulus in South Africa at the Battle of Isandlwana, and the defeat of the Italians by the Ethiopians at the Battle of Adwa. Instead, what would eventually emerge in Africa was a system of competing imperial intrusions and settler colonialisms gaining footholds in different regions across the continent (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 4). This is partly due to the continent's geographical richness, with changing topography across different regions.

Arguably, the continent's historical patterns and complexities tend to hinder any hypothetical external expansionist project seeking "strategic depth" in Africa. Indeed, Africans would not need to access resources, human or otherwise, from elsewhere in the world, since these are generally abundant within the continent. Therefore, Africa's vulnerabilities are not rooted in resource scarcity but in how it manages its interregional proximity to non-African regions interested in extracting African resources (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 5). As a result, this reality has, over time, gravitated the continent towards regional integration to ensure a stronger center able to negotiate on more equal terms. However, Africa's weakness can be exploited only as long as it remains divided and governed by relatively weak governments unable to exercise authority and

sovereignty over their territories. Thus, Africa's vastness can also make it extremely vulnerable. This stems from its inherited lack of integrated governance and cohesion encompassing an endemically diverse continental landscape—the other side of the coin in a “double-edged sword” that continually weighs on Africa's future (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 5).

Towards a Coordinated African Strategy

With the multiple challenges facing Africa in an increasingly fragmented geopolitical landscape, any “geostrategy” the continent adopts would have to be preoccupied with achieving a higher degree of strategic autonomy and ensuring that the African Union (AU) works in conjunction with its regional economic communities (RECs) to overcome a process of fragmentation inherited after the colonial period. This would constitute the core of an emerging grand strategy to navigate an increasingly competitive geopolitical landscape amid ongoing great-power competition. These core features of the strategy would need to shape the way the continent forms partnerships with external powers interested in fostering ties. Evaluations of the utility of Africa's international partnerships would have to consider whether these partnerships enhance these two core elements or exacerbate a fragmented political landscape.

Pursued with a degree of discipline and coordination amongst the regional economic communities (RECs) and the AU on the one hand, and the various nation-states of the AU on the other, this purported grand strategy would essentially constitute a pan-African challenge to achieve an “Afro-continentalism” of enormous proportions and complexity.

While Africa faces some of the more traditional challenges highlighted above, non-conventional challenges such as climate change are also important. Interacting with the rapidly accelerating pace of urbanization, demographic expansion, and rampant resource

exploitation, climate change could accelerate ecological decline, undermining the continent's capacity to use its resources to drive its development program. The existence of weak or failing states at the mercy of predatory internal and external forces could also exacerbate this predicament (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, pp. 56).

Confronting Challenges and Elevating Strategic Opportunities

Africa's centrality on the global map means the continent must grapple with the multiple and interrelated security, geopolitical, and geoeconomic interests of the Mediterranean Sea and the interregional zones of international activity in the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans. As such, major power agendas of external powers such as the US, Russia, China, Europe, the Gulf states, and other important state actors and regional groupings must always be factored into the continent's geopolitical calculus (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 6).

As the 21st century unfolds, Africa's geostrategic centrality will likely increase, for better or ill. This will also be closely related to how the continent's demographic trends continue to unfold. By 2050, Africa's population could double to over 2 billion people, surpassing both India and China individually and equaling Asia's total by the 22nd century. This shift offers opportunities for growth and development; however, it also poses threats if national and continental development plans are not planned and executed. Indeed, demographics is by no means destiny, and implications are contingent on any number of variables already alluded to, though this prospectively implicates levels of regional and continental integration as determinants in discerning Africa and the world's future. While the continent's demographics could drive greater prosperity, Africa's population trajectory could also prove destabilizing and is

already informing European threat perceptions regarding migration (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 6).

Towards Greater African Agency: Overcoming Fragmentation

Despite various pressures arising from an increasingly polarized and unstable geopolitical landscape, Africans, both within and outside the state, have sought greater control over their own development agendas. This bolsters their capacity to shape their own regional and global priorities. The African Union expresses its aspirations through Agenda 2063 and through its continued efforts to pursue reforms within the continental body. They are also addressed in the various regional indicative strategic frameworks adopted by the regional economic communities, which outline clear goals and priorities for the development of Africa's sub-regions.

All of these efforts share a desire to spearhead endogenous development on the continent. Notably, Agenda 2063, which outlines *"The Africa We Want,"* has recently concluded its first ten-year implementation period under the theme "A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development." The first ten-year implementation plan covered the years 2014-2023 (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 382). As a result, the AU is thus now in a position to learn from the shortcomings encountered in formulating the ten-year implementation plan and to carry these lessons into the second ten-year implementation plan, which began in 2024.

Implementation, along with continued monitoring and evaluation, will be the real test of whether contemporary African actors have the necessary political will to execute their strategies. It is thus important to understand the extent to which African stakeholders align their engagement with external powers to achieve key regional and continental priorities. This alignment also helps expand the

continent's policy space and strategic autonomy. These goals have become even more integral under the second Trump administration, which some have intimated heralds a more transactional disposition in global politics, one which weakens multilateral cooperation in favor of bilateral deals and relations. If Africa is tempted to go down this path, it may hinder its aspirations for regional cooperation and, over time, weaken its ability to strengthen its strategic autonomy. While some larger economies may continue to prosper under such a scenario, even their interests will be hindered over time.

While continental integration remains crucial for enhancing Africa's global role, it should not be seen as synonymous with delinking from existing global processes. Instead, it demonstrates that Africa's encircling interconnectivities can be seen as both a weakness in terms of external vulnerability and a potential strength by enhancing its integration into the global economy.

In this sense, what will remain important is the continent's ability to strengthen its internal processes and systems to better coordinate externally in building international partnerships that move beyond historically built extractive economic relations. As such, the pursuit of strategic autonomy seeks to reshape the continent's strategic engagement with the world, increasingly based on the interests of Africans (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 383). Africa's central geography and continued efforts to steer clear of the tensions of the great powers may, over time, position Africa as a location for enhanced regional value chains, with global corporations producing and exporting closer to their markets within Africa, the Middle East, the Americas, Europe, and Asia, depending on where on the continent they choose to be located.

To overcome fragmentation, nation-states across Africa must make commitments based on their own capabilities. Larger economies will thus have to take on greater responsibilities. Importantly, these countries also stand to continue benefiting from larger regional economies, as their companies can access broader markets.

In return, they must open their own economies to goods and services produced in the region. This system of variable responsibility will thus need to develop a stricter system of incentives for regional integration. Countries that are committed to regional integration and its funding should also gain the largest material benefits. This approach ensures that, over the medium to long term, regional integration and Pan-Africanism are supported not only for historical or ideological reasons, but also because of the material benefits they bring (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 383).

Larger and more dynamic African economies will gradually realize that their inability to create a more autonomous continental and maritime space diminishes their influence in their immediate regions, as external powers fill the void left by a lack of internal cohesion and coordination. A healthy debate on the continent continues to evolve as practitioners and scholars increasingly evaluate potential new ways to reshape external relations in more mutually beneficial ways.

Given the dwindling levels of bilateral development cooperation, it may become increasingly important to explore alternative ways of mobilizing domestic resources to finance development programmes. It may become increasingly important to also go beyond this, and channel existing development cooperation funds towards continental bodies such as the regional economic communities (RECs), the AU's development agency in the form of the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), and to a body such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). The aim would be to ensure that the limited development cooperation is used towards projects with a regional impact and footprint. This would ensure that development funding actively supports the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the various regional integration frameworks.

It is important to note that such a model would not erase bilateral development cooperation but would instead increase sup-

port and coordination for projects aligned with continental agreements (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 387). Indeed, the reprioritization of development cooperation funding towards defense amongst leading developed economies will continue to persist and precedes the Trump administration's United States Agency for International Development (USAID) cuts and absorption of the work of USAID into the Department of State.

As Africa pursues greater regional integration, it must remember that true integration involves more than state actors. Civil society, trade unions, business associations and networks, think tanks, universities, and even the informal sector all play key roles. These actors will deepen regional integration efforts and will help secure its longevity (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, p. 387). These actors must thus remain active in shaping the contours of the strategic engagement within Africa and between Africa and external partners.

The idea of Global Africa will also be important in the broader project towards African integration. This area holds significant potential, yet it's still largely underutilized in terms of mobilizing the African diaspora towards the continent's developmental objectives. The African diaspora remains an important stakeholder in attracting additional resources to the continent and in conveying its key objectives to foreign audiences. More must thus be done to put real flesh on the designation of the African diaspora as the sixth regional pillar of the African Union.

Besides tapping into the diaspora community in Europe, the priority strategic focus would also have to include the United States to re-energize an African-American-based constituency for Africa and influence US-Africa policy. This is of greater importance now, given the fundamental shifts underway in the US in trade and development policy (Kornegay & Mthembu, 2020, pp. 399 - 400).

Furthermore, given the growing diversity of the black population in America—particularly the increasing number of Afri-

canimmigrant-descended African Americans—this dynamic could provide added impetus to a revival of the Agenda 2063 PanAfrican constituency. However, the growing influence of Afro-British in the UK, as well as people-to-people government-to-government linkages between Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries and the AU, should also receive priority attention in fleshing out the role of the AU's sixth region.

Conclusion

Having reflected on the economic and political dynamics of the African continent in a changing geopolitical landscape, some of the core issues considered by this chapter have included the challenges and opportunities presented by Africa's central position in a geopolitical landscape undergoing significant change. Often seen as peripheral to global politics, the chapter has sought to place the continent at the center, both geographically and conceptually. It thus had to unpack the idea of Africa being at the center while identifying ways the continent can move towards greater strategic autonomy in global affairs. As the region with the largest number of countries in the Global South, there are various opportunities to shape the discourse and practices of South-South Cooperation, which will also influence how leading countries of the global North relate to Africa and the Global South.

The chapter argued that some of the continent's strengths can also become sources of weakness in a changing geopolitical landscape, mainly if not well managed.

Africa is geographically central and thus well-positioned to connect various regions. However, this also draws keen interest from the great powers in these regions, especially given the vast continent's resource endowments. The state in which these external powers find the continent will thus be important to whether Africa is indeed able to exercise a higher degree of agency. If Africa is

more fragmented and less integrated, it will be less able to shape engagement with external powers to advance its development objectives and the aspirations of its citizens. In such a state, it will struggle to achieve greater strategic autonomy.

The inverse is also true. Decisionmakers must ensure that Africa's medium to long-term strategy focuses on building its internal capabilities while also laying firm foundations for greater regional integration. This requires a higher level of discipline. When external relations do not advance these interests, they should be equally reviewed and, if necessary, shunned.

Africa's demographics can also be seen as a double-edged sword. The continent's youthful population has rising expectations for its governments. If decent jobs are not created for this young population, further unrest is likely in many countries, especially those that have created limited job and educational opportunities. To harness its strengths while minimizing its identified weaknesses, Africa will have to enhance its own internal capacity to exercise greater agency on the world stage. This would ensure that the continent is not only a central actor in the extraction of natural resources but also in the creation of value and the rise of livelihoods in a manner that contributes to the achievement of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Reframing Africa: Reassessing Discourses and Agency in a Shifting Global Order

Oscar Mateos¹

Introduction

This chapter explores Africa's evolving relevance in a world marked by major transformations, complex crises, and growing uncertainty. This raises key questions: What is Africa's role in this "era of epic transformation", as described by the current Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), Antonio Guterres, in his September 2024² UN General Assembly speech? Should Africa be considered more *central* and therefore less *peripheral* in international relations, as some authors (Ellis, 2011; Harman & Brown, 2013; Taylor, 2015) have suggested? What continuities, and especially what novelties, does this changing global context, and particularly the emerging role of the so-called Global South, bring to the African continent?

This exploration is based on three ideas. First, the chapter challenges both the traditional discourse that relegates Africa to a peripheral role in global historical processes (Jackson & Rosberg, 1986) and the discourse that suddenly assigns the region unexpected centrality (The Economist, 2019). Consistent with the perspectives of scholars such as Jean-François Bayart (2000), James Ferguson (2006), and Rita Abrahamsen (2017), among others, this argument holds that Africa has always been central to the development of modern global capitalism. This presumed peripherality, frequently reiterated in mainstream international relations narra-

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² United Nations (2024).

tives ranging from realism to Marxism, stands in stark contrast to the significant role that African territories and peoples have played in influencing global economic systems over centuries. To unpack this notion, the chapter examines two critical dimensions that have greatly influenced and shaped Africa's apparent global image of perpetual "marginalit": discourses and agency. Here, "discourses" means the dominant narratives about Africa's role. "Agency" means actions by African actors, both state and nonstate, who have used different strategies to systematically and in different ways resist, accommodate, or coopt various political and economic dynamics. This perspective, heavily influenced by decolonial scholars, shows how overlooked discourses and agency have shaped the understanding of Africa's role (what Mudimbe [1988] called "the idea of Africa") in these processes, albeit in overly simplistic ways.

Second, the chapter draws on contributions from international political sociology (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2010; Ferguson, 2006; Ellis, 2011; Callaghy, Kassimir & Latham, 2001) to argue that Africa and global realities have a co-constitutive historical relationship. Specifically, Africa's experiences and processes have been significantly shaped by and contributed to global dynamics. This co-constitutive relationship is key for explaining the complex nature of global capitalism, from the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism to the contemporary era of globalisation. While global capitalism has not deterministically and exclusively conditioned Africa's role in world politics, it is important to recognise that the two cannot be understood independently of each other. Notions such as African politics as an "extraverted" phenomenon (Bayart, 2000), as well as the concepts of networks and assemblages between African and global actors (Abrahamsen, 2017), further facilitate an understanding of the complex, co-articulated nature of these two realities.

The third and final idea explored in this chapter concerns Africa's integration into current global dynamics within a new

“post-hegemonic” context, as proposed by Amitav Acharya (2017). In this post-hegemonic African context, we observe a renewed global competition for the continent. The Global South is increasingly challenging the traditional Western hegemony. This phenomenon has been termed the “new scramble for Africa” (Carmody, 2016). This new phase features both continuities and novelties in the geopolitical landscape, discourses, and African agency. The new African context is more geopolitically pluralistic and competitive: discourses ranging from security concerns to anti-colonial rhetoric coexist, challenging Western presence and Eurocentric perspectives. Simultaneously, African agency has diversified. Actors now strategically negotiate and interact with new partners, consolidating what has been termed “strategic polygamy” (Mateos, Rentería & Torrella, 2024), clearly eroding Western hegemony in the region.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section addresses the controversy surrounding the notion of Africa’s peripherality in global politics. Building on this, the second section examines the co-constitutive nature of Africa’s interactions with global realities, using historical examples to illustrate the intricate, interconnected nature of this entanglement. Shifting focus to the present, the third section examines current trends, analyzing both continuities and discontinuities in the post-hegemonic context as well as the Global South’s impact on the continent. Finally, drawing these threads together, the chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings from these analyses.

Challenging Peripherality: Unpacking “Single Stories” about Africa and Re-interpreting African Agency

The Construction of Africa as a Problematic and Marginalised Entity

The notion of Africa’s marginal status in global processes persists across academic disciplines like philosophy, International Relations (IR), and media studies, as well as in popular culture.

We argue that this view is rooted in a Eurocentric worldview that portrays Africa as marginal to global development and progress, largely due to the continent's perceived internal shortcomings. From Hegel's dismissal of Africa as "unhistorical"³ to Morgenthau's description of pre-WWII Africa as a "politically empty space" (Dunn & Shaw, 2001), these discourses frame Africa as lacking the necessary attributes of modernity. More recently, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy went so far as to claim that "the tragedy of Africa is that the African man has never really entered history." (Percival, 2008)

As Íñiguez de Heredia (2018) notes, discourses that marginalise Africa are evident not only in political and economic relations but also in academic and policy research on the continent. As some scholars have recently observed, Africa's "limited state agency" hinders its ability to play a central role in international affairs (Andreasson, 2013). This narrative not only reflects a Eurocentric bias but also stems from colonial and postcolonial constructions of Africa as the "other" that serve to affirm Western superiority.

From a critical perspective, we argue that the assumption of Africa's peripherality is flawed because it ignores the subtle yet powerful forces that have shaped global imaginaries of the continent. These discourses have consistently positioned Africa as a "white man's burden" or a modern 'development problem'" (Ferguson, 1994). Conversely, they have depicted Africa as a land of the exotic and exceptional. Both tendencies entrench Africa's subordinate status in global narratives. In light of postcolonial and decolonial theory, we argue that these discourses play a central role in maintaining Africa's peripheral status. They do so by consistently marginalising African voices and perspectives. Sierra Leonean scholar Zubairu

³ From Hegel's (1956) perspective, Africa is said to be "unhistorical; undeveloped spirit - still caught up in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morals, religions and political constitution".

Wai (2018), drawing on Valentine Yves Mudimbe's insights, highlights the significant impact of the so-called "colonial library" on global perceptions of Africa. This term refers to the large body of knowledge produced by Western scholars and colonial administrators, which continues to shape contemporary understandings of Africa. Instead of acknowledging the continent's contributions, this knowledge base has fostered a perception of Africa as lacking in certain areas, rather than as diverse and multifaceted. Mudimbe (Wai, 2012, p. 270) suggests that this process of knowledge production has constructed Africa as a paradigm of difference and alterity, thereby reinforcing the continent's perceived inferiority.

Edward Said's (1980) analysis of the "Orient" is particularly relevant in this context, demonstrating how the construction of the 'Other' serves not only to dominate but also to define the 'self'. Building on Said's framework, it is clear that the portrayal of Africa as a land of deficiency and failure has allowed the West to assert its superiority and moral authority. In line with this, Mbembe (2001, p. 2) observes that Africa has historically been used as a "polemical argument" in the West's efforts to establish its separateness from the rest of the globe. This interconnected process of "othering" has created a narrative in which Africa is perceived as inherently deficient, and the West is positioned as the entity that must assist the region in overcoming its structural challenges through specific solutions.

In line with Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie's critique of the "single story", these external discourses have collectively exerted considerable influence in shaping perceptions of Africa, often resulting in narratives that marginalise the continent's inherent complexities and nuances. Even today, many describe Africa through a lens of absence and failure. Ferguson (2006) highlights the persistence of stereotypes of plague, disaster, and crisis that dominate global "Afro-pessimistic" perceptions of the continent.

The role of race in structuring global hierarchies is another critical factor in understanding Africa's peripherality. Danso and Aning (2022) use Bhambra's concept of "methodological whiteness" to argue that the global system, and in particular its liberal political economy, is constructed to normalise "whiteness" as the default and universal standard. This perspective ignores how the constitutive role of race and colonialism shaped the global order, effectively marginalising African states and their insecurities. By analysing the persistent problems in the global discourse on Africa, particularly around peace and security, the authors show how labels such as "uncivil wars", "ungoverned spaces", and "insurgencies" discredit African political action while upholding Western political norms (Danso & Aning, 2022).

Denial of African Agency

A second major factor contributing to the perception of Africa's peripherality is the denial of African agency. Historically, global discourse has represented the continent as passive. Its role in world politics is often defined only through interactions with external actors. As Íñiguez de Heredia (2018) notes, this representation not only obscures Africa's political realities but also perpetuates power dynamics that maintain its subjugation, both materially and symbolically. This narrative is consistent with the Hegelian idea that Africa is "unhistorical"—a region with minimal influence on global events. In this view, Africa only becomes relevant through its interactions with the rest of the world (Hegel, 1956). The denial of agency reinforces Africa's subaltern position in global politics, casting it as a passive recipient of outside influence rather than an active participant in shaping global outcomes.

As Van Wyck (2016) notes, Africa's identity has often been situated in a triangular relationship between the roles of victim, bystander, and, less frequently, agent. Even in Marxist scholarship,

Africa has been portrayed as a passive entity, with external actors identified as the primary agents of change and disruption on the continent. This construction has had significant implications for how Africa has been studied and understood within the field of International Relations. The emphasis has been on external intervention and influence, with relatively little attention to how African states and actors have exercised agency and autonomy within the international system.

In contrast to these traditional narratives, recent scholarship has sought to reframe Africa's role in global processes by emphasising its agency. Rather than viewing Africa as a victim or passive bystander, scholars such as Brown (2012) argue that we should focus on how African states and other African actors have actively engaged with and shaped the international system. This approach requires a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between agency and structure, recognising that African actors have exerted considerable influence despite the constraints imposed by global capitalism and external powers, as the following section of this chapter will discuss.

Similarly, Ellis (2011) calls for a more nuanced analysis of African history that transcends simplistic portrayals of Africa as merely a victim of external forces or fundamentally deficient. He underscores the pivotal role of African agency in shaping the continent's internal dynamics and its interactions with the global system. This agency is evident in various forms—adaptation, co-optation, and resistance—as African actors have confronted the challenges of colonisation, post-colonialism, and globalisation.

Bischoff, Aning, and Acharya (2016) further highlight the growing potential for African agency in contemporary international relations. The authors note that African states and regional organisations are increasingly asserting themselves in areas such as regionalism, security management, and relations with external actors. This redefinition of African agency encompasses both ma-

terial and ideational elements. As will be seen in the final section of this chapter, African states are using their strategic importance in a multipolar world to negotiate more favourable terms with emerging powers from the Global South. This shift represents a significant departure from the traditional view of Africa as an object of external influence. Instead, the continent is now positioned as a key actor and an active subject in shaping global outcomes.

An important concept in this discussion is the notion of “extraversion”, which has at times sparked controversy due to its potentially stigmatising nature. The term refers to how African elites have historically engaged with external actors in order to secure resources and legitimacy (Bayart, 2000; Ellis, 2011). Critics often condemn this strategy for exacerbating Africa’s dependence on external actors, yet it also demonstrates agency, as African actors skillfully negotiate the global system to their advantage. However, this extraversion, referred to in the literature as “neo-patrimonialism”, has in many cases also been criminalised, with African leaders and elites portrayed as corrupt or self-serving. As Ellis (2011) notes, this critique overlooks the complex political dynamics at play, including the way African actors have used external resources to maintain internal stability and resist external domination.

These dynamics of adaptation, co-optation, and resistance have ensured that African agency remains central to the continent’s role in the global system. From the Atlantic slave trade to European colonialism and the post-colonial era, African actors have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adapt to changing global circumstances while resisting external domination. Such recognition serves to reassert the political subjectivity of African states and societies, while challenging long-standing exceptionalist narratives that have characterised Africa as either a romanticised or stigmatised “other”.

In sum, Africa’s peripherality in IR is not inherent but rather a discursive construct that has served to deny the continent’s agency

and reinforce its subaltern position in global politics. Recent scholarship, however, has challenged this narrative by highlighting how African actors have exercised agency, both historically and in the contemporary global system. Recognising the complex, co-constitutive relationship between Africa and global capitalism enables us to move past simplistic portrayals of Africa as a mere victim or passive bystander, and instead acknowledge its central role in shaping the modern world.

Examining Africa and the Global Co-Constitutive Relationship

From the Systematic Global Exclusion of Africa to the “Assemblage” Approach

The co-constitutive relationship between Africa and global capitalism is fundamental but often neglected in international relations and global history. As we have just argued, conventional wisdom holds that Africa plays a marginal role in the global economy, primarily subject to external forces rather than actively shaping global dynamics. However, a more nuanced understanding suggests that Africa has long been an integral part of the development of global capitalism, both as an active influence on its development and as a subject to external forces. This perspective is supported by critical approaches, such as international political sociology and decolonial theory, which challenge dichotomies dividing the local from the global and instead highlight the interactive, interconnected nature of global processes (Abrahamsen, 2017; Bischoff, Aning & Acharya, 2016; Ranieri & Baldaro, 2022, among others).

One of the most important contributions to the study of Africa and global capitalism is Rita Abrahamsen’s (2017) “assemblage approach”. This methodology proposes that international relations, usually viewed as external to Africa, are in fact intricately interwoven with African localities by acknowledging that the concept

of the international can be found in any place and can be traced from the ground up. This challenges the idea of Africa as a separate, passive entity. Conversely, this approach places Africa within the global, with local contexts inextricably tied to and shaped by wider international forces. As Abrahamsen (2017) argues:

an assemblage methodology, offers a productive way of negotiating the meeting between IR and African Studies by making it possible to study Africa simultaneously as a place in the world and of the world, i.e. in a manner that appreciates its specificity and its globality. By studying Africa from the ground up, as it is being constantly assembled by a multiplicity of local and global forces, the continent's politics and societies can be captured as both unique and global, as a window on the contemporary world and its articulation in particular settings. (Abrahamsen, 2017, p. 3)

Jean-François Bayart (2000, p. 267) further supports this view. He famously declared that the discourse of Africa's marginality is fallacious because it is inextricably linked to the ebb and flow of global power and economic configurations. Similarly, Taylor and Williams (2004) argue that historiography has often failed to acknowledge the extent to which Africa has been a key actor in defining moments in international relations, not only as a passive recipient but often as a catalyst or trigger of major global events. As Ranieri and Baldaro (2022) note, Africa's role in global capitalism is not an established, static component of the international system. Rather, it is a constantly evolving social construct shaped by relational and dialectical interactions with other global actors and systems. This perspective challenges any attempt to define Africa's position within a fixed international system. Instead, it emphasises the dynamic and co-constitutive relationship between the continent and global capitalism.

From a decolonial perspective, scholars such as Íñiguez de Heredia and Wai (2018) also argue that the notion of Africa's exclusion from global capitalism is a myth. It is wrong to view Africa as a peripheral entity in global capitalism; rather, it has always played a central role in shaping this system. The point, therefore, is not to debate the inclusion or exclusion of Africa, but to examine how it has been incorporated into the system and the consequences this has had for its people. This line of argument aligns with Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) critique that International Relations (IR) as a discipline systematically excludes and silences Africa's role in the global order. The tendency to "bring Africa back in" during periods of renewed interest in the continent, such as the current "new scramble for Africa", fails to acknowledge that Africa has always embedded itself at the heart of global capitalist modernity and its exploitative structures.

Assessing Historical Stages of Co-Constitution: From the Atlantic Slave Trade to the "New Scramble" for Africa

Historical evidence suggests that Africa's involvement in global capitalism dates back to the Atlantic slave trade and the so-called *first* scramble for Africa, both of which were fundamental to the development of Western capitalism. Specifically, the extraction of slave labour and natural resources from Africa was a crucial element in the accumulation of capital that fuelled the Industrial Revolution and the European imperial expansion. As Howard F. French (2021) succinctly observes, this fateful engagement between Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa "produced civilisational transformations in both regions and in the wider world" (p. 5). The slave trade, in particular, had a profoundly negative impact on Africa, both socially and demographically. Furthermore, it had a significant and lasting impact on the global economy by establishing patterns of trade, labour, and capital that persist to this day. Turning to existing

literature on the economic and political impact of the slave trade, scholars argue that African elites were not merely passive victims but played an active role in facilitating and profiting from the trade. As Klein (1999) and Eltis (1999) show, African traders held dominant positions in the trade, and many African and Afro-European elites accumulated considerable wealth from the exploitation of enslaved people.

During the colonial period, Africa's resource extraction continued to underpin European industrialisation and the expansion of global capitalism. As Carmody (2016) observes, the initial "scramble for Africa" was fuelled by Europe's demand for raw materials to sustain its industrial economy, positioning Africa at the nexus of global capitalism's development. However, the relationship was reciprocal. African elites and societies navigated colonial rule, often co-opting or resisting foreign dominance to maintain agency within the global capitalist framework. The concept of extraversion, as discussed by Bayart (1981) and others, captures this dynamic, in which African actors leveraged external resources and networks to advance their interests, often challenging or subverting colonial control.

In the post-colonial period, Africa faced new forms of global capitalist control, particularly as structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and the neoliberal policies of international financial institutions took hold. The Washington Consensus, which dominated global economic policy from the 1980s onwards, cast Africa as a problem of underdevelopment that, it claimed, integration into the global capitalist system could solve (Ferguson, 1994). Africa's proxy wars also exemplified how the region was embedded in global geopolitical dynamics during the Cold War (Cooper, 2002). Nevertheless, African states and their citizens demonstrated considerable agency as they navigated these external pressures, adapting to and resisting the demands of global capitalism and geopolitical trends in diverse ways. All in all, and as James Ferguson (2006, p. 14) notes

regarding Africa's integration into the global capitalist system over the past few centuries, Africa's engagement with globalisation has not involved a straightforward process of "joining the world economy". Instead, it has involved a series of selective and spatially uneven forms of connection and disconnection, reflecting the continent's complex and ambivalent relationship with global capitalism.

In recent decades, the emergence of new global actors, particularly from the Global South, has transformed Africa's role within the international system. The so-called "new scramble for Africa" is driven by the rising economic and strategic interests of countries such as China, India and Brazil. This has created new opportunities and challenges for African states and societies. African actors have demonstrated an increasing capacity for agency in these relationships. They negotiate with external powers to secure investment, aid and trade deals that align with their national and regional interests. However, this new phase of global engagement has also reproduced many of the exploitative dynamics of the past. African resources are once again at the centre of global capitalist expansion.

In conclusion, the co-constitutive relationship between Africa and global capitalism is a central theme in the continent's history and its contemporary role in the international system. It would be wrong to view Africa as a marginal or peripheral actor in the development of global capitalism; rather, it has been a crucial and active participant in this process, both in shaping it and in being shaped by it. The theoretical approaches of international political sociology, decolonial theory, and assemblage thinking provide valuable insights into the complex and dynamic nature of this relationship, challenging simplistic narratives of Africa's exclusion or passivity. By recognising Africa as both a place in the world and a place of the world, we can better understand the continent's centrality in the global political economy and how African actors continue to influence and be influenced by global capitalism.

Africa's New and Sudden Centrality? Discussing the Novelties and Implications of the So-Called "New Scramble" on the Continent

Africa's Sudden Centrality in IR?

Over the past two decades, *The Economist* has produced three covers of particular significance for the African continent. The first cover, in 2000, was particularly notable for its characterisation of Africa as "the hopeless continent" (*The Economist*, 2000). A reversal of this narrative followed this in 2011, when the magazine adopted the more optimistic "Africa rising" theme. (*The Economist*, 2011) By 2019, the cover highlighted not only the continent's burgeoning economic dynamism, but also the growing global diplomatic interest in the region, driven in particular by China and other nations from the Global South. In that issue, *The Economist* describes a "new scramble for Africa", drawing parallels to the original late 19th-century scramble. (*The Economist*, 2019)

The concept of a "new scramble for Africa" has also attracted considerable academic interest. A particularly notable contribution is that of Pádraig Carmody (2016), who emphasises the exploitation and commercialisation of natural resources to validate the comparison between these two historical moments. Similarly, Ian Taylor (2015) notes that there has been a notable increase in international interest in Africa as a potential energy source, to the extent that there is now a perception of a "scramble for Africa's oil". However, this renewed scramble is not driven solely by economic interests. It is clear that many emerging economies now recognise Africa's political and diplomatic importance, particularly within global forums (Alden, 2019). For example, countries such as Turkey have expanded their diplomatic presence in Africa, growing from 12 embassies in 2009 to 42 a decade later (*The Economist*, 2019). Alongside this, Russia has been successful in influencing the

positioning of African states in international forums such as the UN General Assembly. Notably, the abstention of around 20 African states from condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 was seen as a diplomatic victory for Moscow and Beijing.⁴

This growing global interest in Africa underscores the continent's increasing centrality in changing international relations, as various scholars have noted (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2012; Harman & Brown, 2013; Taylor, 2015). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2012) argues that Africa has emerged as a key arena of capitalist competition and plays a central role in redefining the world order. Although the continent's share of global output remains below that of the advanced economies of the North and the emerging powers of the South, it has been steadily increasing (Lopes, 2019). The growing number of global actors competing for influence in Africa has not diminished Western interest; instead, it has intensified competition among these various actors (Carpintero *et al.*, 2016, p. 194). Taylor (2015) observes that these new actors introduce new approaches, markets, financing options, and aid channels, allowing Africa to reduce its dependence on traditional Western partners such as Europe and the United States. The continent has witnessed diversification of its partnerships, accompanied by notable increases in trade, foreign direct investment, and aid from these emerging partners.

Discontinuities and Implications of the New "Post-Hegemonic" Momentum for Africa

This intensified competition is not limited to state actors. A wide range of non-state actors participate, including corporations, pri-

⁴ White A. & Holtz, L. (March 9, 2022). Figure of the week: African countries' votes on the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *Brookings*. Available: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/figure-of-the-week-african-countries-votes-on-the-un-resolution-condemning-russias-invasion-of-ukraine>

vate security firms, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These groups are working with Western and emerging governments and international organisations. This multifaceted landscape exemplifies the “multiplex” world order described by Amitav Acharya (2017, p. 277), reflecting the complex interplay of forces shaping contemporary African dynamics. Acharya argues that the hegemony of a single nation or idea does not define a multiplex world. Instead, it is characterised by a system in which multiple international norms, regional alliances, and cooperative frameworks supplant the traditional dominance of a single hegemon. This pluralistic and interconnected international system reflects what Acharya calls a “post-hegemonic” order. Carmody (2016) echoes this concept with his notion of “flexigemony”, which captures the evolving dynamics in Africa, where both African state and non-state actors are actively shaping global realities.

This trend is further supported by Fantu Cheru and Cyril Obi (2010, p. 1), who argue that the West no longer holds a monopoly over Africa’s future development. The authors argue that the traditional North-South relationship is being replaced by a South-East and emerging Africa-Gulf triangular relationship. Most importantly, both scholars argue that this shift coincides with a period of profound introspection by Africans themselves about the failures of their development over the past fifty years (Fantu Cheru & Cyril Obi, 2010).

This raises the question of whether this post-hegemonic reality, in which Africa now plays a growing co-constitutive role—as in earlier historical phases—has introduced new discourses and forms of agency. In terms of discourse, Africa is once again framed in contradictory ways. On the one hand, as *The Economist* (2019) suggests, the continent is portrayed as a space where external interventions are an “opportunity” for Africans, provided they are astute enough to seize it. On the other hand, regions such as the Sahel are portrayed as security concerns (Abrahamsen, 2017; Van Wyk,

2016). This securitisation of issues such as jihadism, migration, and climate change has prompted Western actors, including the European Union (EU) and China, to implement comprehensive military and security strategies in the region. These efforts aim to protect their interests and mitigate emerging threats, reflecting a pragmatic shift in international relations (Mateos, 2022). While this discourse is not new, its widespread acceptance is noteworthy.

Moreover, as Harman and Brown (2013) argue, these competitive dynamics provide African states with the opportunity to act autonomously, enabling them to reconcile conflicting interests and pursue their own objectives. Cheru and Obi (2010, p. 4) observe that the increasing involvement of the Global South in Africa resonates with African leaders and elites who are wary of Western paternalism. This “Southern consensus” provides African actors with new policy options that were previously infeasible. Despite this, increased competition has not produced a zero-sum scenario. Rather, Western influence now faces growing challenges, especially amid rising anti-colonial rhetoric. Yet, African leaders are not simply replacing Western actors with those from the Global South. Instead, they are pursuing a strategy of complementarity, which some have termed “strategic polygamy” (Mateos, Rentería & Torrella, 2024). This approach allows for the diversification of alliances and agreements.

As Taylor (2015) observes, Africa is moving away from its traditional post-colonial North-South relations towards a more diverse set of partnerships, centred on business and involving a wider range of actors. This shift has led to a resurgence of Western governments’ interest in Africa, which could give African governments greater leverage.

But while this broader range of relationships offers considerable promise. However, many longstanding challenges remain, especially with governance and state-society relations. Multipolarity may offer African states more flexibility, but it will ultimately

depend on their ability to define a long-term development vision that could enable the continent to escape the dominance of Western-led paradigms. What is clear is that this new dynamic is creating both winners and losers within Africa, as well as new processes of adaptation and resistance.

Conclusions

The interdependence between Africa and the global capitalist system is not new; rather, it has been a historical constant. In this chapter, we draw on Abrahamsen's (2017) notion of "assemblage" to challenge traditional perspectives that have systematically positioned Africa as marginal and subaltern in global dynamics. The current phase, often termed the "new scramble for Africa", reflects a renewed form of this entanglement, whereby Africa and the global system mutually shape one another. In this phase, Africa has been represented by disparate voices, both as a land of opportunity for global actors and as a source of security threats. This duality reflects the persistence of tensions between discourses of development and modernisation, and those that perceive Africa primarily through the lens of Western concerns over instability and resource competition. Conversely, this specific phase also offers a broader range of voices, leveraging historical context to propose approaches and ideas that seek to decolonise and deconstruct our understanding of Africa.

A further significant characteristic of this period is the diversification of alliances and opportunities available to African elites, particularly in politics and economics. As African actors navigate an increasingly complex global order, they engage with a broader range of external powers, including emerging Global South powers on the international stage. Such engagements offer potential pathways for African development. However, whether these opportunities will translate into long-term benefits for broader populations across the continent remains uncertain (see Colom-Jaén &

Mateos, 2022). The challenge remains whether African elites can effectively use these opportunities to enhance wealth distribution and foster inclusive, redistributive growth.

In conclusion, it is worthwhile to reflect on the insights of Senegalese philosopher Felwine Sarr (2019), who calls for a re-thinking of the African trajectory. Sarr proposes that Africa undertake a critical reassessment of its experiences, many of which have been shaped by traumatic events, and situate them within their appropriate historical and cultural contexts. He argues that Africa must envision its future from a foundation rooted in its own values and knowledge system, free from the distorting narratives imposed by colonial and foreign powers. Africa must embark on a process of reevaluation and self-definition to build a future grounded in an honest recognition of its past, while empowering its people to assume control of their own destinies.

However, this task is complicated by the current securitised global order, in which Africa is often seen primarily as a source of threats. These might include worries about migration, terrorism, climate change, or competition for resources. Such securitised narratives tend to overshadow Africa's social and economic achievements and its potential for growth and transformation. Even though these narratives have become more conspicuous, they still pose significant challenges to Africa's self-determination. The continent must navigate the external perceptions of itself while striving to carve out an independent path that prioritises the well-being of its people.

It is therefore vital to subject the discourses that shape global perceptions of Africa to critical analysis and to highlight the agency of African actors. This necessitates an examination of how narratives about Africa are constructed and disseminated, while acknowledging the multifaceted and evolving ways in which African societies respond to and shape these narratives. This approach requires a shift in perspective, moving beyond viewing Africa as a

passive recipient of external influences. Instead, it requires recognising the continent as an active participant in global affairs, with the capacity to influence, challenge, and transform the global system.

In conclusion, the growing global importance of Africa should not be perceived solely in terms of its incorporation into existing global capitalist structures, but also in light of its active role in influencing those structures. Africa's intricate interactions with global capitalism reflect not only external forces acting upon the continent, but also the agency of African actors in shaping global economic and political processes.

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Capitalism, Development, and Climate Change in Africa: A View from a Global South Perspective

José Luis Gázquez

Introduction: Colonial, Postcolonial, and Neocolonial Legacies of Western Capitalism in Contemporary Africa

Western approaches to modern African history often depict it as beginning with the acknowledgment of the political independence of former colonial territories and their entry into the international system. However, this view is inaccurate. Critical historical research has demonstrated that Africa was forcibly drawn into the modern capitalist system from its earliest stages. Africans were enslaved, bought, and deported to work in the plantation system in the Americas, where they were also forced to produce and extract primary agricultural products. These goods were later manufactured in Europe's industrial centers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Thuram, 2020; Zeleza, 2021).

While I do not intend, in this section, to review the ways in which imperial-colonialist ideology continues to systematically exert power and reproduce itself through neo-colonial means in contemporary African spaces and societies, it is worth recalling at least two mechanisms considered to have the longest-standing effects. The first is the incorporation and fragmentation of African territories into Western colonial empires and later into postcolonial nation-states, followed by their forced integration into the global capitalist system. The second is the epistemic stigmatization and marginalization of Africa and its diverse societies and knowledge systems through mainstream dominant scholarship, which still facilitates the continual exploitation of these societies and resources even after the formal abolition of slavery and colonialism.

These historical processes—one political and economic, and the other epistemic—have unfolded since the earliest colonial encounters between European and African societies. As a result, contemporary states in this continent have exhibited a series of common traits during the postcolonial period, which have made them particularly vulnerable to the current impact of a climate change context exacerbated at this juncture by other processes, such as the Coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine between Western powers and Russia.

In the economic domain, it has also been argued that former colonial powers like France left in place diverse neocolonial mechanisms like the monetary system based on the common currency, the *franc CFA*, employed in most of its former colonies in West Africa:

The franc was introduced in Sub-Saharan Africa as a tool of colonial domination. In the highly exemplary case of the Western Volta (situated in actual Burkina Faso), the imposition of the franc was made progressively and at the expense of vibrant pan-African commercial networks built around the use of cowries, which served simultaneously as a unit of account, a method of payment, and a value reserve. (Samba, 2019, p. 236. Translation from French by the author of this chapter)

The Franc CFA monetary system was introduced in the French African Empire at the eve of decolonization, beginning in 1945 and concluding 15 years later with the political independence of its colonies in 1960. Despite being one of the central goals of most African Anglophone countries after gaining independence, this economic policy was absent in the former French colonies, where, instead, a system controlled by the former metropolitan power was installed and maintained after the formal end of colonialism. As Samba Sylla demonstrates, the basic pillars of this monetary system remain intact nowadays: a fixed parity with the Euro (previ-

ously with the French Franc at an exchange rate of 655,95 Francs CFA per 1 Euro), the warranty by France of an unlimited convertibility of francs CFA into Euros, the centralization of exchange reserves and the free transfer of capitals to the Franc CFA zone. In the final instance, Samba Sylla raises the question of whether the Franc CFA is a sovereign African currency, concluding that it is a currency used by Africans but not controlled by them, but by the French government (Samba, 2019, p. 239).

For the last three decades, Africa, like other regions of the “developing world,” has been subject to neoliberal economic and political reforms that have further accentuated the dependency and precarious conditions of societies of countries where they have been implemented since the 1980s. Undoubtedly, it could be argued that continuity and parallels with the economic model adopted during the colonial period are at the core of the failure of the Structural Adjustment Plans and their negative social, economic, political, and environmental impacts on contemporary African countries and societies. In fact, the influence and dependency that international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) impose on African countries represent another example of how powerful nations of the Global North (including former European colonial empires) continue to control economic and political processes in the continent even when formal colonization has theoretically disappeared from the legitimate actions a state or a group of states can perform.

Commercial relations between West African countries—former French colonies—and the neoliberal political and economic model illustrate the continuity between colonial and neo-colonial domination by capitalist industrialized nations over the rest. Mali’s economic and political history since colonial times is a clear example. Mali is one of Africa’s 14 landlocked independent countries. It was created artificially when French troops occupied the territory, drew administrative and political borders, and named it

French Soudan (Traoré, 2005). As in the rest of its colonies, France imposed here an economy based on the extraction of raw resources and the production of primary agricultural goods to satisfy metropolitan economic interests. In the case of the French Soudan, the main product was cotton, harvested by French African subjects and shipped to French manufacturing centers. It has been sufficiently argued that this colonial extractive model is at the source of most of the economic and political problems faced by contemporary African independent states, which were once under European colonial rule and are now under the neoliberal economic regime. To a large degree, this persistence is owed to the fact that most (if not all) African independent states retained the same political and administrative borders and the same extractive and productive dynamics introduced during colonial times in the independent period.

In the first decades after achieving formal political independence, economic models in African countries were mainly characterized by state planning and intervention. However, after two decades of political sovereignty, countries such as Mali faced prolonged crises that forced their governments to adopt Structural Adjustment Programs promoted by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB), which entailed economic and political reforms aimed at achieving “progress” or “development.”

Among others, the economic reforms implied the opening and liberalization of national economies to international trade, while at the same time adopting austere measures, such as the reduction or suppression of social expenditure or subsidies, in order supposedly to increase efficiency by reducing the participation of the state in the economic domain, leaving it in the hands of private actors. In the political domain, eligibility to receive financial resources was further conditioned on the adoption of a multiparty democratic system. Thus, the liberal democratic political system, along with an open economy based on primary goods exports, be-

came the requirement for access to credit and loans from these institutions.

In sum, during both the colonial and early postcolonial periods, economic activity was organized primarily by the state. However, since the 1980s, capitalist and extractive interests have prevailed, doing so at the expense of the state's capacity to deliver public goods as a condition for accessing credit from financial institutions. Critically, for African countries and other nations with a colonial past, this has been reflected in the agricultural domain, where the World Trade Organization's (WTO) prohibition on public funding for the agricultural sector places these countries at a disadvantage relative to rich nations. While most of the countries that adopted the structural reforms have complied with this norm to acquire financial funds, great powers such as the United States of America (USA) or countries members of the European Union (EU), continue to subsidize their agricultural sectors and to "flood" international markets (Traoré, 2005).

In the countries of the African continent where the intensive monoculture export crops system was introduced, the results both in the colonial and independent periods have been mainly profits for powerful economic enterprises and corporations, and African political elites on the one hand, and widespread poverty for the majority of its people at the expense of the environmental degradation of their lands (see below).

Thus, the neoliberal globalization model imposed on African countries in pursuit of "development" has created paradoxical situations such as that faced by the *dogons*—one of the many and diverse traditional ethnic communities inhabiting the former French Soudan, now Mali, known for centuries for the beauty and high quality of their cotton tissues and garments—who are currently compelled to wear secondhand clothes imported from Europe, the USA, China, and elsewhere, unable to afford manufactured goods from industrial powers. This situation is further aggravated by the

intentions of powerful countries like the USA to enforce the cultivation and production of a genetically modified cotton that would enable them to control the whole production process while simultaneously outstripping already poor farmers of their only advantage in the commercial process, which is their profound traditional knowledge of seeds (Traoré, 2005).

Finally, it should also be added that the implementation of structural adjustment policies in African countries, alongside the simultaneous introduction of multiparty politics, coincided with the beginning of intolerance and xenophobia. These developments would, from the 1990s onward, drive many African countries into economic and political crises, some of which erupted into violent armed conflicts, including those in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Côte d'Ivoire. Although these particular conflicts have already been settled, economic, political, and environmental degradation remain significant features of the postcolonial African landscape, as illustrated by ongoing internal armed conflicts in the Central African Republic and Ethiopia. As for the Sahel, the situation is not more promising. In recent years, there has been a succession of military coups in most of the states due to armed violence coming either from radical Islamic groups or from national armies themselves, which threatens the stability of the whole sub-region of West Africa.

Africa, Capitalism and Climate Change

Generally speaking, states and populations from the Global South are the most vulnerable to the multiple and diverse impacts of climate change. As most of the consequences of the so-called anthropocene and climate change scenarios are related to the global warming process, states that host societies South of the Equator are likely to suffer more than their Northern counterparts from rising temperatures translated in both gradual onset effects such as

droughts and desertification processes and in an increase of extreme weather events such as floods or landslides because geographically and economically they are better prepared to face the impacts of such phenomena.

In other words, the impact of climate change should be understood “in relation to state policy” concerning the local level (Tsing, 2018). This perspective is especially pertinent in the context of the African continent, where the issue is directly related to the historical imposition of the nation-state’s political structure and infrastructure to satisfy the needs of Western powers rather than to respond to local populations’ interests. As I shall argue on the following pages, the absence of the latter positions states and societies of the Global South in a more vulnerable position than their counterparts in the North when facing the consequences of climate change.

While it has been argued that Africa is the most affected geographic space by climate change and extractive capitalist dynamics since the beginnings of capitalism, it should be noted that this impact has been uneven both globally and within the continent. In this sense, in the following lines, I would like to refer to the impact of climate change and capitalism in Africa as “patchy,” rather than as homogeneous and uniform. Here, it is also helpful to look at “how particular human infrastructures have been created out of whack ecologies, that is, ecologies that bring us into the anthropocene” (Tsing, 2018).

While it is necessary to keep this last point in mind when analyzing climate change-related phenomena before making generalizations about the continent, it is important to note, for the purpose of this chapter, that there is a considerable number and variety of anthropocene scenarios evolving in Africa. These scenarios are both human-induced and not. They place the continent, its countries, and societies in the aforementioned position of having contributed the least while being the most affected by it. Further-

more, these societies have benefited the least from the capitalist economy.

The goal thus is to present how the impact of climate change is felt more acutely in African states and societies than elsewhere because of the historical consequences of a colonial then development model determined by a global (neo)-liberal capitalist economic system and ideology imposed on Africa by Western powers since its early mercantilist stages and continued nowadays by the same nations together with a fast growing presence of other non-Western powers such as China, India, Russia or Brazil in a rush for African strategic resources as several authors in this volume and elsewhere underscore. In fact, the current scenario poses crucial challenges for African countries amid a multidimensional crisis, such as balancing access to energy to promote economic growth and development while protecting themselves from climate change, on a continent with the most significant global energy gap.

Although it may be the world's most vulnerable region to climate change, Africa is also the least able to respond to it. For progress to be made, global climate solutions must address Africa's specific vulnerabilities. Being the least industrialized continent, and thus having contributed the least to climate change, Africa is nevertheless paying the highest prices. For example, phenomena associated with global warming, such as disruptions in average rainfall levels, are also felt in other regions of the world. Still, Africa is more severely affected, since the 10 most vulnerable countries to climate change are on this continent. It is forecast that climate change could push 40 million people into poverty and displace approximately 85 million people (Mo Ibrahim, 2022).

As mentioned before, one way to define climate change is in terms of long-term shifts in global temperatures and weather patterns. At the same time, its impact is measured by the increase in extreme weather events on the one hand and slow-onset effects on the other.

Europe and North America, since the 19th century, have together produced most of the historical greenhouse gases, which are highly responsible for the current intensification of climate change patterns and contexts worldwide. Despite registering the lowest historical carbon dioxide emissions, Africa has contributed very little to global climate change. At the regional level, three countries—South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria are responsible for 51% of the African emissions. Nevertheless, temperatures in Africa rise faster than elsewhere, and precipitation becomes increasingly unpredictable as extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, landslides, and sandstorms, increase in frequency.

As for the slow-onset effects, which constitute the gradual impacts of long-term temperature shifts such as desertification, rising sea levels, land degradation, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss, glacial retreat, or salinization, all of them are present in Africa. There is already evidence that in several African countries, crop yields are shrinking due to climate change. Suffering from year-long droughts in 2021, Madagascar was the first country in the world to face a famine solely due to the consequences of climate change (Mo Ibrahim, 2022).

This section aims to briefly illustrate how structural adjustment programs imposed on African governments since the 1980s have, over the last decades, reduced the state's capacity to meet development and environmental challenges, thereby accelerating poverty, inequalities, and the widespread degradation of natural ecosystems.

Historical conditions imposed on Africa (and particularly those that followed the adoption of structural adjustment programmes [SAPs]) have not led to a general improvement in material security for communities and societies. Instead, economic and political reforms in Africa have favored transnational corporate interests and provoked the emergence of anthropocene scenarios in

Africa where livelihoods, and especially those of the most vulnerable (children, women, and elders), are severely threatened.

Since the 1990s, as a result of the implementation of the neo-liberal model under structural adjustment programs, some African countries have witnessed the emergence of e-waste dumps that thrive in the so-called informal sectors of the economy.

The biggest dump is located in Agbogbloshie, Ghana. During the 1990s, it received up to 200.000 tons of e-waste each year. Despite efforts to close it, the amount of waste traded with enterprises, along with the (precarious) livelihoods it supports, has made the resilience of this dump an example of an anthropocenic, capitalocenic scenario where transnational economic dynamics intersect with local communities' initiatives and strategies of survival in a post-structural adjustment and climate change scenario (Kwan, 2020). In Agbogbloshie, the accumulation of e-waste not only piles up and threatens the livelihoods of its inhabitants, but also harms their health through the economic activity it sustains (Lawal, 2019). One of the most common jobs in the scrapyard is burning old electronic devices, mostly done by young men. This activity is highly toxic to the ecosystem, polluting the air, land, and water, and seriously harming the health of those who engage in it (Lawal, 2019).

It is worth noting that the dynamics of extraction that underpin the digital capitalist economy are very present on the continent, especially in the DRC, where most of the coltan and tantalum reserves are found. Moreover, Africa is where electronic waste ends up. Another example of environmental degradation resulting from human capitalist activity can be found in the land and water of the Niger Delta, caused by frequent oil spills, which, in turn, are a direct result of perforating and extraction activities. Furthermore, the case of the Ogoni community resistance and its brutal repression by the Nigerian government remains a paradigmatic one (Thomson, 2014; Obi, 2005).

Related to the consequences of the exploitation and extraction of oil and other non-renewable fossil fuels along the continent, another example of anthropocenic/capitalocenic scenarios developing in most of African major cities due to economic practices is the high rate of air and water pollution provoked by the general use of lowest quality fuels which are banned in Europe and the US but sold and extensively used in African urban contexts (Kalmoy, 2019).

Finally, another economic activity, extractive by definition and present on the continent since Western colonial times—mining—has been at the core of capitalist dynamics and conflicts since the European colonial occupation. While gold extraction can be traced back to this period, many other strategic mineral resources, such as coltan, cobalt, and tantalite, now figure among the most coveted inputs that underpin the current stage of digital capitalism. To cite one example among many, South Africa's province of Gauteng has been a mining hotspot for gold, diamonds, and uranium extraction, resulting in a “landscape pierced by hundreds of quarries, shafts and abandoned tunnels” (Kalmoy, 2019). A similar, if not worse, context of environmental degradation from extractive mining is found in Niger. Here, operations by French mining enterprises like Orano (formerly Areva) before the coup d'état have polluted land, air, and water with radioactive uranium without paying any export duties or taxes on mining.

It should be noted that natural disasters, or disasters caused by extreme weather events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, are also the result of capitalist agricultural activities. During the colonial period and afterwards, intensive agricultural mono-crop economies were the norm in the territories under European control. However, as the production was designed to meet the short-term demand of international markets, it left little or no time for African soils to recover, thereby accelerating the progression of desertification.

Indeed, Africa's vulnerability in the context of both climate change and the current stage of evolution of the capitalist economic system lies in its geography. A landmass that spreads over more than 30 million square kilometers, Africa, the world's biggest island, is home to some of the most extreme climates on Earth. This condition of being *de facto* an island under the influence of multiple geopolitical, economic, and cultural factors has been put forward to explain both its potential for its ecosystems and populations, as well as its weaknesses and vulnerabilities (see Mthembu in this volume). In fact, it has been argued that, since human history is coterminous with African history, African societies living in such harsh environments as the Sahara Desert have developed various forms of living together under hostile climatic conditions since early historical times (Sarr, 2016).

After examining these contexts in which severe environmental degradation was either directly provoked by capitalist extractive activities or by a combination of the former with long-term climate change effects, it is tempting to represent Africa as the anthropocenic epicenter, from the imposition of colonial economies onward, under the neoliberal logic of Structural Adjustment Plans.

Nevertheless, before representing Africa in a generalized manner that risks reproducing Eurocentric or Western negative views of the continent by extending the anthropocenic scenarios across the continent, it is essential to approach, from a nuanced historical perspective of state-building and its policies (or absence of them) regarding climate change, capitalism, and environmental degradation, the impact of extractive capitalism in particular scenarios. As discussed above, African countries bear the heavy burden of the colonial legacy in state-building capacity, especially in infrastructure and welfare institutions that enable populations to adequately resist the negative impacts of both capitalism and climate change.

Environmental Protection and Development in Africa and the Global South

Fighting climate change globally requires addressing Africa's specific development challenges. For instance, in the framework of Agenda 2030, climate change, COVID-19, and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine are putting at risk the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the continent. Twelve of the seventeen SDGs involve direct action on climate change. Especially SDG13, which specifically addresses climate change¹.

As mentioned before, African countries are among the most severely affected by climate change, where poverty, limited access to education, deficient health care capacity, and unemployment lead to low societal resilience. This makes them chronically less able to face environmental challenges compared to nations and regions elsewhere. Even under these circumstances, three-quarters of African countries have made progress toward this goal, while no EU country, the US, or Canada has done so. Almost 90% of EU and North American countries are facing major challenges in achieving SDG13, and none are on track to achieve it.

To all this, it should be added that the negative spillover effects from industrialized countries, such as embodied imports of greenhouse gas (GHG), the buying of carbon credits, land degradation, or water scarcity, all resulting from Western or other powers' capitalist exploitation of the continent, pose additional obstacles to Africa's development under climate change crisis conditions.

Africa may be absent from mainstream theoretical discussions in the social sciences, particularly in International Relations, but it

¹ Sustainable Development Goal 13, titled "Climate Action", focuses on taking urgent action to battle against climate change and its impacts. This goal recognizes that climate change is a global issue with far-reaching consequences, affecting every country and requiring immediate, coordinated efforts to mitigate its effects and adapt to the changes already underway (UN, 2023).

is at the core of multiple global issues; one of the most important, if not the most, is climate change. This is because it means we have to address the question of how to achieve development in Africa under climate change conditions, and try to answer it through envisioning major reforms to the capitalist system or by eschewing it and adopting alternative models. Either way must take into account a shift in the way we conceive and represent Africa and its place in the world's economic and political affairs, because while Africa is at the forefront of achieving SDG13, it is critically lagging behind other SDGs, such as SDG1 (poverty) or SDG2 (hunger), and SDG7, energy (Mo Ibrahim, 2022).

The achievement of this last SDG is highly problematic because it poses the challenge of reconciling energy justice (development justice) with climate justice. Realizing that Africa's development agendas depend on addressing the continent's energy gap with the rest of the world. Currently, 600 million Africans lack access to electricity, and 930 million lack access to clean cooking fuels, making Africa the region with the lowest energy access rates globally. Africa's demographics heighten this challenge. We must remember that the African population is expected to almost double by 2050 and triple by 2100.

Yet policies focused on ending fossil fuel financing (which is essentially the position of Northern countries) risk further hindering potential drivers of development for Africans. Africa has an enormous potential in the domain of renewable energies, but alone, and at this juncture, it would be insufficient to satisfy the continent's energy demand. Projects like the African Integrated High-Speed Rail Network, which is intended to cover transcontinental distances (from Casablanca to Cairo to Cape Town), and the Trans-African Highway Network Program, central to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) integration process, will certainly increase energy demand.

So, to answer the question of how to merge climate and development goals in Africa, exploiting natural gas as a transition fuel towards a future dominated by renewables might be the solution. Natural gas should be seen as an African option due to its abundance and cleaner burning than coal, wood, and oil. Wood produces even more emissions than coal or oil. In Sub-Saharan Africa, around 70% of households depend on wood fuel for energy. Besides the severe health effects, cooking with wood contributes to deforestation in the Congo Basin, considered the planet's second lung after the Amazonian jungle.

Finally, another question regarding gas as a major driver of transition is how to ensure that African gas primarily serves Africa's people and addresses the energy gap in African countries, rather than serving the growing extractive interests of Western and other powers participating in the new scramble for Africa.

Besides addressing the crucial energy concerns described above, how can African countries play a central role in the current global fight against climate change without being sidelined in decision-making and policy development processes?

Africa holds key ecological and mineral assets for the world. The continent contains nearly a quarter of global biodiversity hotspots and 30% of mineral reserves, both of which are essential for renewable and low-carbon technologies. However, Sub-Saharan Africa receives only 5% of total climate finance and must, in turn, pay for adaptation measures. For instance, in Ethiopia, it is estimated that adaptation measures until 2030 will cost \$6 billion per year, equivalent to 5.6% of its current Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, at least 40% of international development funds will need to be channeled into adaptation measures and cannot be spent otherwise (Mo Ibrahim, 2022).

It is also crucial to highlight the role of the African Union (AU) and African climate negotiators in elevating the issue of climate change impacts on the agendas of multilateral organizations

and forums. At the recent COP27, held in Africa and called by some the “African COP,” **a facility on loss and damage was approved**. We should not underestimate its importance, as it recognizes that the most vulnerable countries will require urgent financing to address the climate crisis. Still, it would be too early to consider it an accomplished and functional fact. There is still significant debate over how it will be funded and who will contribute to the fund. And these issues are fundamental to an effective operational modality that will ensure funding flows to those who need it most (Mo Ibrahim, 2022).

Likewise, this context also allows the African states, societies, and organizations an opportunity to overcome historical divisions between them and find in the fact that Africa is the most severely affected continent by climate change, while being the least responsible for it, a rallying point looking for climate justice that could increase the political weight of the continent globally.

It may be added that the large-scale armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine (the West) has also revived space for negotiations over resource demands and supply. It has also led to the adoption of positions on the conflict within international organizations like the United Nations (UN).

The main argument here is that increased interaction and co-operation among countries of the Global South facing similar climate change challenges could be highly beneficial in both tangible and intangible dimensions of the emergent South-South Cooperation model. Crucially, for these frameworks to consolidate, the investment in fostering research, teaching, and learning in the Social Sciences and International Relations from the perspective of the Global South, rather than the conventional Eurocentric Western paradigm, will be key. In the Global South paradigm, Africa, with its cultural specificities and understood through its own historical perspectives, is a critical actor, a major actor alongside the other regions and states that constitute the postcolonial space of the in-

ternational system. In the Global South paradigm of International Relations, Africa is a place where different globalizing, hegemonic projects are at play, and local societies are at risk. This is the reason why African knowledge production systems are given paramount importance in the conception of human and international relations.

Importance of Indigenous Knowledge and Religious Systems

In fact, it has been acknowledged that the solutions for African development and environmental degradation (and by extension for all the societies that compose the Global South) should be designed and informed by local realities that include alternative sources of knowledge to Western rational, scientific models of thinking (Falola & Griffin, 2021; Fagbayibo, 2020). In fact, free-market economic models have been built on this rational model, neglecting or overlooking complex systems of thought grounded in local and lived realities that could provide better solutions to the issues discussed above.

Among the many examples of indigenous knowledge systems, it is worth noting how they differ from Western thought systems by placing humankind on the same level as nature and the living and non-living beings that compose the planet. The religious principle of *Jok*, present in many Eastern African traditional belief systems, is illuminating in this sense. *Jok* is embedded in what has been called “African Traditional religions” or “animism.” It refers mainly to “the process of being part of the essence of universal power, which is inherent to life as a manifestation of its force” (Mazrui, 1986, p. 135). Most African traditional religions teach that humans are not created in the image of God, nor is God conceived as an image of humans. In fact, dichotomies crucial for the development of scientific thought in the West—such as man-nature, dead-living, natural-supernatural, or divine-human—are deliberately blurred in

African Traditional religions and belief systems. This blurring helps explain, for example, that all the forces of nature are expressions of religious forces (Mazrui, 1986, p. 135).

In this sense, it is also necessary to refer to *Ubuntu*, an African concept that emphasizes solidarity and is a powerful resource in climate change response (Chitando *et al.*, 2022, p. 33). In fact, while the concept has evolved in contexts of conflict and divisiveness, serving as a tool for reconciliation and reparation between human communities or societies, it should be stressed that its meaning can be extended to the protection of the environment in the context of climate change. As Chitando and others state, Ubuntu “is a reminder to be in solidarity with creation, an African environmental ethics [that] recognizes the integrity of creation and a radical philosophy that challenges ecocide and the plundering of African resources” (Chitando *et al.*, 2022, p. 34).

Nevertheless, Ubuntu is only one manifestation/dimension of African indigenous knowledge systems. Many others have shaped religious and cultural practices in Africa since early times. These practices aim to protect ecosystems and the environment by promoting the preservation of sacred natural sites. In fact, it is argued that traditional leaders or authority figures within these belief systems that represent African indigenous religions (and also those of imported ones such as Christianity and Islam) may play a crucial role in raising awareness about the environmental and climate crises and advocating for more resolute responses to them.

Finally, while it has been argued in this chapter that African countries and societies suffer the most from environmental degradation and climate change dynamics while being the least responsible for them, African women suffer disproportionately more than men because of their greater dependence on agriculture. As discussed earlier, both the colonial economic model of extraction and the current phase of accelerated climate change are the main factors exacerbating the degradation and desertification of fertile

soils. Despite this higher vulnerability, African women have been at the forefront of the fight against capitalist or environmental destruction of ecosystems and communities.

Wangari Maathai probably remains the best-known example of this fusion between communitarian feminism, ecological activism, and scientific research. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, she demonstrated that rainfall disruptions in Kenya's central highlands were caused by indiscriminate logging. Other activities related to the capitalist commercial system, such as the introduction of exotic monocultures, were also among the main causes of widespread poverty among the Kenyan population. She wrote: "Agriculture in Kenya, as in most of Africa, is watered by rain, not irrigation systems. With the destruction of the main forests, rainfall patterns are affected, and with them, yields from cash and food crops [...]" and "the loss of the forests also means that no vegetation remains to hold the soil in place" (Maathai, 2009, p. 241). Based on these observations, she concluded that the continuous degradation of ecosystems—caused by both the destruction of forests and the monocrop farming model of exotic species—could seriously compromise the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.²

At the epistemological level, the work of Maathai should serve as a reminder that Africa possesses a vast historical experience in what Eurocentric approaches have called "traditional knowledge."

² In this same book, Maathai explains the damaging ecological dynamics of the *shamba* agricultural system introduced in Kenya under British colonialism, which has persisted in the postcolonial period. In her view, this system consists of monoculture plantations—tree farms—that destroy local biodiversity, and that lack the ecological and biological systems to retain and conserve rainwater. This issue led Maathai to found the Green Belt Movement, which improved rainfall patterns and, in turn, agricultural yields. Nevertheless, the same peasant population that gained consciousness of the impact of resource depletion by participating in this movement was eager to return to the monoculture system to earn the financial means to survive. This situation clearly reflects the issue of achieving development in the context of climate change, which has been the focus of this chapter.

It is precisely this kind of local knowledge, embedded in traditional practices and philosophical systems, that African states and societies require to achieve development on their own terms while simultaneously protecting and caring for the environment amid climate change.

In fact, it is striking to observe the parallels and links between environmental decline, structural adjustment policies, and widespread poverty in former French, British, Belgian, German, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa. After six decades of achieving political independence and international recognition as sovereign states, what is at stake in the future is thus the survival of Sahelian and other African societies that face the dangerous convergence of different factors that contribute to relentless desertification processes which in turn provoke disturbances in rainfall patterns, aggravation of droughts and the multiple crises that they produce such as hunger, malnutrition, epidemic outbreaks, and water scarcity to name just a few.

In fact, at the time of writing this contribution, the governments of three countries in the Southern Africa region—Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe—have declared a state of national disaster due to the havoc droughts are causing in their territories and populations. It is estimated that approximately 24 million people could suffer from severe hunger or malnutrition conditions. Regretfully, droughts have been a common feature in the region over the last decades, but this year they have been further aggravated by the “El Niño” meteorological phenomenon, which raises sea surface temperatures and impacts rainfall patterns and levels globally.

Of course, as in the case of the anthropocenic scenarios described earlier, caused and sustained by both geographical aging and human disruption, one of the main consequences is the increase in migratory movements and the displacement of people. In the author of this chapter’s view, this probably represents the most

significant difference in how climate change differentially affects Global North and Global South countries, as well as the biggest challenge for humanity as a whole.

While Northern countries face considerable challenges in addressing the consequences of global warming, societies in the Global South, especially African ones, face difficulties compounded. They must deal with the consequences of rising temperatures alongside other important factors, such as the colonial past and the neocolonial, neoliberal present. These factors further exacerbate the crises while simultaneously reducing the response and resilience capacities of the states most affected by them.

Conclusions

When Wangari Maathai wrote about the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in her book *The Challenge for Africa* (2009), she argued about the paramount importance of upgrading MDG 7, “Ensuring environmental sustainability,” to the highest priority in addressing the negative impacts of climate change (Maathai, 2009).

Although the UN Agenda 2030 adopted in 2015 (six years after the death of Maathai, fifteen after the MDGs) for Sustainable Development represents an important discursive move towards increasing the importance of implementing and respecting norms globally although in practice, in most countries environmental challenges are still treated as a secondary issue when they should not:

The challenges facing agricultural communities throughout Kenya are mirrored throughout Africa and many of the poor countries in underdeveloped regions. In these regions, concern for environmental issues is treated as a luxury. But it is not: protecting and restoring ecosystems and reversing or slowing global warming are matters of life and death (Maathai, 2009, pp. 248-249).

Nevertheless, as Maathai herself concluded,

throughout Africa, the budgets of environmental ministries are dwarfed by those of defense ministries or national security, even in countries where the major threat to security is desertification, poverty, and unemployment (Maathai, 2009, p. 254).

In this chapter, it has been argued that Africa is the continent most affected by climate change and the capitalist economy, while being the least responsible for it. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the global implications of the destruction of African ecosystems. As it has been stated above, in some regions of Africa, these two factors have already provoked a serious decline in the quality of life of populations, resulting in the displacement of thousands of environmental refugees. This trend will continue, as anthropogenic and capitalocentric dynamics will continue to alter ecosystems worldwide. While it is important to continue to raise awareness about ecological and environmental issues and to accomplish a real reduction of greenhouse gases emissions, more attention should be provided to restoring and protecting natural environments such as the Congo Basin from the devastating effects of deforestation: “Scientists estimate that clearing of forests throughout the world currently amounts to about 20 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions” (Maathai, 2009, p. 271). In this sense, it is important to focus on creating market value from ecosystems’ natural capacity to absorb and store large amounts of carbon in the ground, thereby preventing their release into the atmosphere. The concept of carbon credits, while reversing the tendency to deplete and destroy natural resources by creating value associated with not exploiting them, risks putting natural zones back at the service of corporate capital once again, allowing powerful enterprises to pay for their emissions rather than reduce them.

Nevertheless, Africa needs such funds, as well as those of the loss and damage facility mentioned earlier, as the conflicting nature of development goals and environmental goals at the current juncture is a major obstacle to achieving both.

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II. Global and Regional Conflicts: Effects of Russia and Ukraine's Conflict

Africa in the Inter-Capitalist Dispute: Resonances of Russo-Ukrainian Conflict

Adriana Franco

Introduction

Imagine it is February 2022. We hear on the radio that the Russia-Ukraine conflict has begun. We are in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR). As we listen to the news, we watch a woman place flowers on a sculpture. This scene deeply captures our attention. The sculpture depicts seven figures: a woman embracing her two children and four Russian soldiers protecting them. We do not understand what is happening. Western media have claimed that Russia has invaded Ukraine and that it is an imperial force, but in some parts of Africa, Russians are being represented as liberators.

Why is a woman in CAR placing flowers in a sculpture representing a dominant force in Western narratives? How can Russia protect subalternized people in Africa? This striking sculpture is not the only surprise. Elsewhere, Central Africans are marching in the streets with banners reading “Central African Republic with Russia.” How did this happen? Is Western media lying, or what is going on? How do we make sense of these contradictions?

Since the war between Russia and Ukraine began, the dominant narrative has blamed Russia for both the causes and implications of the conflict. In 2023, a *New York Times* note argued: “Mr. Putin now appears intent on securing a place in the pantheon of historic, expansionist Russian leaders. In his public comments, he increasingly styles himself as a modern-day Peter the Great, the famous Russian czar, gathering up lost Russian lands” (Nagourney *et al.*, 2023). In this way, the war has been portrayed as a problem initiated and fostered by Russia to restore an empire that had

ceased to exist several years ago. Also, the war has not been historicized. Therefore, it has been deemed irrational. This narrative was not new.

According to the prevailing wisdom in the West, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression. Russian President Vladimir Putin, the argument goes, annexed Crimea out of a long-standing desire to resuscitate the Soviet empire, and he may eventually go after the rest of Ukraine, as well as other countries in Eastern Europe. In this view, the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 merely provided a pretext for Putin's decision to order Russian forces to seize part of Ukraine. (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 77)

In January 2022, violence against the Ukrainian population by the central government of Ukraine increased, principally targeting pro-Russian separatists. However, this has been largely omitted by the dominant media. The hegemonic discourse also fails to mention that Zelensky banned opposition parties, criminalized media that questioned him, and suspended elections. Thus, Blumenthal (2023) questioned:

Where is the democracy in Zelensky's recent decision to suspend elections in 2024 on the grounds that martial law has been declared? Well, it seems that Ukraine's democracy is harder to find these days than its military's suddenly inconspicuous commander-in-chief, Valeriy Zaluzhny.

Despite these contradictions, the war has not damaged Russia's image in Africa. On the contrary, in some areas, the ties have been strengthened. Therefore, this article analyzes how the war in Ukraine has rearticulated the interests of the great powers in Africa, particularly Russia's concerns, in the context of the inter-capitalist

dispute. First, the inter-capitalist dispute will be discussed, along with how it materializes Russia's presence in Africa. Subsequently, colonizing discourses about the implications of this war for African populations will be questioned. Finally, social processes regarding the dispute and the governments' and populations' acceptance of the Russian presence will be described.

The Inter-Capitalist Dispute and Africa

At the beginning of the 21st century, the inter-capitalist dispute spread throughout Africa, often justified by narratives such as the presence of terrorist groups or the collapse of the states. These approaches reinforced the infantilization and barbarization of African populations, a process implemented since the colonial period. However, beyond reproducing these discourses to continue the subordination of the continent, what does the inter-capitalist dispute entail? First, it is important to note that the dispute is anchored to hegemony. Hegemony is understood as:

the ability to pass one's vision of the world as a universal and shared vision. That is to say, it is the strategy to involve the social group in the construction of a world, material and symbolic, that comes from the vision and project of the subject with leadership capacity (Ceceña, 2018, p. 56).

Hegemony, as argued by Gramsci (2000), is based on coercion and consensus practices. Furthermore, it is a given fact that it is a process that changes over time and space, meaning its strategies and modalities are not static either. Historically, since the colonization of America and the imposition of slavery in Africa, the capitalist system has anchored hegemony. Even though the hegemonic subject has changed throughout this period, after the implosion of the Soviet Union, the United States (U.S.) acquired that role

worldwide. In recent years, however, Russia and China have also emerged as contenders for hegemony on the continent.

The inter-capitalist dispute is, therefore, a confrontation between different capitalist projects. It is not a conflict to create a new system but to lead it. That is why the dispute is inter-capitalist, that is, among or between diverse capitalist designs. This confrontation implies a dispute over the direction or control of the capitalist system, not its transformation or its reproduction. Historically, capitalism has sought the accumulation and valorization of capital. Thus, although the basis is the same (the capitalist system), the modalities differ. In Africa, governments and corporations from the United States, Russia, China, among others, are the main subjects in the dispute. However, in this article, I will focus only on Russia's presence on the continent.

For Wa Thiong'o (2015), Africa has been central to the development of capitalism. During the period of mercantile capitalism, enslavement ensured the accumulation of capital. In that context, the civilizing mission was the dominant discourse for European hegemony over Africa. During the period of industrial capitalism, colonization was subsequently established on the continent, mainly for the extraction of raw materials. At that time, one of the prevailing discourses for deploying hegemony was that of development, which continued throughout the Cold War. In the era of financial capitalism, however, debt became the core strategy for valorizing the capital of the centers of power at the expense of Africa's welfare. With the implosion of the Soviet Union, the United States positioned itself as the great hegemon, shifting the dominant narratives toward democracy and the fight against terrorism to maintain its dominance on the continent.

During the Cold War, specific African territories were central to the bipolar confrontation: the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola are just some examples. While in the 20th century, the United States and the Soviet Union were present on the con-

continent, their activity here was less pronounced, and they did not contest European spaces and influence as actively as they do today. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, this dynamic began to change, leading to an increase in the presence of non-traditional actors on the continent. Thus, although Russia's presence and dialogues on the continent are not recent, they have deepened in recent years.

In 2003, for example, the United States became more intrusive in Africa. The justification was to fight terrorism. Hence, in 2007, the U.S. created a new command for the region: the United States Africa Command. Subsequently, they established small and mobile military bases called lily pads and encouraged the deployment of private security forces. Likewise, they intervened directly in the territory with the operation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Libya, and they have supported the French troops in Mali and the Sahel (Franco, 2023).

For its part, Russia also began to have a more visible presence in Africa. For example, during the first decades of the 21st century, trade between Russia and Africa increased by 185%. The leading importing countries of Russian products were Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Sudan, and South Africa. For its part, the central exporting countries are South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Tunisia, Kenya, and Ghana (Sidiropoulos & Alden, 2017, pp. 13-15). Trade between Russia and the continent went from 1.5 billion in 2000 to 12.2 billion in 2014. Two-thirds is concentrated in North Africa, specifically Algeria and Egypt (Daniel & Shubin, 2018, p. 58).

For Russia, the most important area on the continent is North Africa. Russia considers it the "neighborhood of the Eurasian region" and central to its national security. This can help us understand why much of the recent U.S. military presence is also concentrated in this zone, since both countries are relevant actors in the inter-capitalist dispute. Even though there is no statistical

causal relationship, the deployment of U.S. bases, military exercises, and operations in the northern part of the continent allows us to observe the materialization of the inter-capitalist dispute between these two actors in Africa.

For Russia, the continent is a fundamental space for securing the supply of geostrategic resources, as it was for the ex-colonial powers, especially given that Russia and Africa together possess nearly half of the world's biological resources, fresh water, and minerals (Daniel & Shubin, 2018, pp. 58-59). In such a way, Russia also projects the African continent as a repository for its hegemonic fantasies. It is considered a place without decision-making capacity, allowing Russia to position itself in the inter-capitalist dispute. Since colonization, Africa has been represented as a space with abundant natural resources that local populations do not use, and external actors must seize them to enable the continent's development. Russia does not confront this narrative but positions itself as the subject that will lead the continent.

Russia has many energy interests in the continent. In 2011, Russia held a business forum in Ethiopia, attended by representatives from Mali, Niger, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe. The presence of the Russian oil and gas sector was evident at the summit (Daniel & Shubin, 2018, p. 60). In fact, Russia has secured concessions for oil and gas fields in Algeria with Gazprom and Lukoil. In addition, Russia was planning a series of pipelines in the Western region, including one that will run from Nigeria to Algeria, to transport gas from Africa to Europe (Sidiropoulos & Alden, 2017, p. 11). In this way, Africa is also a source of energy for Russia. And even though Eurasia's resources are more relevant to its interests, ensuring access to resources in other areas contributes to its hegemonic position.

Russian companies are also interested in uranium from the continent for developing nuclear energy (Olivier *et al.*, 2020, p. 20). Niger and the Democratic Republic of Congo have deposits of this

element. During the 20th century, France had an almost absolute, uninterrupted monopoly on uranium mining in Niger. However, in recent years, the Chinese and Russian presence has increased. The Russian state corporation, Rosatom, is the leading supplier of nuclear reactors worldwide (Sidiropoulos & Alden, 2017, p. 12). Although Russia can access uranium deposits more expeditiously, such as those in Kazakhstan, they are insufficient for Russian corporate interests. “The Russian Federation launched a long-term program to promote its nuclear reactors worldwide” (Kachur, 2022, p. 517). Also, Rosatom’s nuclear reactor contracts stipulate that the plants will be supplied with fuel for their entire operational period, which ranges from 50 to 60 years (Vasil’ev, 2011, pp. 377-379), and it is essential that Russia guarantees access to this fuel.

Russia also knows the importance of rare-earth elements (REE) and their concentration in Africa. Rare-earth elements are central to the energy transition and contemporary technological innovations. For instance, the so-called clean energy technologies and batteries use rare-earth magnets. Likewise,

in recent years, Chinese production has accounted for about 95 percent of the REE global market. Citing a need to retain their limited REE resources for domestic requirements and concerns for environmental effects of mining, China has restricted the supply of REEs through quotas, licenses, and taxes (USGS, 2014, p. 4).

That is why access to these elements is important in the inter-capitalist dispute. Vasil’ev (2011) considers that Russia has the technology to exploit these resources. Thus, Russia states that its assistance is essential for Africa to take advantage of these resources. Besides, Russia seeks to secure conventional energy sources and access to resources to diversify its energy production.

On the other hand, since 2006, Russia has been negotiating with African leaders the conversion of debt incurred by African countries during the Soviet era. However, this action has also been accompanied by a military project. For example, “after converting its debt to Russia in 2006, Algeria has spent \$7 billion to buy Russian weapons, including new-model MiG29 jets, tanks, and other heavy weapons to enhance the capabilities of its armed forces” (Zoubir, 2009, p. 83). Russia has established itself as the second-largest arms seller in Africa (Olivier *et al.*, 2020, p. 20). In fact, 13% of Russian weapons find their way to Africa. The primary recipients between 2017 and 2018 were Algeria, Egypt, Angola, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Sudan (Sidiropoulos & Alden, 2017, p.17).

In addition to the arms sale, Russia conducted a military exercise in 2015 as part of its Multinational Joint Task Force’s activities. The armed forces of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria participated in this action. Thus, in recent years, not only has the United States been training local forces to address the obstacles it faces in settling on the continent, but Russia is also strengthening its capabilities in the region. In 2016, Morocco and Russia made a joint declaration to combat transnational terrorism (Daniel & Shubin, 2018, p. 61). Likewise, Russia has had rapprochements with the Tobruk regime in Libya, which continues without the recognition of the so-called international community but controls important oil deposits. These interactions are not accidental. As mentioned, North Africa is Russia’s second-most-important area for its security interests, after Western Asia.

According to The Institute for the Study of War, Russia has signed security cooperation agreements with more than 20 African countries since 2014. Also, in 2019, the first Russia-Africa Summit was held. With this, “the Russian Federation made a bold statement about its interest in Africa” (Kachur, 2022, p. 509). Four years later, in 2023, the second one was held. All these show Rus-

sia's interest in closer ties with the continent. This is essential in its project to foster a new world order. In the face of these gatherings and the context of the Ukrainian war, the West has criticized these approaches and argued that:

Russia will also likely use the Summit to falsely claim that Western sanctions are limiting the export of Russian (and Ukrainian) food and fertilizer to Africa, distracting attention from Russia's culpability for triggering the disruption in global grain supplies. This includes Russia bombing the Ukrainian port of Odesa in the days prior to the Summit, while the grain intended for Africa and elsewhere was being loaded. (Siegle, 2023)

Another issue that has been debated regarding the Russia-Africa link is the presence of the Wagner Group on the continent. Wagner is a Russian private military company founded in 2014. It is said that this group acts in line with the interests of the Russian state, so the West portrays it as a significant threat. Wagner's presence on the continent is real. However, at the beginning of the deployment, the African population did not necessarily represent it as an imposition. On the contrary, in some places, its presence had been accepted, as will be analyzed in the third section.

The Colonizing Narrative of the Russo-Ukrainian War in Africa

The study of the African continent has reproduced coloniality since the colonial encounter. Since that moment, the continent and its people have been projected as empty spaces and needy subjects. According to Tamale (2020), coloniality is an ideological system that "explains the long-standing patterns of power that resulted from European colonialism, including knowledge production and the establishment of social orders" (p. xiii). Coloniality continues to

this day, reproducing discursive and material violence against marginalized populations. For instance, our image of Africa as a space of war, disease, and underdevelopment is anchored to this system. Besides, this narrative has been maintained even by non-hegemonic actors on the continent, such as Russia and China, who continue to extract resources from the territory.

When the Russian-Ukrainian war erupted, one of the main claims that spread worldwide was that the African continent would face a severe famine because many of the wheat and pesticides reaching the continent were exported from territories in conflict, particularly Ukraine. According to Martin Armstrong (2022), a Data Analyst, “Russian and Ukrainian imports account for 30 percent of all African wheat consumption. In the case of Egypt, for example, this figure is closer to 80 percent.”

Although these data are accurate, the image of a catastrophe in Africa due to the war in Ukraine continues to reproduce coloniality. In this narrative, the continent was portrayed as a region without agency that would suffer deeply from an external war. Africans were depicted as unable to adapt to the contexts that affected them. Passive people who depend entirely on the outside. That discourse is a fastener of coloniality. On the one hand, while unequal trade relations favor the economic dependence of African countries, it is also true that their populations are creative and find ways to confront the global dynamics of domination to survive and live. On the other hand, instead of merely proposing subordination, we should analyze how that dependency has been created.

Historically, subsistence agriculture has guaranteed the livelihoods of African peoples in the face of the structural violence of the capitalist system, even though classical economics considers it unproductive. Moreover, in the face of the ecological crisis we are experiencing—that is, Earth’s natural limits to sustain the reproduction of capital and even human life and other species—the subsistence economy is a proposal based on care to protect life. This

contrasts with the capitalist ethos, which focuses on dispossession and accumulation.

Subsistence agriculture is opposed to the metabolic rift of the capitalist system, i.e., the rupture in the exchange of matter between society and what we call nature. Capitalism has fissured this relationship because it extracts and discards more than the Earth can absorb and reproduce. This rupture dates back to the agricultural revolution, when soil exhaustion led to the use of fertilizers and soil chemistry to increase productivity. Even though this practice originated in England, it later came to dominate agricultural practices.

The decisive lessons of these agricultural revolutions are that every spatial re-centering of agro-ecological production—each with specific, commodity inflected geographies—entails a qualitative restructuring of the totality of agrarian relations: class structure, the range of necessary inputs, transportation infrastructure, the organization of money and credit, techniques of cultivation. (Moore, 2017, p. 306)

This revolution was also imposed on the African continent during colonization. Despite this, there are still memories of subsistence agriculture, which is less disruptive to nature's cycles and is based on community solidarity in African societies. Subsistence agriculture breaks with the linearity imposed by the capitalist system. It could also allow us to think of a different relationship with nature, not from the human-nature split of modernity but from a relational perspective.

During the Russo-Ukrainian war, commodity prices, energy costs, and inflation worldwide increased. In Africa and other countries, the increase in food prices could foster famine, food insecurity, and the outbreak of more conflicts. In the 21st century, we have already seen a rise in demonstrations and protests against rising

food prices across different regions of the African continent. The so-called bread demonstrations are some examples. This situation, along with the dependence on fertilizers and wheat, suggested that Africa would be deeply affected by the Eurasian conflagration. Although the price of wheat increased significantly at the beginning of February 2022, it began to decrease by May.

Based on data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Kebe and Nadarajah conducted a study to analyze “whether domestic wheat (flour) prices in the African countries of Angola, Mauritania, Egypt, Namibia, and South Africa have been affected by the Eastern European conflict” (2023, p. 4). Their findings were interesting. Angola was the fifth-largest economy in Africa in 2019. Notwithstanding, 90% of its food demand was covered by the international market. The most imported products into the country were sugar, rice, chicken, and, in fourth place, flour; 30% of the wheat imported came from Russia and Ukraine. During the first months of the conflagration, wheat prices in Benguela, a municipality in Angola, increased in line with international prices. However, the relationship was not so clear everywhere. Mauritania imported two-thirds of its cereal production, particularly sorghum, millet, and wheat. Its two leading wheat importers were also Russia and Ukraine. Nonetheless, during the first days of the war, wheat prices remained constant, but from May to June, they increased by 11.1% (Kebe & Nadarajah, 2023, pp. 5-6).

Egypt depended on Russian and Ukrainian wheat imports at 80%, and prices were already rising before the war broke out. Besides, more than two-thirds of the population relies on food subsidies, where wheat (bread) is essential. Despite this, the cost escalation was controlled by the government’s prompt response and its commercial connectivity. Thus, African countries are not inactive or completely dependent. They have the capacity to take action. In Namibia, prices increased due to the country’s reliance on imports such as wheat, energy, and fertilizers. However, according to Namib

Mills, a wheat and maize meal products corporation, the rise can be attributed to the depreciation of the Namibian dollar against the U.S. dollar. Finally, in South Africa, the wheat prices also increased. In 2021, South Africa imported 10% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine. However, the condition of the global dollar prices for its imports should be considered as in the Namibian case (Kebe & Nadarajah, 2023, pp. 5-11).

Despite this, the dominant narrative about the price increase was explained due to the war: “the price of wheat has tumbled from its peak after Russia invaded Ukraine” (Rennison, 2022). The discourse on the escalation in wheat prices can be seen as a strategy to direct public opinion against Russia or to foster negotiations to end the war. The increase cannot be explained solely by the war; recent discussions about food prices consider climate change a central factor, driving up food’s financial value. This returns us to the discussion of alternatives to development to avoid deepening the metabolic rift. The dependency on pesticides, the speculation by economic actors, and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic should also be considered in the analysis (Kebe & Nadarajah, 2023, pp. 12-13). The explanation for the increase is multi-causal. It cannot be explained solely by the war.

Another colonial narrative derived from the Russo-Ukrainian war in the African continent is linked with refugees and, therefore, focused on corporalities. By June 2022, the war had generated an intense refugee crisis. According to the United Nations (UN) Refugee Agency data, for that month, there were already 4.8 million Ukrainian refugees, most of whom headed for Europe to request protection. However, this humanitarian situation also reflected systemic racism. The UN Refugee Agency noted that “European Union Member States have taken unprecedented steps, rapidly activating the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time, guaranteeing access to protection and services for refugees from Ukraine.” This

action was essential to guarantee the safety and well-being of the Ukrainian population.

Notwithstanding, when we consider the treatment given to African refugees, the history has been very different. Carras (2022) recovered a phrase from Noah Trevor criticizing the racism in media reflected during the war: “I don’t know about you, but I was shocked to see how many reporters—around the world, by the way—seem to think that it’s more of a tragedy when white people have to flee their countries. Because, I guess, what? The ‘darkies’ were built for it?” With this, I do not want to say that Ukrainian citizens should not be helped, but we should question why it is easy to help certain bodies and not others. The war uncovered extremely racist discourses anchored to coloniality. For example, in the same article by Carras (2022) for the *Los Angeles Times*, she recovered some phrases said by journalists:

“These are prosperous, middle-class people,” said Al Jazeera English anchor Peter Dobbie. “These are not people trying to get away from areas in North Africa. They look like any European family that you would live next door to.”

“This isn’t a place—with all due respect—like Iraq or Afghanistan,” remarked CBS News correspondent Charlie D’Agata. “This is a relatively civilized, relatively European — I have to choose those words carefully too — city where you wouldn’t expect that or hope that it’s going to happen.”

Western and Westernized media claimed that war was common in Africa. However, it did not have to occur in Europe. They also said that the refugee bodies were black, not white. These narratives strengthen the coloniality of bodies, which value people based on phenotypic characteristics rooted in the subject of colonial-cap-

italist modernity; that is to say, the white, bourgeois, European, and heteronormative man. Quijano (2014) already said that:

The ongoing globalization is, first of all, the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and that of colonial/modern and Eurocentric capitalism as a new pattern of world power. One of the fundamental axes of this pattern of power is the social classification of the world population based on the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and that has since permeated the most important dimensions of world power. (Quijano, 2014, p. 777)

While these speeches were projected in the Western and Westernized media, Russia was establishing its presence in Ukraine, but also in Africa. Proof of this is the Bangui demonstration described at the beginning of the article. Furthermore, after analyzing the racist discourses of the war, it is not so difficult to understand why African populations have been more receptive to the Russian presence than to the Western one over the last years. In any case, this will be briefly analyzed in the next section.

The Perception of Russia in the African Imaginary

Recently, the link between Russia and Africa has been more evident. Countries like Mali, the Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, and Zimbabwe are moving closer to Russia. The presence of Russia on the continent is defined not only by interstate relations but also by the association between African governments and Russian companies, particularly private military companies (PMCs). “Russia’s ‘return’ to Africa is primarily viewed via the provision of

services in the security sector, and specifically through the presence of Russian PMCs. Moreover, this ‘return’ is perceived as mutually beneficial” (Issaev *et al.*, 2022, p. 426).

The link between PMC and African governments is exemplified by the Wagner Group’s increased presence on the continent. It has been argued that, in line with Russian interests, this group has influenced the political decisions of certain countries, such as Zimbabwe, to install rulers tied to Russian interests. Wagner’s influence in this space can also be observed in the tours made by the former leader of this company. In fact, one year after Yevgeny Prigozhin’s death in August 2023, the ex-leader of the Wagner Group shared a video. Prigozhin affirmed that he was in Africa during the transmission. Therefore, it seems that he was trying to foster the association between Wagner and the continent. The video was broadcast in the media, but no source could identify which country he was in.

These relations, along with those described in the first part of this article, can also explain the positions of many African leaders on the Ukrainian war.

Many African states have declared a position of neutrality and, during the United Nations General Assembly vote on 2 March 2022, nor its violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. While only Eritrea supported the Russian position, many African countries chose to abstain; others did not submit a vote (Kachur, 2022, pp. 509-510).

Even though neutrality can reflect a strategic position that avoids compromising or influencing the foreign policy of other countries, it also reveals the political posture of many African leaders. For instance, one year after the war broke out, the United Nations issued a resolution to condemn Russia for invading Ukraine. On that occasion, South Africa abstained from voting and refused to condemn the Russian invasion.

During the first anniversary of the Russian-Ukrainian war, South Africa also hosted naval exercises with Russia and China. The United States and the European Union highly criticized this exercise. Still, South Africa argued that this was solely defensive, aimed at improving its military and defense capabilities. However, in the context of the war, this evidenced a political position that did not intend to break relations with Russia. The South African government also pointed out that, on other occasions, it has conducted military exercises with Western forces, as is common among countries. However, how can we explain these actions? Do we maintain the colonial narrative that does not historicize processes, or do we listen to South African leaders to understand their reasons?

First of all, it should be considered that the United Nations and Western powers did not do much to protect black South Africans during the apartheid regime, despite the requests of the population. Besides, “the ANC remembers who were its allies during the Cold War, and who denounced it as ‘terrorists’” (The Conversation, 2022). The United States and Western powers historically supported the racially segregated government, while the Soviet Union backed the black movement structure in the African National Congress (ANC). The Soviet Union also helped African anticolonial movements (Kachur, 2022, p. 510). Therefore, Africans do not represent Russia as a colonial or imperialist country. On the contrary, they see it as a country that has historically supported them. With this, I do not intend to affirm that Russia is not a colonizing state. However, the Africans did not experience a colonial force under Soviet or Russian control.

Second, many African countries oppose the United Nations sanctions due to their implications for the population and their discrete implementation. Many sanctions have been applied against African governments and populations, but imperial violence has never been punished. Also, African leaders and the population are more supportive of negotiations to resolve conflicts and oppose the

imposition of economic sanctions. For instance, in 2018, Russia sought to facilitate dialogue among Libyan political factions (Dursma & Masuhr, 2022, p. 416). This proposal was more consistent with African ways of resolving conflicts. Therefore, it is seen as a more positive measure than those implemented by the United Nations and the West. In addition, “Moscow lobbying for the reform of UN structures to grant African states permanent representation on the Security Council” (Kachur, 2022, p. 510) is another reason for the rapprochement with Russia.

Russia has stated that it wants a more horizontal, new international order. Discursively, this has been reflected in its relationship with Africa. Despite this, like Western powers, Russia continues to see Africa as a continent for extracting natural resources. Wagner, for example, “helps” African countries in exchange for mining concessions. The Russian government has also negotiated debt to reinforce its regional presence. For example, “debt was canceled in exchange for Russian privileges such as expanding business opportunities for Russian companies, access to natural resources, and building strategic economic ties” (Kachur, 2022, p. 517). Although state and corporate strategies are similar, the Russian State neither projects nor confirms a direct relationship between the interests.

Russia has experience of cooperation with African states within the framework of ‘shadow’ military diplomacy, which includes political agreements, arms supplied in exchange for deals with Russian companies for raw materials, and armed protection of Russian interests by the forces of PMCs. In addition, this diplomacy requires very little from the government’s budget; these PMCs are not recognised by the state, nor are they noted in the defence budget of the Kremlin. (Issaev *et al.*, 2022, p. 430)

Regardless, in recent years, governments and African people have rejected the continuation of Western interference, particular-

ly the French presence. In some cases, they have even indicated that they prefer the Russian one. In 2019, the presidents of countries such as Burkina Faso and Mauritania called for closer relations between Russia and Africa. Mark Christian Kabore, the then Burkinabé president, invited Russia to the G5 Sahel summit, a relevant regional organization that France promoted. Also, Mohamed Ould Ghazwani, the Mauritanian president, encouraged Russia to construct an oppositional force against interventionism.

After the military coups in Mali (2020), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023), popular demonstrations waving Russian flags and bearing pro-Russian slogans were held in the capitals of these three African countries (Issaev *et al.*, 2022, p. 429). After the coup in Mali, leaders asked French troops and corporations to leave. The justification for this was that the French have been making everything worse for more than ten years since the implementation of the Serval Operation in 2013 (Bertrand *et al.*, 2023). Due to the French failures in the Serval and Barkhane Operations, West African populations preferred the Russian army to counter the instability caused by the militarization of French forces. Thus, although they do not romanticize the Russian armed forces, they consider it a better option.

According to surveys conducted in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso by Issaev, Shishkina & Liokumovich (2022), 80% of Malians considered Russia's role in their country to be positive, 62% in Niger, and 63% in Burkina Faso. Also, 80% thought that the assessment of Russian private military companies was positive in Mali, 70% in Niger, and 60% in Burkina Faso. 58% of Malians considered Russia's role in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel to be positive, 52% in Niger, and 55% in Burkina Faso. Finally, 93% of Malians, 82% of Nigeriens, and 76% of Burkinabés said Russia should be more active in African affairs.

This is a sign of dissatisfaction with the domination and dependence promoted by former colonial and imperial forces. Be-

sides, in Mali, Russia is creating an infrastructure project to refine gold. Rosatom has bilateral agreements with about 20 countries, and in Egypt it is building a nuclear power plant with four reactors, 85% of the financing is concentrated in Moscow. In Mali and Burkina Faso, Russia is also negotiating the development of this energy (Naranjo, 2024). Thus, the Russian presence is growing in significant acceptance, but it is unlikely that this relationship will generate a dynamic different from that imposed by the West.

Conclusions

In 2019, Stephen Townsend, commander of U.S. African Command (AFRICOM), said Russia was the second greatest threat to U.S. security interests after terrorism (Duursma & Masuhr, 2022, p. 408). This reference helps us understand the African continent's relevance in the inter-capitalist dispute worldwide, specifically from an American perspective. However, it is important to consider that the interests of Russia and the United States are also materialized in this conflagration. Many actors are interested in Africa to secure their position in the capitalist system. Some of these players have more regional interests, such as the United Arab Emirates, but others must be understood from a global perspective, as in the case of China.

In addition to the materialization of the Russian presence in the inter-capitalist dispute in Africa, this article analyzed how colonial discourses prevailed, particularly in examining the implications of the Russian-Ukrainian war for the continent. The idea that the food crisis in Africa would be brutal and the discourses that reinforced the relationship between African populations and wars are evidence of the coloniality that still prevails in our societies. The study of these processes and narratives invites us to question the racism and epistemic injustices against subalternized peoples. Besides, these speeches and the insecurity generated by the deep-

ening of Western military interventions have fostered the rejection of African populations of Western forces and the acceptance of Russian ones.

Some Africans prefer a Russian presence for diverse reasons. For instance, the narratives can be an essential element to consider. In March 2023, the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, told Macron, the French president: “Look at us differently by respecting us, by considering us as true partners and not always with a paternalistic look with the idea of always knowing what is necessary for us.” Thus, Russia’s discourses and rapprochement with the continent have shown the weariness of the African people and their demand for dignity. At the same time, Western forces have continued to humiliate the communities and their leaders.

In Africa, there are more interests and actors on the ground, and this only deepens the violence against the continent and its populations. Therefore, in the face of the inter-capitalist dispute, it is important that we pay more attention to counter-systemic proposals. Some have already been implemented on the continent, although they have been subordinated. We should also reflect on how we understand the economy. For example, subsistence agriculture can be a more environmentally friendly alternative and a break from capitalism’s anchors of accumulation. Africa should not be considered the continent of the future because of its work capacity and the raw materials it concentrates, but rather because of its proposals against the unequal system in which we live.

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The Russian-Ukrainian Crisis and the Global Arms Race: Implications for Security and Development in Africa

Ahmed Taber

Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis prompted many countries around the world to increase their military spending. That momentum was not only given to the two parties to the crisis (Russia and Ukraine), but also extended to various regions of the world, as revealed in the recent report entitled “Military Balance Report 2023,” issued on February 15, 2023, by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). The report monitors the most prominent features of the global security and military landscape, provides updated data on the military organizations, equipment stocks, and defense budgets of more than 173 countries, and assesses significant global defense developments. This report also points to a substantial change in the military balance in 2023, particularly in Europe and Asia.

Before reviewing the forms of arms race, it is necessary to identify the patterns of armament in terms of the following:

- **Number of Parties:** An arms race can be unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral.
- **Quantity and Quality:** It is difficult to distinguish whether the race is quantitative or qualitative. Currently, all arms races have both quantitative and qualitative manifestations.
- **Nature of Parties:** An arms race usually occurs between individual States or alliances of a group of States. Nevertheless, it can also arise between organized groups within the same society, thereby moving beyond relations between States.

- **Expenditure:** Military expenditure is calculated as a percentage of national income. Changes in this percentage, whether up, down, or stable, signal the parties' behavior during an arms race.
- **Stages:** An arms race does not directly start with manifestations of hostility and escalation of tension, but when a party realizes its interests are threatened, it shall be prepared for a potential confrontation with the other party. In the first stage, the situation is believed to be ambiguous, and once the threat is perceived, subsequent stages unfold.
- **Restrictions:** The nature of the arms running the arms race determines the speed and intensity of the race. Therefore, there are two types of arms races: restricted and unrestricted. Any attempt by any party to excel in such a type of race may lead to failure due to its high cost, decreasing the number or intensity of arms races over time (Abdel Ghani, 2023).

Furthermore, since it is a political, strategic, and economic decision, the level of military expenditure in such States is influenced by several factors that interact with one another, most notably:

1. **Political Factors:** They are reflected in the relevant State's political situation, governance, and degree of political stability. It goes without saying that political instability and military expenditure are directly related. In addition, these factors mirror the potential relationship between the State's regional alliance and its military expenditure, which might push the State's expenditure to skyrocketing levels.
2. **Strategic Factors:** They are represented in the risk of wars. Military expenditure is high in areas with high war risk. In addition, civil wars and regional conflicts trigger arms races among the States of the region.

3. Economic Factors: They are represented in the following:

- » **Availability of economic resources:** The richer a State in economic resources is, the higher its military expenditure is, and vice versa.
- » **Level of economic development:** It is measured by changes in average gross national product (GNP) per capita. A higher level of economic development tends to increase military spending. As growth accelerates, military expenditure is likely to rise.
- » **Foreign exchange:** The availability of foreign exchange can help a State in fulfilling its needs for advanced military equipment, raising the level of military expenditure, and vice versa (Abdel Ghani, 2023).

Resorted to increasing their military spending. On the other hand, other regions had to reduce their military spending due to high inflation and the economic repercussions of the war. This is illustrated in the world military spending map, as shown in the report, as follows (IISS, 2023):

- 1. Significant increase in the European defense spending:** Due to the Ukrainian war, many European States had to reassess their defense priorities. Twenty States have announced an immediate increase in their military spending or their enhanced compliance with long-term spending targets. For example, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced 100 billion euros (\$106 billion) in defense funding. In addition, defense spending has increased in Russia's Eastern European neighboring countries, and in Poland in particular, where the Minister of Defense said the defense budget should increase from 2% to 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2023. The United Kingdom, France, and Germany were among the

top ten countries in terms of defense spending in 2022. The UK's defense budget was about \$70 billion, France's about \$54.4 billion, and Germany's about \$53.4 billion.

2. **America, China, and Russia are at the forefront of their defense spending:** North America accounted for 39.5% of global defense spending, followed by Asia at 25.7%, and Europe at 16.7%. The United States and China remained among the largest countries globally in defense budgets and military spending in 2022. The United States ranked first in spending, totaling \$766.6 billion, accounting for about 38.2% of global defense spending, up from \$754 billion in 2021. China continues to implement its military-strengthening strategy with the highest global increase in defense budgets at 15.6%. In addition, China ranks second in defense budgets, totaling \$242.4 billion. Russia ranked third in global defense spending, which reached \$87.9 billion in 2022, demonstrating the second-largest increase in military spending after China, at 13.3%.
3. **Inflation reduced defense spending in many regions:** Global defense spending grew in nominal values in 2021 and 2022, but higher inflation meant lower spending in absolute values in both years. In recent years, higher inflation has eroded defense spending in absolute values in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Russia, and Eurasia, but the trend is now more widespread.
4. **Middle East defense spending down compared to 2021:** The Middle East ranks ahead in global military spending relative to GDP. Seven countries in the Middle East are on the list of the most significant defense budgets relative to GDP, but with lower rates than in 2021. Saudi Arabia and Iran ranked

among the top 10 countries in defense spending in 2022. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's defense budget totaled \$45.6 billion, and Iran's was about \$44 billion.

The implications and repercussions of this global trend can be monitored on the global economy in general by pointing out that this expansion in military spending has led to high inflation rates, sharp rises in commodity prices, and supply chain crises, which in turn led to a decline in the economic recovery witnessed by some countries after the pandemic.

On the other hand, increased defense spending in Europe, in particular, would hurt the global economic environment in the short term, owing to further constraints on public spending resulting from higher debt financing costs driven by higher interest rates and energy prices.

Implications of the Russian Crisis for Security and Development in Africa:

Africa has long been one of the main arenas of rivalry among major actors. In light of the crisis-induced escalation of the arms race, especially among the developed countries, there is no doubt that it has had a wide-ranging impact on the development of the African continent and a relevant impact on its security situation and internal stability, which can be monitored through several points as follows:

1. Africa is an Arena for Conflict Between International Powers

Africa has become part of the new Cold War between the U.S. and the West vs. Russia and China. The US-Russian rivalry has moved from Eastern Europe to African territory, as seen in attempts to

galvanize African public opinion in favor of each party, following the U.S. launch of the new U.S. Strategy in August 2022. In response to such attempts, Moscow has been expanding its network of alliances with African States, especially in the Sahel and West Africa, along with deploying Wagner Special Security Forces in several African States to strengthen the Russian influence, and crowding the American and Western influence out in some strategic regions, such as the Sahel.

Washington has launched a new diplomatic effort after years of seeming indifference to Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, an American bill was announced in April 2022 to identify and monitor African governments that collaborate with Russian entities sanctioned by the USA. The bill received violent opposition from African governments and citizens. It was criticized by South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Naledi Pandor, who described it as “violent legislation” and as reminiscent of the “Cold War” (Muhammad Abdel Halim, 2022).

Some African strategic regions, especially the Sahel, are experiencing strategic shifts. People in some African States welcome the Russian presence, and Wagner Special Security Forces are deployed on their territory to fight terrorism, especially after the French incremental withdrawal from some States, such as Mali and Burkina Faso.

Russia is trying to pave an alternative path for Africans that would rely on what is currently known, in some publications, as the “Nostalgia” for the Soviet era, in the face of the West and the United States. Therefore, Moscow is expanding its economic ties with Africa and promoting economic opportunities in key sectors, including energy. Services from private military companies are increasingly being used to advance Russia’s geopolitical power and expand its military and intelligence footprint in Sub-Saharan Africa. This, in turn, reinforces international concern about the escalation of Russian influence despite Russia’s low level of investment in

Africa, which accounts for only 1% of Africa's total foreign direct investment (FDI), reflecting Russia's limited commitment to Africa. In addition, Russia's trade volume with Africa is \$14 billion, compared to the EU (\$295 billion), China (\$254 billion), and the USA (\$65 billion) (Askar, 2023).

2. Political Division in Africa

The African countries faced a political dilemma in determining their position on the *status quo*, despite the clarity of the position of African institutions on the crisis, as expressed by the African Union leadership, represented in the President of the African Union, Macky Sall (President of Senegal), and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki. Both leaders expressed deep concern about the dangerous situation in Ukraine and called for respect for international law, territorial and national integrity, and Ukraine's sovereignty.

They also urged the parties to immediately cease fire and open channels for political negotiations without delay under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). In the same context, the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) condemned Russia's war on Ukraine and called upon the warring parties to resolve differences through dialogue and to ensure the safety of all ECOWAS citizens living in Ukraine (Al-Taweel, 2022).

A 2021 report on the prospects for Russian-African cooperation by the Higher School of Economics in Moscow confirmed that African States tend to remain neutral on Russia's stance regarding the Ukrainian crisis. It also highlighted that the African States did not impose any sanctions on Russia, especially after the 2014 vote in the UN halls on the Ukrainian issue, but have always remained neutral. However, in this crisis, South Africa, Africa's largest economy, called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, highlighting that the conflict must be resolved

peacefully. This is challenging for Russia, one of South Africa's key allies. Both South Africa and Russia have strong economic ties and are members of BRICS. In addition, South Africa has investments in Russia totaling approximately 80 billion South African rands (\$5 billion), while Russia's investments in South Africa amount to 23 billion rands.

Besides South Africa, Kenya, the East African economic power and UN Security Council non-permanent member State, also condemned the Russian war on Ukraine, stressing it was a violation of the UN Charter. The war was also condemned by Ghana and Gabon, who reiterated Ukraine's territorial integrity within the UN Security Council. In return, Russia has received support from its new ally, the Central African Republic, represented by its President, Faustin Touadéra, who supported Russia's decision to recognize the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent States.

On the other hand, the decision to put an end to the French involvement in fighting jihadists in Mali, prior to the Russian military operation in Ukraine, is a powerful example of shifting alliances in Africa. Mohamed "Hemeti" Dagalo, deputy chairman of the Sudanese Military Council, headed a delegation to Moscow to strengthen African-Russian relations, a few days after Washington imposed sanctions on Russia (Al-Taweel, 2022).

However, divisions exist within the individual positions of African countries. If there is an African alignment with Russia, there is also African support for Ukraine, with the level of each position varying in light of the size of the entanglements these countries have with the parties to the crisis. While the economic and security interests are intertwined between Moscow and some African countries thanks to the Russian moves in recent years towards the countries of the continent, Moscow has succeeded in establishing a network of political, diplomatic, economic and military relations through economic cooperation, the export of arms, energy

and gas, participation in peacekeeping operations, combating terrorism, military training and standing by African countries at the United Nations by confronting Western decisions by exercising its right of veto in the Security Council.

This rapprochement and intertwining were manifested both at the level of statements as expressed by Ugandan General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the son of the Ugandan President, who stated that:

the majority of humanity (non-white) supports Russia's position in Ukraine... and Putin is absolutely right. This rapprochement is also evident in the United Nations General Assembly vote, which condemned Russia: 17 African countries abstained in favor of the UN resolution, along with seven countries that did not vote at all. One country (Eritrea) voted against this resolution along with Russia, Belarus, Syria, and North Korea. On the other side of the continent, however, some African countries condemned the Russian aggression and described it as an attack against the international system, such as Kenya and Ghana, where 28 African countries voted in favor of the United Nations resolution (Development Reimagined, 2023).

This deep division among the countries of the African continent reflects a political dilemma for the continent in how to respond to a global crisis that foreshadows the emergence of a new structure of the world system. This portends challenges to the unity of the African position in the coming days, as African countries enjoy the gains they seek from their rapprochement with Russia. That rapprochement has become increasingly interconnected over the past years, achieving positive returns for both (African and Russian) parties, and on the grounds of understanding that increases the area of cooperation between the countries of the continent and Ukraine since the latter's independence in the early 1990s following the disintegration of the Soviet system. The recent period wit-

nessed Ukraine's presence on the continent through the export of wheat and other agricultural products, as well as the hosting of tens of thousands of African students in higher education institutions in Ukraine. The rapprochement is bolstered by Western pressure to support Ukraine, which African countries fear will lead to Western influence within Africa (Taher, 2022).

3. The Economic Repercussions Related to the High Levels of Prices

Especially food (wheat and corn), which represent both Russia and Ukraine as important sources for meeting the needs of these countries, in addition to the high transportation costs and fees, and the associated high global inflation rates, which will be reflected in the economic conditions in the countries of the continent. This adds burdens to the African citizen, who suffers from deteriorating living standards. This poses a threat to food security across the continent, with tens of millions suffering from severe food insecurity as a result of successive strikes. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis coincided with several factors that affect food security on the continent, including the crisis itself. COVID-19, conflicts, climate change, and the threefold increase in global commodity prices since 2020 have pushed more than 50 million Africans in East African and Sahel countries towards hunger and reduced grain production by about 30 million tons.

Many African agricultural import-dependent communities have been affected by the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Furthermore, beyond the crisis-induced damage inflicted upon the parties to the conflict, another disaster is unfolding in Africa. In West Africa, stagnant food production in the Black Sea raised wheat prices by 30% as of March 15, 2022, bringing them back to levels seen in 2021. 33 African States, out of 55, import 90% or more of their wheat consumption. The situation is particularly critical in the Maghreb, especially during Ramadan; Egypt

imports more than 60% of its wheat consumption, compared to Algeria (75%), Tunisia (62%), and Morocco (38%) (BBC News, Arabic, 2022).

Moreover, the Sahel and West Africa have been severely afflicted by low crop yields and the ongoing internal conflict, requiring additional emergency assistance. Issoufou Baoua, Food Security Expert in the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), stated that “after having 10.7 million people vulnerable to food insecurity in 2019, 2022 is witnessing 40.7 million of them” (Fabricius, 2022).

The particularly affected regions include areas around Lake Chad (Chad, Nigeria, and Cameroon) and the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. However, the worst consequences of the Ukrainian war on Africa may yet come. The UN warned that the persistence of war would prevent the future harvesting in Ukraine and even in Russia, which could raise wheat prices. As the decline in fertilizer imports worsens, crops could be under threat for several years to come. While mineral imports, such as potash, from Russia and Belarus make up about 90% of West Africa’s supply, prices have already doubled over the past 12 months.

In Mauritania, already affected by the collapse of biomass production in recent years, the consequences could be long-lasting and would, in turn, reflect on the French Development Agency (AFD). The replenishment of national and regional public reserves can currently be a significant area of work for the AFD. To address such multiple emergencies, some governments withdrew and rely on self-sufficiency. For instance, Algeria and Ghana decided to stop exporting food commodities to their neighbors.

According to Ahunna Eziakonwa, UN Assistant Secretary-General, the war in Ukraine has stalled the recovery from COVID-19, raised food and fuel prices, disrupted trade in goods and services, tightened fiscal space, constrained green transformations, and limited the flow of financing for development in Africa. Despite

the low level of trade between Africa and Russia and Ukraine, some African countries highly rely on those two countries for vital imports, especially wheat, fertilizers, and steel. The disruption in such imports may adversely affect African countries (Fabricius, 2022).

In 2021, for example, Kenya imported nearly 30% of its wheat needs from Russia and Ukraine. The disruption in supplies would affect Kenya's bread production, which Eziakonwa highlighted as the third-most-consumed food commodity there. In 2021, Cameroon imported 44% of its fertilizers from Russia. In West Africa, as its agricultural season is about to start, analysts are concerned that such a disruption might severely affect crop yields and compromise food security. Similarly, Ghana imports 60% of iron and steel ore from Ukraine. As a result of the war, the construction industry in Ghana is likely to face significant challenges.

1. The security and military repercussions, linked both to the military agreements related to armament deals and training, and to the consequent increase in the value of these deals on the one hand. Some of them stopped due to the Russian market's need for this weapon in its battle on the other hand, which may lead to an increase in burdens on the general budgets of the countries of the continent, as well as a negative impact on the ability of governments to confront terrorist organizations and internal conflicts, especially since some African countries were dependent on support Russia, whether directly or through the Wagner Company, in the fight against terrorism. The developments of the crisis will also likely lead to increased international competition over the African continent, especially the Horn of Africa. Russia's interest in that region does not depend solely on the economic dimension, and it is a promising market for arms sales. Accordingly, its movements will include Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Somalia, and other countries, and it will strive to establish military bases for itself in many African countries. Moreover, all these moves Moscow is

making behind the scenes are aimed at avoiding being besieged by the American coalition.

2. The repercussions on the level of internal stability are related to the size of the burdens that African countries will bear to provide financial resources to meet the rises in global price levels, whether related to their food or military needs, which puts African governments in confrontation with citizens, threatening social and political stability in many countries. One of the countries on the continent that may witness either new conflicts in marginalized areas within its borders or an increase in the severity of existing conflicts.

In light of the foregoing, we conclude by saying that it has become necessary for African countries to search for new approaches that enable them to rearrange their economic, political and military priorities, by seizing some of the opportunities presented by the crisis, whether it is related to their European orientation by taking advantage of the European need for the countries of the continent to find alternatives to energy resources away from relying heavily on Russia, as European research began on how to benefit from the oil and gas reserves located in African lands, which opens the door to directing more European investments in these two fields, as well as heading to the field of rare metals. These countries can also benefit from Russia's need to open new horizons for cooperation with the continent's countries at all levels, to confront European and American sanctions, reduce the adverse effects on the Russian economy, and escape from international isolation.

African States have become well aware of their status, attracting international rapprochement. Despite their crises and urgent need for foreign support in security, economic, and humanitarian aspects, with the presence of African pro-West political elites and the pervasive increase in corruption within the structures and institutions of States, many African States have become aware of the need for a collective African rejection of pushing Africa's States to be involved in the international conflict. In this regard, President

Yoweri Museveni of Uganda posted on X, after the recent visit of Thomas-Greenfield, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, to four African States, that if they were really seeking Africa's help, then they had to think about separating Africans from sanctions of a war they had nothing to do with.

In addition, Africa needs to reframe its financing for the development agenda and reconsider the global financial architecture. It is also necessary to strengthen the mobilization of local resources to enable Africa to maintain a greater share of the value of its mineral, agricultural, and human strategic resources. Such an end can be reached by reducing illicit flows in Africa by nearly \$90 billion, improving tax efforts, raising the average tax-to-GDP ratio from 17.5% to 24%, and eliminating unnecessary tax exemptions for mega companies.

In addition, the crisis demonstrated the need for African countries to pursue a "shock-proof" democratic development. It is also pointed out that development is not a linear process and that various shocks can reverse gains. Resilience can be achieved through initiatives that enable Africa to fully utilize its natural resource wealth, take advantage of planet-friendly financing mechanisms, and focus on climate risk-sensitive investment. Africa and its development partners need to invest in food and fuel security, greater productive capacity, and higher value-added manufacturing and exports (Kumar Sen, 2022).

Conclusions

There is an urgent need to prioritize structural transformation and regional integration, harness digital technologies and promote free and fair competition globally, intensify support for regional integration and economic diversification, and mobilize resources to fill critical gaps in technology, skills, and infrastructure (Morsy, 2017). Financial and global institutions should also understand that an

investment in Africa's well-being is an investment in the world's well-being. Africa needs to be more assertive about taking its rightful place in the world.

It is also possible to establish an emergency program and a crisis fund to compensate the African countries most affected by the disruption of food commodity flows and trade caused by the Ukrainian crisis. This program aims to secure wheat and other imports in appropriate quantities for the countries most in need (Raa-fat, 2022, p. 5).

African States have to carefully strike a balance between national and regional interests and competing global powers. In addition, foreign policies must be developed with consideration of the short and long-term strategic objectives to enable African States to navigate an intricate landscape and compete with the great powers and advanced governance structures.

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III. South-South Cooperation and Climate Change

The Geopolitics of Energy Matrix Change: The Role of Chinese Investments in Africa and Great Power Competition¹

Óscar Ugarteche & Brandon Young

Great Power Competition

The discussion of power competition in this paper refers to the rivalry between the two great powers over their influence in Africa. Without the Berlin Africa Conference (1884/85), which divided the continent in the age of high imperialism and amid new republics, the two great powers were competing for a greater say in the continent's future. The U.S. advances the concepts of democracy and human rights as a political stance, while China advances its business interests, setting politics aside. Behind the U.S. political push lies hard power. Behind China is money and technology. The U.S. soft power presence in Africa failed after the World Bank's economic reforms were unable to deliver the promise of growth and improved welfare, and the continent instead turned to massive emigration. Some countries fared better than others, but overall, the performance remains well below the expectations set at the time of the adjustment policies three decades back.

The lack of interest shown by the ex-colonial countries and the U.S. has opened the door to a slow and limited Chinese presence since the 1990s. "Since 1991 to the present, Chinese foreign ministers achieved an impressive coverage rate of 96% (countries)

¹ Conference delivered at 3rd International Colloquium of Studies on Africa: Framing Africa as the Epicenter of the World in the Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas UNAM, Ciudad Universitaria, on April 18 and 19, 2023 <http://pueaa.unam.mx/en/activities/3rd-international-colloquium-of-studies-on-africa-framing-africa-as-the-worlds-epicenter>

by visiting 51 of the 53 African nations that China maintains diplomatic ties with” (Hao Nan, 2025). No Western country has that record.

From 1991 to 2000, China turned to Africa, alongside other regions, to rebuild global partnerships after Western isolation following the 1989 Tiananmen incident. Africa’s neutral stance was key to China’s diplomatic breakthroughs. The Soviet Union’s collapse created a strategic vacuum, allowing China to strengthen ties, secure resources, and support independence movements. Symbolic diplomacy focused on East and West Africa, with key visits to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Madagascar. Africa’s refusal to condemn China over Tiananmen made it a crucial region for diplomatic breakthroughs. (Hao Nan, 2025)

From 2001 to 2010, China shifted toward economic engagement and multilateral cooperation, driven by the launch of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Large-scale infrastructure projects enhanced connectivity and trade, while partnerships with significant and smaller African nations reflected a balanced strategy. This period also saw the institutionalization of Sino-African relations through FOCAC, fostering systematic collaboration across various sectors. (Hao Nan, 2025)

From 2011 to 2020, China expanded its global economic presence, driven by its 12th Five-Year Plan and the need to address surplus production capacity after the 2008-2009 stimulus. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, positioned Africa as a key partner in China’s connectivity strategy. Major infrastructure projects, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, strengthened economic ties, while public health efforts, including the Ebola response, broadened cooperation. This phase emphasized economic diversification, focusing on technology transfer and industrialization. Since 2011, China has deepened its financial and strategic ties with Africa. The 2011-2020 phase saw the launch of the BRI, fo-

cusing on infrastructure, technology transfer, and industrialization. Major projects such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and public health efforts strengthened cooperation, including during the Ebola response. (Hao Nan, 2025)

From 2021 onward, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted China to shift its priorities toward public health, supplying vaccines and medical aid worldwide. Facing increased global competition, she pivoted to renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and climate resilience. She elevated all African nations to the status of strategic partners, deepening ties with major players like Nigeria and Egypt while tailoring approaches for smaller countries, focusing on resource extraction, and making key visits to Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Senegal (Hao Nan, 2025).

None of the events required the use of force or interference in domestic politics, as is usual in Western assistance. She strengthened her military ties with Africa through training programs like the Chinese Professional Military Education (PME). These initiatives promote China's governance model and deepen political and military relationships. Thousands of African officers train in China each year, and many later hold key military and government positions. PME serves as both a strategic and soft power tool, expanding China's influence across the continent (Sharma, 2024).

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) maintains a strong presence in Africa, with a base in Djibouti, around 2,000 troops deployed to UN peacekeeping and anti-piracy missions, and potential plans for additional bases in Equatorial Guinea, Angola, and Namibia. Sharma argues that China expands its influence by engaging military leaders, increasing arms sales, and leveraging multilateral forums and training programs.

The U.S., on its side, keeps partnerships with undemocratic regimes, which have often worsened instability by empowering abusive security forces, harming its reputation. Given that terrorism in Africa poses a low threat to U.S. national security, prior-

itizing short-term security over governance and the rule of law is unjustified, according to Shackelford, Kessler, and Sanderson (2023). While the U.S. Congress is increasingly restricting aid to abusive regimes, these actions are often too late and inconsistent. Great-power competition risks reinforcing flawed security policies. It has been argued since at least 1998 that “whether the U.S. military is the most suitable tool for pursuing many of the United States’ broad policy objectives in Africa” (Henk, 1998, p.1).

The interests in Africa are

[...]regional stability, access, information and warning, safety of American citizens, safety from weapons of mass destruction, comity and cooperation, safety from transnational threats, regional freedom from egregious suffering, humane/competent/accountable regional governance, and an unthreatened natural environment. (Henk, 1998, p. ix)

There were no economic interests in mining or oil, nor interests in developing the countries in 1998. That void placed the U.S. more on the side of hard power than soft power in China’s use of power.

Nye (1990) discusses the components of the Great Power Competition (GPC) and explores power dynamics in a post-Cold War context. He emphasizes the complexities of information technology and the potential for greater use of soft power. Additionally, he predicted the consequences for weak states regarding migration and drugs if the United States failed to bolster their strength while avoiding militaristic approaches.

Nye argues that power is becoming less transferable, coercive, and tangible. Modern trends and political changes significantly shape power dynamics, favoring cultural and economic influence over military might in persuading other nations. He argues this shift away from military power can have disastrous implications for international stability. Throughout history, concerns about the

decline and shifting power balances have often led to tension and miscalculations, even as other countries recovered economically. Notably, the U.S. economy's share of the global product remained relatively stable from 1975 to 1990. It has since shrunk in the face of an expanding Chinese economy, to the point that it now has the same weight as China, according to Allison (2017).

He predicted the 21st century would be a continuation of American preeminence. True power lies not only in resources but also in the capacity to influence state behavior. He argues that the United States faced a lesser threat from the rise of another great power and a greater threat from the general diffusion of power across the international system, as reflected in the surge of the BRICS+. While the U.S. retains leverage over specific countries, its overall influence is waning. Consequently, they face limitations in achieving their objectives unilaterally, as do others confronting this predicament.

He could not weigh the relevance of the military-industrial complex in the States and thought national security evolved with the shift from military aggression to economic and ecological threats. Nye underlines that the traditional geopolitical agenda remains relevant, and that military power is fungible in state bargaining. However, relying solely on conventional power resources is less effective for great powers. Evidence in the Middle East in 1991 and from 2003 onwards showed otherwise. Private actors (Robinson) and smaller states have gained influence due to trends such as economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weaker states, technology diffusion, and evolving political issues, as well as military strife in countries such as Libya, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Powerful states, such as the U.S. and USSR, faced challenges in Vietnam and Afghanistan due to the costs of ruling antagonistic populations rather than the increased power of weaker states. Still, the U.S. did not learn and repeated the military presence in numer-

ous parts of the world without success. Utilizing traditional power resources to address drug production, public health, or ecological issues in other countries presents limitations. For instance, the U.S. cannot compel Peru to curb cocaine production if the Peruvian government lacks control over private drug gangs. Moreover, without addressing the U.S. domestic demand, a transnational market for cocaine will persist.

The availability of information has grown, but the need for swift action on new information remains, making timely responses a critical power resource in an information-based economy. Nye thought that organizational skills and adaptability became more critical while raw materials became less significant. Weaknesses in Mexico or the Caribbean states could pose foreign policy challenges with increased migration, drug trafficking, or contraband. Similarly, the failure of developing countries to protect forests affects the global climate, but weak states' vulnerabilities diminish others' influence over them. Neglecting weak Third World countries reduces the U.S.'s capacity to shape policies on emerging transnational issues. It is the space China has begun to fill by seeking raw materials and fossil fuels, as well as by leading in renewable energy.

Shaping the agenda and structuring situations in world politics are as crucial as influencing others. Soft power, shaping desires through culture, ideology, and institutions, contrasts with hard power, which imposes will. Modern trends impact the nature and resources, with reduced coerciveness among central states through diplomacy and military coercion. While China stepped up its soft power, the U.S. stepped up its hard power with little success.

The U.S. possesses greater co-optive power, with international institutions reflecting its values, because the U.S. Congress defines policy through the Subcommittee on National Security, Illicit Finance, and International Financial Institutions of the Financial Services Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives. American corporations' headquarters and market significance contribute

to their power and to cultural exports, such as TV shows and films, which translate into soft power. China, like Japan's manufacturing success, provides soft power; the difference is that Japan has an inward orientation that limits its influence, whereas China is open to the world. Concerns about decline can benefit the U.S. if they drive action, but says Nye, excessive anxiety leads to nationalist and protectionist policies, like those expressed by the Make America Great Again group in the U.S. Republican Party, hindering adaptation to increasing international interdependence. The protectionist policies installed during the first Trump administration demonstrated this. Biden accentuated it with the protectionist measures followed by more radical ones at the start of Trump's second term. When ideals become a crucial source of power, the realpolitik-liberalism dichotomy blurs.

The mix of resources shaping international power changes, but it does not guarantee a cycle of hegemonic conflict. The U.S. has more traditional hard power resources and soft power through ideology, institutions, and corporations, maintaining its lead in transnational interdependence. The challenge for U.S. power lies in addressing the new challenges of interdependence rather than confronting new challengers to hegemony.

In the history of International Relations, there have been dynamics of conflict and cooperation among nation-states. (Ross, Tunsjø, & Wang, 2020) Great powers have had rivalry and competition, from the Peloponnesian Wars to the Cold War and the East-West confrontation between the USSR and the United States (Allison, 2017). The People's Republic of China is on the rise. What are the implications of the rise of China for the hegemonic position that the U.S. has held in the international system, and what repercussions would a shift of world power bring to Africa?

State-to-state relations exist on a spectrum ranging from cooperation to total war. Strategic competition falls between these extremes, characterized by intense rivalry without crossing into

armed conflict or violence. This competition includes espionage, economic and cyber warfare, intellectual property theft, sanctions, information operations, legal maneuvering, military positioning, diplomatic pressure, intimidation, and alliance-building—so long as it remains non-violent and avoids causing death or destruction (Van de Vele, 2024).

The Sino-American relationship exhibits a strong interdependence, with both countries relying on each other across many areas. From commercial ties ranging from manufactured goods to security in the Indo-Pacific, both countries share an interest in achieving or maintaining supremacy. Moreover, policymakers in both countries view the actions of the other with significant uncertainty and suspicion because they cannot be sure of the other's real intentions (Grieco, 1988).

GPC arises from high interdependence, making the actors in this dynamic sensitive to other countries' actions. The interactive process among states creates opportunities for both conflict and cooperation. Strategic competition is how two countries' governments can pursue their policies, which may sometimes be antagonistic, without necessarily resulting in war (Zhang, 2017).

The United States and the People's Republic of China have several contact points: geographically, both share the same neighborhood, the Asia-Pacific region; in trade, they are each other's top trading partner, indicating a deep relationship of interdependence; in investments, both seek to position themselves in many countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Both are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, which grants them veto power (Kavalski, 2015). Similarly, the two nations belong to the small group of countries formally recognized as nuclear powers under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Neorealism or structural realism constitutes a paradigm for studying GPC and other forms of state rivalry. The term "Great

Power Competition” was widely used before World War I, as Great Britain, the United States, and Germany raced towards supremacy in economic and military affairs across the Atlantic. Security in Europe relied on spheres of influence, alliances, and the balance of power among great powers. Each pursued belligerent and competitive politics, leading to two major wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945). During the Cold War, the approach of competition and rivalry centered on the United States and the USSR.

Nevertheless, these two great powers never had a direct conflict. Instead, they fought proxy wars in many countries of the now-Global South (Potter *et al.*, 2008). The question lies when the actors are no longer only States, and the GPC is strictly economic and business.

As neorealism analyses, the power struggle places the State at the center of global events due to its capacity to shape the international structure. However, the State is not the only actor in international relations; transnational corporations, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations have gained an enormous role in global affairs (Rathus, 2011; Robinson, 2007). However, the State is the most crucial subject for neorealism due to its prominence and its capacity to structure the international system. (Waltz, 1979).

In international politics, the absence of reliable guarantees regarding other states’ actions is a perennial issue. The lack of a centralized political authority above them forces states to engage in power politics and competition (Wendt, 1992). This is how the security dilemma arises: the actions undertaken by any given state to increase its security may be seen as an offensive move by other states, leading them to increase their military capacity to defend themselves against the adversary (Mearsheimer, 2011). Because states define security in terms of their interests, they will take actions they deem necessary to achieve it, regardless of whether those actions undermine or endanger others.

International anarchy drives competition and conflicts among states and hinders their willingness to cooperate, even when they share common interests (Grieco, 1988). States, identified as the critical actors in the system due to their ability to shape the structure of international politics, will prioritize their security through power and, secondly, seek to maximize their interests (Sagan & Waltz, 2013). The issue is what happens when firms lose markets, and the new definition of national security is the loss of those markets or technological edge. In the White House's National Security Strategy (NSS) 2022, the term appears 71 times across 47 pages. The reference is to the U.S. Government using public funds "in key areas where private industry, on its own, has not mobilized to protect our core economic and national security interests, including bolstering our national resilience". (14) It is also taken as "... the importance of the semiconductor supply chain to our competitiveness and our national security, and we are seeking to reinvigorate the semiconductor industry in the United States" (15). "Technology is central to today's geopolitical competition and to the future of our national security, economy, and democracy". (32) Another approach is "treating the fight against corruption as the core national security interest". (18) Climate change is now under the national security concept. The loss of competitive edge is taken as a national security threat that can be put under control through

[...]modernizing and strengthening our export control and investment screening mechanisms, and also pursuing targeted new approaches, such as screening of outbound investment, to prevent strategic competitors from exploiting investments and expertise in ways that threaten our national security. (NSS, 2022, p. 33)

Finally, it argues,

We will not use our military to change regimes or remake societies, but instead limit the use of force to circumstances where it is necessary to protect our national security interests and consistent with international law while enabling our partners to defend their territory from external and terrorist threats. (NSS, 2022, p. 33)

The Middle East intervention directly contradicts this perspective. The current national security approach seems more focused on business and economic interests than military concerns. This shift sometimes hinders cooperation, as states hesitate to enter into agreements, fearing that others might gain advantages and later use them against them. In the international system, where states primarily depend on themselves, the risk of deception makes them wary of others.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 left the United States as the sole superpower. Jervis (2006) believed that describing the then State of the world as unipolar did not necessarily imply admiration for American power or leadership, nor did it imply that the United States was creating a global empire. Instead, it was a factual observation. The implications of this unipolarity were poorly understood, as there was a lack of comprehensive theory and substantial evidence regarding the functioning of unipolar systems. This “unipolar moment” led to the belief that the new hegemon had won the race for great-power status and hegemony in the international system. Thus, the older term GPC was considered to be obsolete because the study of rivalries and competitions was no longer needed. However, new geopolitical events over the past decade have brought the term back to study a new emerging world order.

Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822), a British statesman and diplomat instrumental in the negotiations leading to the Congress of Vienna, wrote on this, followed by Hegel (1770-1831), Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston (1784-1865), and Metternich, worried about the Napoleonic wars. From a more distanced position, after the Wars and with the *Pax Britannica* installed, A. T. Mahan (1840-1914) wrote on sea power and its role in international politics. These authors' common preoccupation was creating a stable and orderly international system after the French Revolution and its aftermath, a period of upheaval and conflict. They were concerned with maintaining a balance of power, using diplomacy and treaties to advance their nations' interests, while preventing revolutionary disruptions to the existing order. Their writings and diplomatic efforts played a significant role in shaping the international landscape of the 19th century. The traditional GPC of the 19th century faded from view during the early 20th century due to the transformative effects of World War I, World War II, the rise of new global powers, and the onset of the Cold War. These events reshaped the international landscape and altered geopolitical dynamics in the post-World War II era. The oceans returned as a scenario for the GPC (Kim, 2024).

During the Cold War, there was a broad consensus within the field of International Relations (Cavelty, Mauer, & Balzacq, 2010) that "the system was bipolar in that the United States and the Soviet Union largely shaped the course of international politics" (Fulton, 2022). After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the tumultuous disintegration of the USSR, the U.S. emerged as the sole superpower, ushering in the era of unipolarity (Krauthammer, 1990).

The international landscape remained unchanged from the first Gulf War to the 2008 financial crisis, with the United States as the dominant superpower. However, after these events, discussions about the U.S. decline in global affairs resurfaced as new actors

gained influence on the world stage. Among these rising powers is the People's Republic of China (Chu & Zheng, 2020).

During the Obama administration, the U.S. decided to focus its foreign policy on the Asia-Pacific region after almost a decade of engagement in the Middle East (Wesley, 2007). Former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton articulated this policy under the name of "Pivot to Asia".

The goal was to engage with the rising power while containing it. Some argue that the current Sino-American strategic competition began with the Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy, which labelled China a revisionist power with hegemonic ambitions. While this narrative holds in discourse, the pivot from the Middle East to the Pacific actually began under Obama. The key difference is that Obama took a more diplomatic approach, whereas Trump escalated tensions through a trade war (Nwankwo & Ibeh, 2014).

The GPC in Energy

The Sino-American strategic competition is a complex, multifaceted relationship between two great powers. Throughout history, conflicts and cooperation among states have influenced international relations. GPC re-emerges in a presumably multipolar world, as China challenged the brief unipolar dominance of the United States. It is unclear whether the world is genuinely multipolar or genuinely bipolar, given that business interests and technological leadership are the main components.

A space for the dispute between great powers is Africa, and the sector in which this plays out is energy, given that energy is central to shaping global geopolitics, security, and international relations. Yergin (2011, 2012) and Klare (2012) argue that energy is a geopolitical tool: energy resources, such as oil, natural gas, and renewable energy sources, are not only economic commodities

but also strategic assets. States can leverage control over energy resources and supply routes to advance their geopolitical interests. They also emphasize the importance of energy security, ensuring a reliable and stable supply of energy resources to meet domestic needs (Romano & Meglio, 2016). Energy security is a fundamental component of national security and stability. There is a race for access to and control over energy resources to achieve these objectives (Breslin & Hughes, 2017). It often results in diplomatic maneuvers, alliances, and rivalries. Technological innovation in energy production and consumption, including advancements in clean energy technologies, is pivotal in driving economic competitiveness and global influence. These dynamics are enabled by the interconnected nature of energy markets and geopolitics, underscoring how events in one part of the world can have far-reaching consequences for energy security and international relations.

The fight to transition to cleaner, more sustainable energy sources to mitigate climate change and address environmental concerns, while recognizing the complex geopolitical implications of this transition, is vital and aligns with GPC (Bleischwitz *et al.*, 2018). All of this affects foreign policy. They explore how a nation's energy policies and decisions can significantly impact its foreign policy and relationships with other states, including alliances and conflicts. Schlesinger, in particular, delves into this. Finally, these authors approach energy and GPC with a global perspective, recognizing that these issues transcend national borders and affect the entire international community.

Yergin (2011, 2012) provides comprehensive insights into the history and geopolitics of energy. M. T. Klare (2012) examines energy security and geopolitics and explores competition for dwindling energy and mineral resources. A. M. Jaffe (2021) discusses how digital technologies transform the energy landscape and influence GPC. Huda (2024) and Jaffe (2021) comprehensively explore the multifaceted relationship between energy, geopolitics,

and international affairs, emphasizing the importance of energy security, technological innovation, clean energy transitions, and international cooperation in addressing the complex challenges of our energy-dependent world. P. Roberts (2005) delves into the challenges of oil dependence and the global competition for energy resources. Former Secretary of Defence and later of Energy, James Schlesinger, wrote with Dutch and Victor (2006) on recognizing the centrality of energy in shaping global geopolitics, security, and international relations. Their ideas and analyses revolve around energy as a Geopolitical Tool, emphasizing that energy is not only an economic commodity but also a strategic asset; states, in their view, can leverage control over energy resources and supply routes to advance their geopolitical interests. They underscore the importance of energy security, which involves ensuring a reliable and stable supply of energy resources to meet domestic needs. It provokes competition among major powers for access to and control over energy resources, leading to diplomatic maneuvers, alliances, and rivalries. The authors recognize the role of technological innovation in energy production and consumption, including advancements in clean energy technologies, as a driver of economic competitiveness and global influence, and illustrate how events in one part of the world can have far-reaching consequences for energy security and international relations elsewhere (Mukhtar, 2023). They explore how a nation's energy policies and decisions can significantly impact its foreign policy and relationships with other states, including alliances and conflicts among Great Powers. They produce the analysis with a global perspective, recognizing that energy issues transcend national borders and affect the entire international community.

In Latin America, Guerrero (2021), Fontaine and Puyana (2008), and Ugarteche and de León (2022) point to the energy transition as a strategy to diversify electricity sources, primarily centered on gas and hydroelectric power. However, this transition faces significant obstacles, say Fontaine and Puyana, due to unre-

solved historical and present-day geopolitical conflicts and various social, economic, and political issues, such as the availability of cheap oil and state-owned oil enterprises that generate fiscal revenue. These factors make achieving a more profound and sustainable transformation of the regional energy sector challenging. China's presence as an actor in energy GPC in Latin America is a game-changer, as it has effectively bought out Western investments in renewable energy.

Chinese Investments in Africa

Data from the Heritage Foundation's China Investment Tracker shows investments in 39 countries: practically all of Sub-Saharan Africa. There are four from Northern Africa. For this work, we have taken two approaches: first, to examine how foreign investment reaches African countries and the role of the leading investor, China. It is remarkable that the risk of political instability is not an obstacle and that they enter the countries deemed suitable for their interests without any other risk considerations. The second approach is to identify where the investment went and why, thereby bringing forward big power competition.

Table 1. World Investment Stocks Growth by Origin, US Dollars

Stock FDI	2000	2010	2021	Variation 2021/2000
China	27,768	317,211	2,581,800	9,297.8%
EU	1,967,112	6,988,984	13,263,759	674.3%
US	2,694,014	4,809,587	9,813,545	363.3%
China/EU+US	0.6%	2.7%	11.2%	

Source: UNCTAD 2022

Note: The FDI stock projections for 2030, at the rate of growth between 2010 and 2021, which is slightly lower than the 2021-2000 period, place the stock of Chinese global investments in the same range as the US and EU, with 2.1 T USD, which is larger than the US, 2.0 T USD but lower than the EU, 2.5 T USD

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2022), Chinese investments have outpaced those of the European Union and the United States worldwide, growing by 9.297% between 2021 and 2000. The total amount invested ranks third worldwide behind the E.U. and the U.S., but if the trend continues, it will level off in 2030, and Chinese capital will take the lead (see Table 1). Chinese capital is most exposed in North America, primarily the U.S., followed by South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Northern Africa. Of all global investments during 2005-2021, 35% went to energy.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the lack of access to electricity is a significant problem (Aemro, 2022). Nearly half of the global population lives without electricity in this region, despite it having only 13% of the world's population (McKinsey & Company, 2015). Approximately 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa lack access to electricity, and most of the region has a low grid access rate, averaging just 20%. Even in areas with access, there may not be enough electricity to meet the demand. Only seven countries in the region—Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa—enjoy electricity access rates exceeding 50%. Meanwhile, the remainder of the region averages a meagre grid access rate of only 20%.

In this context, Chinese investments in African energy are examined, with renewable energy accounting for 40.7% of total energy investment and fossil fuels for 40.1%, roughly even. There is an undefined 19.2% of investment due mainly to incomplete registration. Hydroelectricity accounts for 35.3% of all energy investments, followed by alternative energies at 5.4%. Fossil fuels lead, with oil investments accounting for 24.1% of all energy, followed by 11.7% for gas and 4.3% for coal (Castellano *et al.*, 2015).

The comprehensive Heritage Foundation China Tracker lists China's investments across 39 countries, with 18 highlighted. These 18 countries account for 87.4% of China's total energy investments

(refer to Table 2). In return, Africa represents 13.5% of China's global investment interests, with a significant portion, 42%, concentrated in the seven oil-exporting nations. Energy investments alone constitute 54.3% of China's total investments in that continent. Another considerable investment sector is mineral mining, while other sectors receive loans.

Hydroelectricity

Hydroelectricity is the leading investment focus in China's energy sector, accounting for 35% of its energy investments. These are strategically distributed across Ethiopia, Angola, Cameroon, Zambia, Guinea, Kenya, and Uganda. While many serve domestic markets, they also aim to expand electricity access to neighboring countries.

Africa faces a severe energy shortage, with the continent—excluding South Africa—having just 28 gigawatts of generation capacity, comparable to Argentina's output alone. Even those connected to the grid experience frequent blackouts, averaging 54 days per year, or 15% of the time without power. Businesses rely on expensive generators to bridge this gap, which cost four times as much as grid electricity. As a result, companies in Africa, particularly in energy-intensive sectors, such as banking and retail, face significantly higher operational costs than their global counterparts, making energy expenses a significant financial burden (Waiyaki, 2016).

McKinsey (2015) and Lawal (2023) indicate that Africa possesses a potential energy generation capacity of up to 1.2 terawatts, excluding solar, and over 10 terawatts when including solar, a resource abundant on the continent (Varadi, 2017). Renewables, including geothermal, hydro, solar, and wind, are set to play a crucial role, with estimates suggesting they will contribute to more than 25% of Africa's total energy by 2040, a significant increase from the 5% recorded in 2013 (Castellano *et al.*, 2015). While Africa's pow-

er sector presents significant opportunities, realising them will require substantial investment and the establishment of incentivising structures. National governments play a crucial role in facilitating this development by formulating policies that prepare the market for private investment and promote regional integration, ultimately leading to savings in capital expenditure (Waiyaki, 2016).

McKinsey (2022) suggests that significant growth in energy-related investments will be needed to respond to rapid increases in demand, with power demand tripling and hydrogen demand growing fivefold by 2050 in their Further Acceleration scenario. It comes with more stringent emission-reduction goals, with renewables expected to account for over 30% of global investments in the next 15 years (excluding transmission and distribution reinforcements), doubling projected investments in conventional power generation and nearly matching investments in oil and gas.

The government of Angola has unveiled an ambitious plan to significantly expand access to electricity nationwide. Their goal is to achieve a 60% electrification rate by 2025, and they are fully committed to achieving this objective through substantial investments in the energy sector totalling billions of dollars. A critical element of this plan involves constructing new power stations. These power plants enhance Angola's electricity generation capacity and promote diversification of the energy mix, reducing reliance on traditional energy sources (Nwokolo *et al.*, 2024).

In addition to developing new power plants, Angola has plans to expand and modernise its electricity transmission and distribution networks. This initiative is vital to ensure the reliable and efficient delivery of electricity to communities nationwide. Furthermore, rehabilitating existing electrical infrastructure is integral to this process, optimising performance and extending the operational life of existing facilities.

What sets Angola's efforts apart is its aspiration to transform into an electricity-exporting nation within the Southern African

Development Community (SADC). To achieve this, Angola needs additional electricity generation capacity for export to neighbouring countries. It will strengthen Angola's regional standing and contribute to economic development and energy integration in southern Africa.

Cameroon boasts the third-largest hydropower development potential in Sub-Saharan Africa, estimated at over 12,000 megawatts (MW). Despite this abundant resource, less than half of the population has access to electricity, and it sells for an average price surpassing the rates paid by many consumers in the West (Kenfack *et al.*, 2021).

Harnessing Cameroon's hydropower resources is pivotal in reducing electricity costs and fostering a competitive economy. The Nachtigal project, which generates 420 MW, represents a significant step towards achieving these goals while minimizing adverse environmental and social impacts. Sponsored by the World Bank, this project promises to deliver clean and cost-effective baseload power once operational.

The financial strategy of the Nachtigal project includes a groundbreaking 21-year local-currency facility. This pioneering approach involves the active participation of five local and regional commercial banks, collectively contributing approximately one-fifth of the total project debt. This collaborative effort enhances the project's long-term financial stability and catalyzes the advancement of a more sustainable energy future.

It is worth noting that both the Export-Import Bank of China (CEXIM) and traditional multilateral donors have played significant roles in financing the hydropower sector. Cameroon is poised to become a prominent electricity producer in Africa and on the global stage because of its abundant water resources. The World Bank's adaptation to the evolving terms set by China Eximbank in the local currency financing arena underscores the shifting dynamics of international funding. This adaptation also underscores

the strategic significance of Cameroon's burgeoning hydroelectric sector in shaping the region's energy landscape (Chen & Landry, 2016). Lema, Bhamidipati, Gregersen, Hansen, and Kirchherr (2021) argue that investments in renewable energy are rapidly increasing in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a notable rise in Chinese involvement in large-scale projects. Their study examines the economic co-benefits of these investments, particularly through spill-overs and linkages. Insights from other sectors suggest that Chinese investments follow an enclave model characterized by finance, turnkey development, and the importation of labor and equipment. Analyzing three Chinese renewable energy projects in hydro, wind, and solar photovoltaic (PV), the study found evidence of "bounded benefits"—some job creation, local linkages, and training, but with limited overall impact. "The new Sanaga River project aims to export power to neighboring countries such as Chad, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria" (Kenfack *et al.*, 2021). This project, developed by the U.S. firm Hydromine, marks the fifth project along the river. Notably, some previous projects in the region were financed by China, reflecting ongoing tensions and competition between the U.S. and China over energy projects in Africa and their efforts to influence the African energy sector.

In July 2021, Zambia achieved a significant milestone in its energy development by commissioning the first 150 MW unit of the Kafue Gorge Lower hydropower station. Owned by Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO) and constructed by Sino-hydro Corporation, a renowned contractor in the hydroelectric power sector, this project aims for a total capacity of 750 MW. The commissioning marked Zambia's commitment to expanding its energy infrastructure and transitioning to cleaner energy sources while showcasing successful collaboration between domestic and international expertise.

Table 2. China's Energy Investments un Africa Share

No.	Country	Share
1	Nigeria	9.77%
2	Angola	8.37%
3	Egypt	8.29%
4	Niger	6.71%
5	Ethiopia	6.62%
6	Zimbabwe	5.30%
7	Zambia	5.07%
8	Kenya	4.91%
9	Mozambique	4.72%
10	Uganda	4.49%
11	Ghana	3.94%
12	Cameroon	3.82%
13	Tanzania	3.63%
14	Guinea	2.75%
15	Sudan	2.49%
16	Algeria	2.30%
17	Ivory Coast	2.12%
18	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2.06%
19	Total	87.4%

Source: own calculations based on

<https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>

Denmark supported the United Nations Development Programme in China (UNDP-China) in developing the Renewable Energy Technology Transfer project, fostering South-South Cooperation among China, African nations, and the UN's Sustainable Energy for All initiative. This project was a pioneering effort in this cooperation, backed by UNDP and the Danish Embassy in China

between 2015 and 2018. Despite China's experience collaborating with African countries, there remained gaps in knowledge and practice regarding South-South Cooperation. The project created a South-South Cooperation unit within the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology to address them.

The project was able to:

- Strengthen the conducive conditions for transferring and utilizing priority renewable technologies in Zambia.
- Eliminate market impediments to the adoption of renewable technologies for rural communities in Zambia.
- Enhance China's capacity for South-South Cooperation in the field of renewable energy. It facilitated energy cooperation between China and other countries (Lempp & Mayer, 2024).

Kenya Electricity Generating Company (KenGen), the national energy generator, has unveiled plans to meet growing energy demand by harnessing geothermal, hydro, and wind power. This decision comes in response to a substantial increase in electricity demand in Kenya, reaching an all-time high of 2,036 MW. Jiangxi Water and Hydropower Construction Kenya Ltd., an Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contractor known for its work in industries such as energy, infrastructure, oil and gas, and manufacturing, was selected by the Government of Kenya as a project developer to oversee and execute these complex projects from conception to completion. This partnership highlights that Chinese EPCs collaborate with Chinese firms and, in this instance, with European companies like Andritz (Austria).

The backdrop to this fact lies in Kenya's ongoing efforts to address its surging energy needs while promoting renewable and sustainable energy sources. Here is a more detailed context:

1. Kenya has consistently increased electricity demand due to population growth, urbanization, industrialization, and improved rural electrification. This growing demand has put significant pressure on the country's power supply.
2. It has diversified its energy sources to cope with this increasing demand and enhance energy security. Geothermal, hydro, and wind power are critical components of the country's energy mix due to their renewable and environmentally friendly attributes.
3. It is renowned for its abundant geothermal resources, making it a leading producer of geothermal energy in Africa. Geothermal power plants tap into the Earth's heat to generate electricity, offering a reliable and sustainable energy source.
4. The country possesses substantial hydropower potential, with numerous dams and hydroelectric power stations utilizing flowing water to generate electricity.
5. It also possesses wind power, which the country has been actively developing, especially in regions with consistent wind patterns, contributing to the nation's clean energy production.

Additionally, official data indicates that Kenya's solar power capacity exceeds 100 MW, with the China-funded Garissa Solar plant contributing 50 MW. This solar facility, the largest in East and Central Africa, was constructed in Garissa County and connected to the national grid in 2019. It is a step toward energy sufficiency and part of a broader strategy to harness 400 MW of solar power from the country's solar resources. The project has led to increased industrial and business activity in the region, benefiting artisans and households. Zhang Jian, the China Jiangxi Corporation for International Economic and Technical Cooperation (CJIC) representative in Kenya, anticipates the plant's service for the next 25 years. China has been a key partner in Africa's transition to renewable energy, and there are expectations of further collaboration

to address climate change during the upcoming FOCAC conference in Senegal (Xinhua, 2021).

The mention of Kenya reaching a record-high electricity demand of 2,036 MW underscores the pressing need for increased power supply to support various sectors of the economy and the daily lives of its citizens. China's support in this endeavor is vital and is complemented by funding from institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, and European sources. It has created a competitive environment for influence in these projects, with Kenya retaining 70% of KenGen's shares, as reported in its 2022 statement of accounts (Capital Business, 2022).

Uganda operates the Karuma Hydro Power Plant in Kiryandongo, which the Sinohydro Corporation built along the Nile River. The project is primarily funded by China's Export-Import Bank (CEXIM) and the Ugandan government and will be the largest electricity-generating facility in Uganda, with a capacity of 600 MW. It should provide significant electricity output and revenue for Uganda's economy.

The project prioritizes environmental protection because it is in the ecologically sensitive Murchison Falls National Park. Measures included building a significant portion of the power plant underground to minimize surface disruption and incorporating fish channels to facilitate fish migration—the projects aimed to balance economic development with environmental preservation. Overall, the Karuma Hydro Power Plant represents a significant step toward increasing Uganda's energy capacity while considering environmental sustainability.

Fossil Fuels

It is the second grouping of energy investments. Half of them are concentrated in nine countries. In friendly countries, there are other natural resources.

Table 3. China Investments in Fossil Fuels. Share by Country

No.	Country	% share of investment
1	Nigeria	9.8%
2	Angola	8.4%
3	Egypt	8.3%
4	Niger	6.7%
5	Ethiopia	6.6%
6	Algeria	2.3%
7	Uganda	4.5%
8	Ghana	3.9%
9	Cameroon	3.8%

China's national oil companies are heavily investing in oil and gas exploration and production in Africa. Africa is China's second-largest supplier in this sector after the Middle East, accounting for over 25% of its total oil and gas imports.

Three major companies—China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC), and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC)—have jointly committed \$15 billion to oil development and production in Africa. China's investment in African oil and gas exceeds the \$10 billion allocated to South America, doubling its estimated investment in North America.

SINOPEC and CNOOC have established strong positions in Nigeria and Angola, while CNPC holds a stake in Mozambique's Rovuma Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project (Klomegah, 2022). China's presence spans nearly 20 African countries as it seeks to meet its growing domestic energy demand. Nigeria, Africa's largest

oil producer and China's biggest trading partner on the continent, aims to boost daily oil production by the end of 2023. Experts forecast that China may need to import up to 80% of its crude oil over the next 15 years (Zaremba, 2020).

Table 4. Countries in Africa where China has Oil Investments by Firm

Country	Overall risk (World Bank) Low 60-100 High towards 0	SINOPEC	CNOOC	CNPC
Algiers	20.9	X	X	X
Angola	19.6	X		
Cameroon	14.2	X		
Chad	8.3	X		X
Djibouti	21.5	X		
Egypt	23.7	X		
Ethiopia	25.1	X		
Gabon	22.5	X	X	
Ghana	52.7	X		
Guinea	18.9	X		
Kenya	31.5	X		
Mozambique	22.0			X
Niger	25.2	X		X
Nigeria	17.2	X	X	X
Senegal	52.5	X	X	
South Sudan	6.6	X		

Country	Overall risk (World Bank) Low 60-100 High towards 0	SINOPEC	CNOOC	CNPC
Sudan	6.6	X		
Tanzania	30.0	X		
Tunisia	44.4			X
The Democrat- ic Republic of Congo	5.7	X		
The Republic of Congo	10.5	X	X	
Uganda	29.6	X	X	
Zambia	33.8	X		

Sources: China Petrochemical (SINOPEC Group), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).

In addition, there are other natural resources in the above list of countries (table 6), including gold and strategic minerals such as bauxite for EV batteries; uranium and cobalt for nuclear energy; and titanium for rockets and other high-speed vehicles, as well as more common copper and iron ore. Egypt, Cameroon, and Angola are the wealthiest countries in terms of natural resources aside from oil.

Table 4 presents the countries where Chinese firms have invested in oil. These are all high-risk countries, some extremely high-risk, and those under a one-digit number, such as Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chad. On the other hand, the less risky ones of the group, with indexes neighboring 50, such as Ghana, Senegal and Tunisia, are also less risky. All others are high risk, so the West does not enter.

Table 5. Natural Resources in Oil-Rich African Countries Where China has Investments

Country	Gold	Oil	Gas	Bauxite	Iron ore	Cobalt	Coper	Titanium	Uranium
Algeria		x	x		x				
Angola	x	x		x	x		x		
Cameroon	x	x	x	x	x				x
Egypt	x	x	x	x	x				x
Ethiopia	x		x				x	x	
Ghana	x	x	x						
Niger	x	x			x				x
Nigeria	x	x	x						
Uganda	x	x				x	x		

Source: taken from <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>

Finally, the choice of countries where Chinese investors enter is subject to bans based on the West's risk criteria, as outlined in the following six criteria designed by the World Bank.²

1. Voice and Accountability (VA) means democracy, freedom of expression, association, and a free media.
2. Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism (PV) – capturing perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically motivated violence and terrorism.

² See Worldwide Governance Indicators, World Bank. Available: <https://www.world-bank.org/en/publication/worldwide-governance-indicators>

3. Government Effectiveness (GE) – capturing perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies.
4. Regulatory Quality (RQ) – capturing perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development.
5. Rule of Law (RL) – capturing perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society and, in particular, the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence.
6. Control of Corruption (CC) – capturing perceptions of the extent to which public power aims for private gain, including petty and grand forms of corruption and “capture” of the State by elites and private interests.

Moody’s and the other two major credit rating agencies (Fitch’s and S&P) use another six groups of variables:

1. Macroeconomic risk related to the natural cyclicity of the economy and the quality of monetary and fiscal policy.
2. Business risk reflects the operational uncertainty that businesses face daily due to local conditions.
3. Financial risk from potential shifts in asset and liability valuations driven by interest-rate and exchange-rate shocks.
4. Social risks, whether large-scale social upheavals or individual-level risks such as crime and disease, affect human resources.
5. Political risk is associated with policy uncertainty and the possibility of significant shifts in political conditions.

6. Security risk to human life and property from war, geopolitical instability, natural disasters, and climate change. (Moody's Ratings, 2022)

The evidence of the 15bn USD invested in those countries, more than in Latin America in energy, is that the Chinese approach to them is unrelated to the Western idea of short-term loss and is more closely aligned with securing the commodity at any cost. Once they have arrived and invested, they will not leave, and the related investments made are generally welcome. It is also unrelated to the cost of capital. It involves controlling the commodity and preventing others from obtaining it.

China welcomes US-sanctioned oil-exporting countries, as they are the world's most significant oil exporters. With its investments in Africa and South America, China is on its way to controlling the oil and renewable energy markets.

Fossil fuel investments in 21 African countries, added to the purchase agreements it holds with Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, plus the eastern countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, make up for most of the world's oil-producing countries. Securing a stable oil supply is a significant challenge for China, given its growing reliance on oil imports. This dependence is exacerbated by the fact that a substantial portion of China's oil imports comes from politically unstable regions.

Additionally, about three-quarters of these imports are transported through vulnerable sea lanes, which China has limited control over, making the situation even more precarious. (ZhongXiang, 2012). For her, oil is the center of her investment in world policy, and energy in all forms is the vehicle for her future global presence.

Table 6a. Natural Resources in Gold-Rich African Countries where China has Investments

Country	Gold	Oil	Gas	Bauxite	Iron ore	Diamonds	Coal
DR Congo:	x					x	
Guinea:	x			x	x	x	
Ivory Coast:	x				x		
Kenya:							
Mozambique			x				x
Sudan	x	x					
Tanzania:	x		x			x	x
Zambia:	x						
Zimbabwe:	x					x	x

Table 6b. Natural Resources in Gold-Rich African Countries where China has Investments

Country	Co-balt	Cop-per	Sodaash	Fluor spar	Tanta-lum	Urani-um	Titani-um
DR Congo:	x	x					
Guinea:							
Ivory Coast:							
Kenya:			x	x	x	x	x
Mozambique					x		
Sudan						x	x
Tanzania:							
Zambia:	x	x					
Zimbabwe:							

Source: see Tables 4 and 5

Conclusion

Under the logic of GPC, the first assumption would be that China is pushing the U.S. out of Africa, gaining the markets Washington is leaving behind. However, historically, this region has been neglected and is eager to grow and develop. In that sense, the Chinese government has seen an opportunity to secure its massive energy and raw-material needs by funding African countries that possess such resources. One explanation for the expansion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Africa is the absence of another great power, primarily the United States, but on another level, the European Union, which serves as its leading investor and bears most of the risk.

Chinese capital does not consider country risk in the same way Western countries do. Long-run strategic considerations are much more important than short-term profit. The politics of investments is absent. Chinese firms enter countries and do not interfere with domestic politics the way previous European and American firms did

Moreover, most Chinese investments are in countries that, to some extent, have institutions that can ensure the rule of law. Historically, the U.S. has asked, in exchange for its aid, for a change in the form of government to a more democratic system, respect for human rights, and assurances of a free market (Cox, 2016). Chinese investors do not ask for these criteria. They are focused on securing energy sources and, in that sense, the flow of investment. The dramatic and abrupt change in the distribution of power in the African continent (Edström & Westberg, 2024) answers to the neorealist ideas of spheres of influence, and the United States seems to have retrenched to their more immediate region, leaving other parts of the world available for an emerging great power to take its place.

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The Belt and Road Initiative of China and Low Carbon Growth in Africa: Progress and Challenges

Antonina Ivanova

Introduction

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an emerging economy-led initiative, represents one of the largest infrastructure, trade, and economic agendas in history and, amid current lower global growth and intensifying trade tensions, demands the utmost attention. In 2023, BRI marked 10 years of activities and began the BRI 2.0 stage. A series of studies by the World Bank estimates that it can increase developing countries' GDP by 2.6 to 3.9 percent on average. The South-South cooperation, which is beginning to take center stage in global politics and economics, is leading to renewed interest in the historic promise to transform the world order (Ivanova, 2020). The growing South-South cooperation (SSC) is a very promising instrument for advancing the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including successful climate action under the Paris Agreement. Through SSC, developing countries prioritize knowledge and technology transfer needs to find sustainable, inclusive, and economically efficient long-term solutions.

China has recently extended the Belt and Road Initiative to many African countries. Some analysts call it an exercise of China's soft power, or "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye, 2004, p. X). According to that definition, international actors

seek to apply soft power to create followership, to convince and attract others of the desirability of their agenda, and—ultimately—to get desired (political) outcomes. It rests on such resources as culture, foreign policies, and values and can be dis-

seminated globally by such instruments as public and personal diplomacy (Shahriar, 2020, pp. 71-85).

In this context, analysts and researchers across different countries have raised the question of whether China has only economic objectives in the Belt and Road Initiative or whether it has geopolitical intentions in this investment and technology transfer strategy for African countries (Lynch, 2024). Another concern is whether African countries truly benefit from participating in the BRI, or if China is the main beneficiary of this cooperation. Another controversial aspect is whether China is fostering green development or whether its investments are causing increased carbon dioxide emissions and negatively affecting air quality and the environment.

To analyze these issues, this study examines the BRI's orientation towards African countries, green infrastructure, and low-carbon green pathways for post-COVID recovery in Africa. To develop the study, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology was applied, which provides guidance for reporting different types or aspects of systematic reviews and other types of evidence. The application of the PRISMA method ensures the selection of numerous studies published on the research topic, and the assessment and analysis of the results. The papers were selected from academic websites, including Web of Science, Google Scholar, Science News, and BBC Science Focus. Some institutional reports and hemerographic materials were also assessed.

First, the Belt and Road initiative is presented as a South-South integration project. Special attention is paid to low-carbon development pathways in BRI countries and to the agreements and principles that promote them. Some risks presented at the stage BRI 1.0 are highlighted. The second part, dedicated to African BRI countries, explains the importance of low-carbon growth and introduces projects implemented by China, discussing the challenges

and opportunities of Chinese loans. We conclude the chapter with some final ideas and some recommendations.

General Overview of BRI 1.0

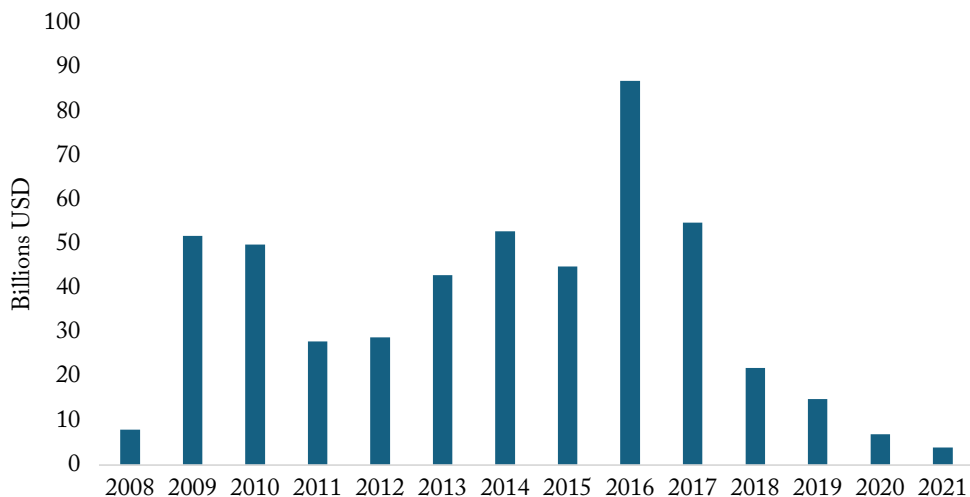
The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was started by China in 2013 and had been operating for 10 years by 2023. It began operating under the name “One Belt One Road”. As an initiative of South-South Cooperation, it is guided by the following principles: the gain-gain principle, collective growth based on each country’s specific characteristics, no interference in internal affairs, and no conditionalities. The main modalities of South-South cooperation are loans, investments, capacity building, technology transfer, lower interest rates, longer repayment periods, and more flexible terms. The general approach is to achieve the seventeen SDGs—the need for a holistic approach to the BRI is a broad trade, infrastructure-building, and financing project that aims to connect China’s space and economy with many countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. The objective of China is to create integration and strengthen economic and financial links over land (the “belt”) and sea (the “road”) with these countries. The most representative features of BRI are presented below. On the *positive* side, it is necessary to consider:

- *Generation of a new model of South-South cooperation and contribution of Global South countries to development.* China has been the first provider of financing and technology transfer. The new alternative institutions created and led by the South increase the presence of developing countries in global governance and provide new financial sources and additional development opportunities. The benefits are mutual for China and the receiving countries.
- *Additional resources for the Global South.* From 2008 to 2021, China’s development finance institutions (DFIs) contributed

half a trillion dollars, and at least \$331 billion during the BRI period of 2013 to 2021. In Africa, Chinese DFI financing was \$123 billion from 2008 to 2021, and \$91 billion during the BRI years. In addition, Chinese commercial and other actors provided \$30 billion to African governments from 2008 to 2021 and \$23 billion during the BRI period (Gallagher *et al.*, 2023).

- *Fostering industrial growth.* Chinese transoceanic financing has supported industries and infrastructure to a greater extent than traditional development financing, which benefits institutional capacity more than it does infrastructure and tends to focus on capacity building. A growing body of literature shows that Chinese finance is more closely associated with economic growth, addressing infrastructure bottlenecks, and increasing energy access than World Bank lending. Borrowers have come to view China and the World Bank as complements, each supporting different but necessary sectors.

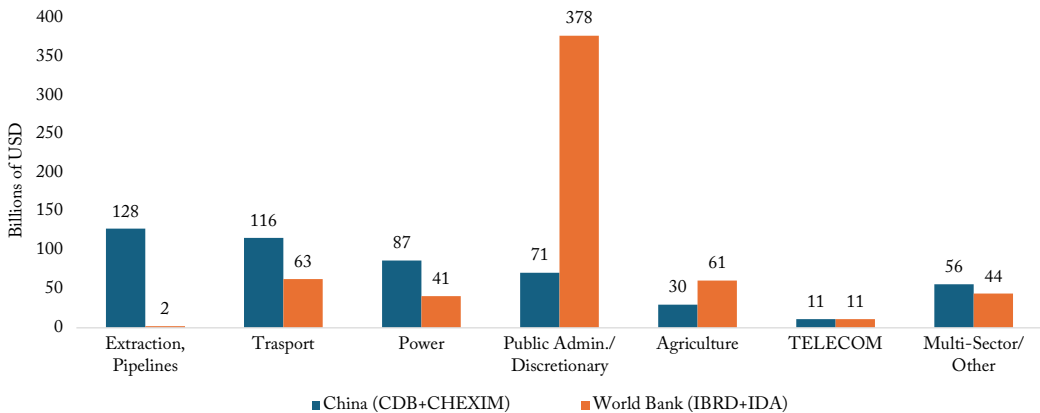
Chart 1. China Transoceanic Finance Flows, 2008-2021



Source: Engel & Moses, 2023.

A comparison between Chinese DFIs and World Bank financing shows that China has contributed to complex infrastructure (Engel & Moses, 2023), whereas multilateral development banks have directed more financing toward soft infrastructure. Chart 2 shows that the majority of World Bank financing during the period 2008-2021 supported the public administration sector. Instead, China simultaneously financed the transport, energy, and mining industries. Many researchers connect China's investment in complex infrastructure to growth in recipient countries.

Chart 2. Comparison of Finance Flows of China and World Bank by sectors 2008-2021

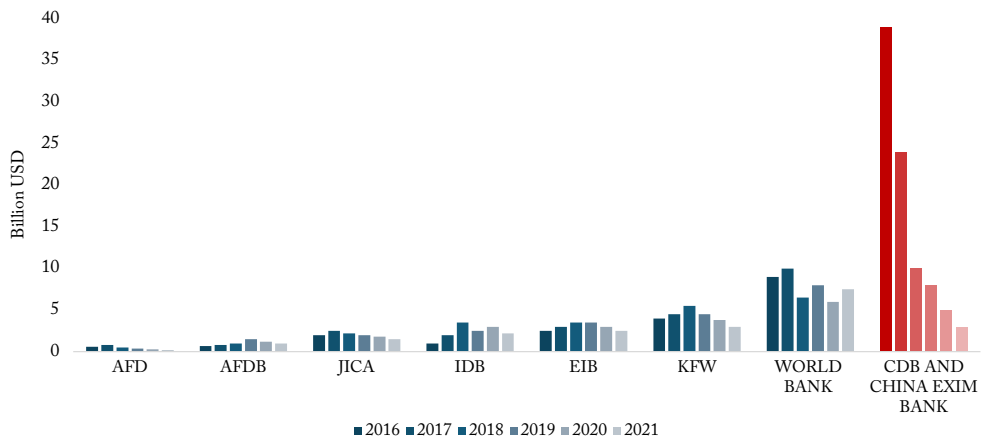


Source: Gallaher *et al.*, 2023.

Chart 3 presents more detailed comparisons of energy sector financing by Chinese DFIs and other regional and/or national lenders for the period 2016 to 2021. During the period when Chinese investment was taken together, the amount of loan financing that Chinese DFIs provided for energy projects was considerably higher than that of other DFIs and the World Bank. The decrease in Chi-

nese energy financing during the period is due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the beginning of the transition to greener energy, not to a lack of interest on the part of China in investing in the power sector.

Chart 3. Financing of the Energy Sector by the Main Development Finance Institutions, 2016-2021



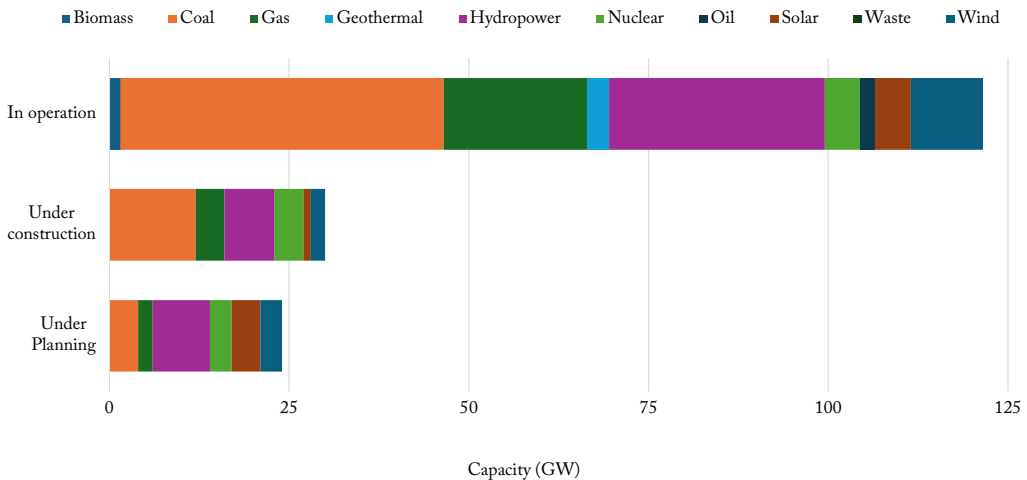
Source: Gu *et al.*, 2022.

At the same time, some risks can be observed in China's BRI:

- *Pronounced debt-related problems in Global South countries. These countries face financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change impacts, and rising interest rates in developed economies.* Suffering from the compounded effects of multiple external shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate shocks, and advanced-economy interest rate policies, developing countries are experiencing a debt crisis. China supported the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, but recipient countries are expecting further debt reduction.

- *The contribution of investment to raising carbon dioxide emissions and air pollution.* The fossil-fuel plants financed by China generate around 245 million tons of carbon dioxide per year, contributing to global warming. China's transoceanic economic activities have also contributed significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions, because the greatest amount of the funds was invested in fossil fuels, compared to (Zhao *et al.*, 2022) Chart 4 shows that two-thirds of the \$235 billion in overseas development finance China committed to energy projects between 2008 and 2021 was allocated to fossil fuel infrastructure and coal-fired power plants, in particular. Chinese-financed power plants will add approximately 12 gigatons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere over their lifetime, with 245 million tons added each year.

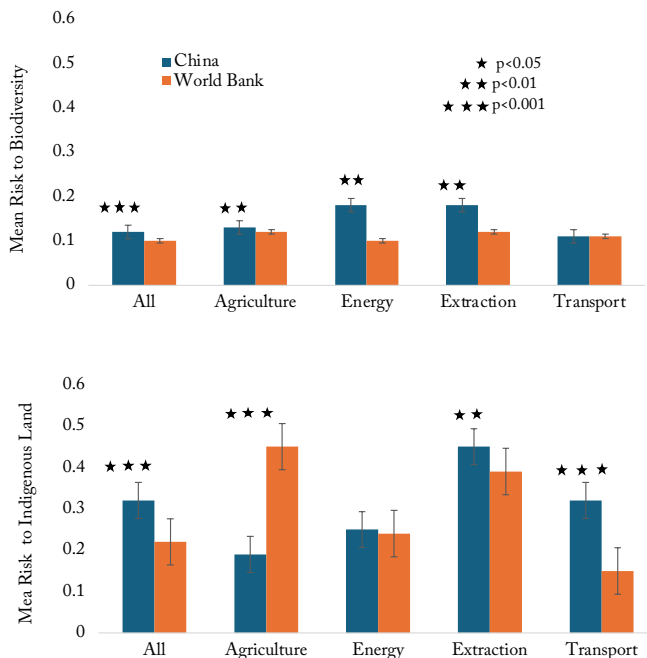
Chart 4. Power Plants Financed by China Overseas by Energy Sources and Status



Source: Gu *et al.*, 2022.

Risks to biodiversity and indigenous lands: The financing of China presents more risks to biodiversity and indigenous lands than the multilateral development banks' financing. The risks stem not only from the sectoral distribution of funding but also from differences across sectors (Gallagher *et al.*, 2023). The risks stem from China's underdeveloped environmental, social, and governance (ESG) policies. Lately, Chinese investment has been oriented towards less risky, small-sized projects. Also, the greening of the BRI is reducing the risks. China respects the domestic regulations of host countries, which can introduce stricter normativity to protect sustainable development, e.g., controls to reduce air pollution and reduce health harms.

Chart 5. China and World Bank Financing Risk to Biodiversity and Indigenous Lands



Source: Engel & Moses, 2023.

To wrap up, the BRI represents important gains for the countries that benefit from the investment and contributes to increasing the financial flows to the Global South. In recent years, China has begun investing in renewable energy rather than fossil fuels, thereby significantly reducing risks to biodiversity and the local population. In the last 10 years, the host countries and China have begun to adopt norms to minimize risks and maximize the benefits of the investments to the host countries.

BRI and Africa: A New Era of Cooperation

The initial Silk Road, where the BRI began, stretches across East Africa and the Nile states. The principal ports in Kenya and Djibouti are highly important for trade with Europe, Latin America/Caribbean, and North America. That is why Chinese funding in Africa in 2017/2018 focused on port development in West African countries.

For Beijing, Africa is crucial to the development and strengthening of its “Maritime Silk Road.” That is why China is investing in the African coastline to build ports, airports, hospitals, and “smart cities” (Gu *et al.*, 2022).

Africa is considered to participate in the BRI due to the need for additional infrastructure and the rapid population growth. On the other hand, China has expertise in building roads, ports, railways, and airports, and is interested in gaining access to copper, cobalt, and other minerals found in Africa to provide raw materials for its manufacturing industry.

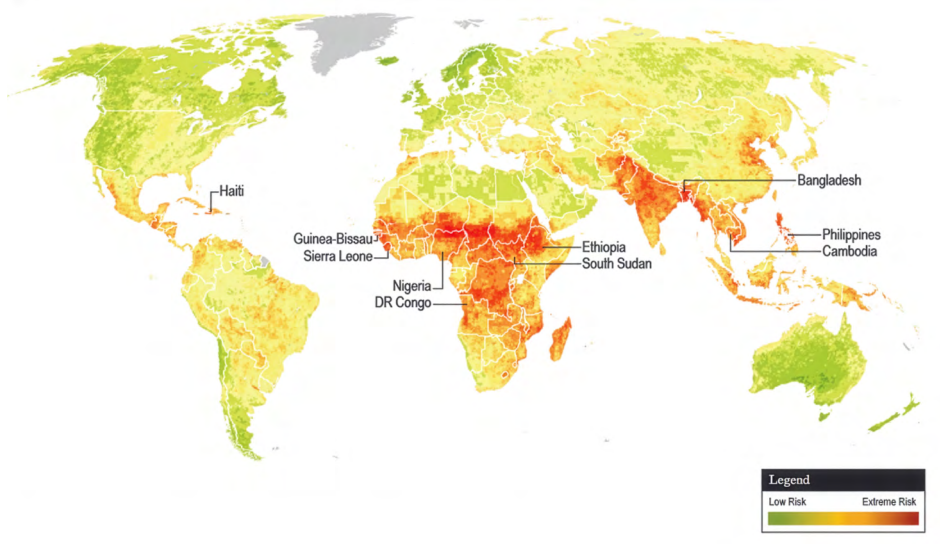
Africa’s countries are exposed to climate change impacts, with more than 50 states considered highly vulnerable. Of the 28 most vulnerable countries globally to climate change, 22 are in Africa. That is why investment in green infrastructure and low-carbon development is significant to African countries (Urban, 2018; Songwe *et al.*, 2022).

Figure 1. Maritime Silk Road



Source: Kahut *et al.*, 2020.

Figure 2. Vulnerability index to climate change for 2020



Source: IPCC, 2021

In recent years, China's infrastructure investments in Africa have decreased due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, China is reorienting its investment toward greener projects, taking into account environmental and social issues (Lema, 2023). China is also paying closer attention to climate-resilient infrastructure projects.

Chinese investment is crucial to the digitalization and modernization of African economies. Chinese mobile phone producers are leading in African markets. Huawei is practically the leader in transforming the telecommunication sector from 4G to 5G, even though Western technology is also involved (Gu *et al.*, 2022).

China and African countries have recognized the imperative need to reorient the investment towards a green, low-carbon economy and to foster sustainable development. In this sense, the collective action has been promoted.

In the report "China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035," Beijing pledges to "invest another USD60 billion in Africa by 2035, especially in support of African agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, environmental protection, digital economy, blue economy, etc." (Ministry of Commerce of China, 2021). China is considering providing Africa with "quality infrastructure" as well as "new types of infrastructure," in the first place, the digitalization to reduce the gap between Africa and industrialized countries (Bartlett, 2023).

In her speech for the 2019 Belt and Road Forum, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Christine Lagarde noted that BRI 2.0 and the launch of the green investment principle at this conference are further important steps forward for the BRI (Lagarde, 2019). Chapter 41 of China's Fourteenth Five-Year Plan and Vision 2035 presents the objective to "embrace the concepts of green, openness and honesty," and to foster a Green Silk Road through joint climate action, biodiversity protection, the blue economy, and deforestation control. Under its Nationally De-

terminated Contributions, China aims to reach carbon neutrality by 2060 (“Carbon Neutral 2060”). The country’s experience along the pathway towards “carbon neutrality” will be an important input for implementing the Green Silk Road (Pike, 2018).

Additionally, since 2021, China has been developing guidelines that introduce new environmental and social risk management procedures, including specific standards and monitoring mechanisms. Also, the China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals and Chemicals Importers & Exporters (CCCMC) introduced its own Environmental and Social Risk Management Policy (ESRMP) in 2022. These standards are voluntary, but widely accepted by the investors.

The African Agenda 2063 sets the objective of achieving a connected continent within the next 50 years. Africans aspire to build

an integrated continent, politically united, and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance by improving connectivity through newer and bolder initiatives to link the continent by rail, road, sea, and air; and developing regional and continental power pools, as well as information and communication technology (Bartlett, 2023, p. 16).

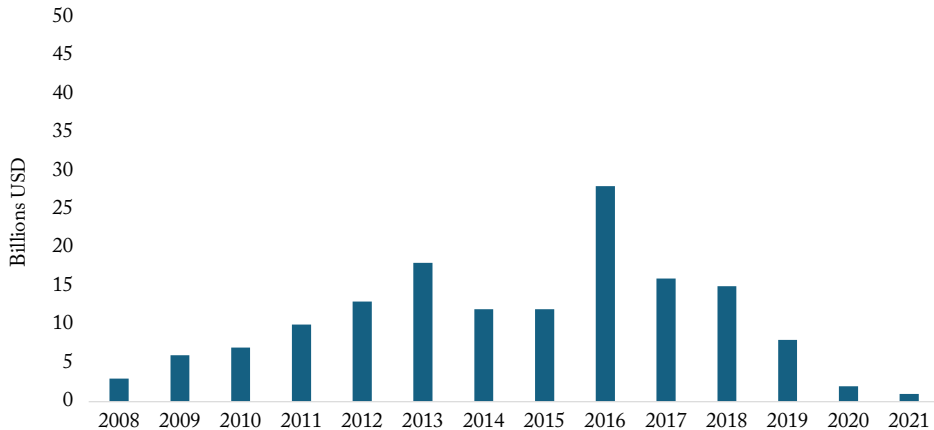
Chinese Loans: interpreting the initiative, assessing the risks

In 2021, China had surpassed not only the United States in the value of its African investments but also long-standing partners such as France, Germany, and India. China’s overseas investment contributed to the infrastructure development of African countries and fostered their modernization, digitalization, and economic growth.

As Chinese investment in infrastructure started in the 1960s, the cooperation with Africa strengthened. From 1980 to 2016,

trade between China and Africa increased exponentially from US\$1 billion to US\$128. China is the largest bilateral creditor of Africa with cumulative loans of US\$143 billion.

Chart 6: Chinese Loans to Africa, 2008-2021



Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2023.

Chart 6 shows that Chinese development finance institutions and businesses provided \$153 billion to African sovereign borrowers between 2008 and 2021, and \$114 billion during the BRI years. Most of this financing was directed toward infrastructure construction and modernization. The Export-Import Bank of China and China Development Bank granted loans to the energy sector, mainly for hydropower, oil, and coal (Gallagher *et al.*, 2023).

A recent Boston University study (Gallagher *et al.*, 2023) found that China's lending to Africa has decreased, reaching its lowest level in the last 20 years (Chart 6). However, it is attributed to difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and to the new orientation towards small-scale investments (Ray, 2023; INFOBAE, 2023).

The narrative that China's objectives are to entangle countries in debt traps is not realistic. The majority of the countries adhered to the BRI when their economic development was stable. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on developing countries. The war in Ukraine also raised food and oil prices, affecting many African countries (Wang & Xu, 2023).

The Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya, which was constructed in 2017, was considered the most important infrastructure project since the late 1 to Nairobi 800s (Diallo, 2023). The travel time from Mombasa to Nairobi decreased from 10 hours to five. The population acknowledged the train as a safe mode of transportation, although some complained about the economy-class seats.

China lent Kenya \$5 billion to build a railway connecting Mombasa to Nairobi, and Nairobi to Naivasha. The project's further objectives are to connect Kenya to Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan (Lema, 2023). This promises significant benefits in connectivity, though the 20-year repayment period is considered too short and could increase the project's costs. The train is passing through the Nairobi National Park, and some environmentalists have questioned the impacts on the park's endemic biodiversity.

Chinese loans were also granted to Ethiopia and Zambia for infrastructure projects. However, the debt imposed a heavy burden on Zambia due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacts. Now, Zambia is the first country to negotiate a restructuring of loan payments (Frimpong, 2023).

In Mozambique, several important projects were built between 2009 and 2021: the Zimpeto National Stadium, the New International Airport in Maputo, the Maputo Circular Road, the Maputo-Katembe Bridge, and the Xai-Xai Airport. According to many academics, the Mozambican State will not be able to pay its debts to China. In this way, there is widespread apprehension in Mozambican society, since they do not know what the consequences will be. Some academics believe that the newly discovered

natural resources could be used to pay these debts, putting future generations at risk (Kahut *et al.*, 2020).

There is enough empirical evidence to conclude that, in fact, BRI channels substantial gains for African countries in education, communication, agriculture, and, above all, public infrastructure. Nevertheless, the new era of cooperation between Africa and China fuels debates and controversies. While on the one hand it encounters strong criticism from both the West and some academics, civil society, political leaders, and entrepreneurs, among other social sectors, on the other hand, it finds strong support from the majority of the national political elite in power and a part of the academics and other social sectors.

China's financing policies, which use a mix of grants, loans, and aid, do not impose any conditionalities, unlike those of Western countries or the World Development Bank. China generally offers preferential terms of return and low interest rates. China's approach to different political regimes is "all-inclusive," to avoid disputes, which grants it an advantage over Western economies. Additionally, China replaced the European Union and the US when these decreased their investments in Africa due to the crisis.

China's cooperation with African countries is most often formalized through memorandums of understanding (MoUs). An MoU is a legal document describing a bilateral agreement between parties. It expresses a convergence of will between the parties, indicating an intended standard line of action, rather than a legal commitment. Of the 54 African countries, 49 have signed MoUs with China. Moreover, China has invested in 52 African countries, negotiating an investment in São Tomé and Príncipe, actually. Of the 49 countries with MoUs, 22 are in West Africa (50%), 12 in East Africa, 9 in North Africa, and 6 in Southern Africa.

Only five African countries— Eritrea, Benin, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Eswatini (Swaziland)—have neither signed a MoU nor expressed support for it. However, China is constantly

seeking closer cooperation with these countries. For example, it began financing the Koka gold mine in Eritrea and investing in the railroad linking Benin to Niger, replacing the French investment. Additionally, China is financing two railway projects to the coast of Mali, worth US\$11 billion.

Sao Tome and Principe accepted the one-China policy in 2017 (not recognizing Taiwan) and, in 2019, signed a financial support agreement with China. These countries will probably sign MoUs with China in the near future (Lokanathan, 2020). Eswatini is the only African country to maintain its alliance with Taiwan and not attend the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (Lokanathan, 2020).

The African Development Bank states that the Continent needs \$130 to \$170 billion USD worth of new infrastructure annually. African countries may receive non-Chinese loans, but these typically take an average of 9 years to be approved due to stringent scrutiny.

Chinese loans focus solely on the project's viability, and decisions are made quickly (approval in two years). Chinese Finance in Africa from 2003 to 2019 - USD 82 billion. Over half are commodity-secured.

Nevertheless, most Chinese finance is "tied" with Chinese suppliers. African countries seem stuck: unable to access favorable loans from others and "tied" to Chinese loans. Although Chinese banks are major investors in Africa, there is a lack of transparency that must be addressed to gain policymakers' trust.

Despite the historical Africa-China cooperation and the significant gains for African countries, China is seen as a risk to Africa's healthy and sustainable development. Many academics and civil society members question the prioritization of infrastructure construction over investment in areas such as agriculture, health, and education. They believe that behind these constructions lies significant corruption within the country's political elite. And these infrastructures are not helping the poor people in the rural areas.

Poverty doesn't decrease as a result of this cooperation (Kleven, 2019). While China is now an economically powerful country, the majority of Africans are still poor, and the infrastructure does not benefit these people.

Actually, the BRI countries receive only 12% of Chinese foreign direct investment. Many investments are aligned with geopolitical objectives. In Africa, the debt-trap situation is not dire: only the Maldives has a debt-to-GDP ratio above 100%. Nevertheless, sometimes nations seek IMF assistance to repay Chinese loans due to chronic financial constraints. Corruption and bribery remain a problem, but are not exclusive to Chinese loans (Kahut *et al.*, 2020).

These facts have raised some concerns about Chinese neocolonialism and "debt-trap" policies. It is documented that China had to renegotiate the initial loan terms to relieve the debt burden. At least \$12.1 billion in debt relief was granted to several countries in 2020 and 2021. For example, \$378 million in cancelled debt by Kenya and a \$110 million decrease in debt by Zambia (Lokanthan, 2020). Since 2000, in Africa, China has made nine commitments to cancel the debts of borrowing countries and has entered into several debt restructuring agreements to extend repayment terms, rather than using coercive measures.

Conclusions

After the BRI 1.0 phase of initial agreements and investments in Africa, BRI 2.0 is expected to be a significant reorientation towards greener, more sustainable investments. It must be recognized that the 10 years of BRI have contributed to the development of infrastructure, railroads, and airports, but at the same time, some countries have been burdened with debt.

In Western opinion, China should help countries with debt problems find solutions. In the words of Janet Yellen, the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States:

Prompt action on debt is in China's interest. [...] Delaying needed debt treatments raises the costs both for borrowers and creditors. It worsens [the] borrowers' economic fundamentals and increases the amount of debt relief they will eventually need. (Yellen, J.)

Other considerations are that China's Belt and Road Initiative is subordinated to geopolitical and geostrategic goals, as, for example, the financing of ports along the East Coast and the establishment of a military base in Djibouti.

Of course, there are also economic reasons to exploit China's industrial overcapacity as its national economy slows. In this sense, China is promoting a "win-win cooperation" model of economic investment abroad. However, the analysts say the benefits are greater for China than for African countries. All the projects to build infrastructure and create connectivity in Africa make it possible for China to bring workers and materials, and export raw materials and minerals. The workforce in most projects consists of highly skilled Chinese citizens and unskilled African workers. China has stated that highly skilled people help reduce costs. Only a few projects benefit the African population entirely, such as local capacity building in the health and education sectors. Some investments have been cancelled due to a lack of local labor, concerns about debt burdens, risks, or low-quality standards. The projects also present limited transparency and public participation in several African countries.

Some recommendations to enhance and make more carbon neutral Chinese cooperation with Africa under BRI 2.0 would be the following: Internationally African countries' position should reflect the vulnerability of the continent to climate change impacts on the population, economy, nature and biodiversity; Integrate climate scenarios into development plans on national and sectoral level; Advocate internationally for increased adaptation funding

(loss and damage); Clarify the role and governance of climate diplomacy; Include all the stakeholders in policy decisions, with special attention to local traditions, environmental protection and indigenous rights; Build local capacities and avoid dependency on foreign skills.

During BRI 2.0, China and African countries will need to collaborate to optimize the benefits and avoid the social and environmental risks that emerged during the first decade of BRI 1.0. China could foster high-impact investment by applying the normative framework for environmental and social management. African countries must include their national development priorities in negotiations with Chinese investors, e.g., job creation for local populations, and environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. Thus, BRI 2.0 could surpass the achievements of BRI 1.0 and lead the way towards a sustainable and inclusive future.

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IV. Economic Issues in Africa: Inflation and Poverty

The Impact of the Inflation-Targeting Regime for Economic Development: The South African Case

Wendolyn Bravo

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, South Africa, like many other emerging economies, committed to aligning its monetary policy with the so-called Inflation-Targeting Regime, setting a numerical target of 3 to 6%. And while it is true that this target has been met, with a few exceptions, the impact it has had on the performance of other macroeconomic variables could cast doubt on its success. For example, economic growth has been low (on average 2%) during these years of inflation control, and policies aimed at reducing the unemployment rate, which, according to data from the International Labor Organization, is above 28%, have been abandoned. Although this is due to other structural, political, and social problems in the country and the region, the influence of the price control policy cannot be denied, as social inequalities have deepened.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the implications of the application of the inflation-targeting regime in the South African economy, under the hypothesis that it has not had a positive impact on the activities and substantive variables to achieve a sustained and long-term economic development, in which production grows in such a way that society as a whole benefit, through an inclusive labor market, with decent and long-term income and work.

The paper is divided into three sections, in addition to this introduction. The next section develops the concept and characterization of the inflation-targeting regime and the context of its application in the South African economy. The third section ana-

lyzes the behavior of the inflation-targeting regime and its impact on other macroeconomic variables and economic development. It ends with a section of conclusions.

Characterization of the Inflation-Targeting Regime

Price stability has become one of the most important pillars and objectives of monetary policy across countries, both in emerging and industrialized economies. According to a study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the most widely used definition of price stability is that of Alan Greenspan, who says: “price stability is achieved when economic agents no longer take into account possible future variations in the general level of prices when making economic decisions” (IMF, 2005, p. 179). Price stability, then, requires adopting economic policy measures today to achieve it in the future and in the long term, even if those decisions entail certain sacrifices in other economic aggregates, such as consumption, investment, and economic growth itself. According to Frederic Mishkin, the inflation-targeting regime comprises five fundamental elements: (i) the public announcement of medium-term numerical inflation targets, (ii) an institutional commitment to price stability as the primary objective of monetary policy, to which other objectives are subordinated, (iii) an inclusive information strategy in which many variables, and not only monetary aggregates or interest rates, (iv) increased transparency in monetary policy strategy through communication with the public and the markets about the plans, objectives and decisions of the monetary authorities, and (v) greater accountability on the part of the central bank for achieving its inflation objectives (Mishkin, 2004, p. 3).

The IMF (2005, p. 180) distinguishes the inflation-targeting regime as one of the operational frameworks of monetary policy aimed at achieving price stability and has two main characteristics:

1. The central bank acts under a mandate and commitment to maintain an exclusive numerical target defined as a level or range of annual inflation.
2. The inflation forecast within a given horizon is the de facto intermediate policy target. For this reason, the inflation-targeting mechanism is also often referred to as an “inflation forecast targeting” regime.

Table 1 lists the countries that, as of 2010, had adopted the inflation-targeting regime. It includes industrialized countries and emerging economies, including South Africa, which began implementing this regime in 2000 with a target of 3-6%. From the same table, it can be seen that there is a significant difference in the countries' inflation targets, particularly in the first group, the emerging economies; Serbia has the highest target, ranging from 13.5 to 15.5%. This shows that the determination of the inflation target by the authorities depends on the specificities of each case, i.e., their political, economic, and social context, the problems and structural characteristics of their economies, and the global situation. As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, in times of crisis, inflation containment becomes a difficult objective to maintain, and economic policy has to adjust and adapt to the complexity of the situation.

Regarding the dynamics of inflation targets in industrialized countries, we can observe that they are very similar, around 3%. This could be due to the stability of their economies and the structural characteristics of their markets, which enable them to achieve low inflation at a low cost to their economic development and growth. This argument leads us to question why, in emerging economies, some targets are so low and close to those of industrialized countries, when the dynamics are so different.

Table 1. Countries that apply the inflation-targeting regime

Country	Year of adoption	Current inflation target (percentage)
Emerging economy countries		
Israel	1997	1-3
Czech Republic	1998	3(+/-1)
Korea	1998	2.5-3.5
Poland	1999	2.5(+/-1)
Brazil	1999	4.5 (+/-1.5)
Chile	1999	2-4
Colombia	1999	5(+/- 0.5)
South Africa	2000	3-6
Thailand	2000	0-3.5
Mexico	2001	3(+/-1)
Hungary	2001	3.5 (+/-1)
Peru	2002	2.5 (+/- 1)
Philippines	2002	5-6
Guatemala	2005	5(+/-1)
Indonesia	2005	4-6
Romania	2005	3.5(+/-1)
Turkey	2006	6.5(+/-1)
Serbia	2006	14.5(+/-1)
Industrialized countries		
New Zealand	1990	1-3
Canada	1991	1-3
United Kingdom	1992	2

Australia	1993	2-3
Sweden	1993	2 (+/-1)
Switzerland	2000	<2
Iceland	2001	2.5
Norway	2001	2.5

Source: Own elaboration with information from IMF (2005) and Roger (2010).

According to the promoters of the inflation-targeting regime, it has certain advantages compared to other strategies, for example, those based on the exchange rate:

- An inflation-targeting regime helps to strengthen credibility and anchor inflation expectations more quickly and permanently.
- Inflation targets provide greater flexibility. In other words, since the inflation target can be reached in the medium term, the central bank can focus on that target, even if it is not reached in the short term, without being considered a failure.
- An inflation-targeting regime entails a lower economic cost in the event of monetary policy failure. This is compared to a monetary policy under a fixed exchange rate, which could culminate in economic and banking crises and debt default problems. However, this point minimizes the impact that failing to meet the inflation target could have on output, suggesting that raising interest rates corrects this deviation from the target, but does not analyze the implications of high interest rates for other macroeconomic variables, such as credit.

On the other hand, there are those who see important disadvantages in the application of this inflation-targeting regime, such as the following:

- The inflation target implies an important commitment on the part of the authorities that assume it, the central banks, who, in order to achieve this goal, will not hesitate to take measures that reflect the seriousness with which they take this commitment, even if this implies low levels of economic growth, for the sake of price stability.
- Inflation-targeting entails high exchange rate volatility. Critics of this regime believe that focusing all efforts on inflation-targeting will lead to a much more volatile exchange rate.
- An inflation-targeting regime is not viable in countries that do not meet a set of “preconditions.”

This last point could include emerging economies, whose monetary, fiscal, and financial institutions are less solid or credible, which represent an unfavorable scenario for the inflation-targeting regime to succeed. According to Frederic Mishkin, there is a very particular institutional context in emerging economies that should be considered when analyzing the application of monetary policy and, in particular, the inflation-targeting regime (Mishkin, 2004, p. 3), characterized by:

- Weak fiscal institutions. This makes these economies highly vulnerable to high levels of inflation and currency crises.
- Weak financial institutions, including prudential regulation and government supervision.
- Low credibility of monetary institutions.
- Many emerging economies are suffering from currency substitution and dollarization of their liabilities.
- Vulnerability to capital outflows (external dependence).

The vulnerability of institutions is evident in emerging economies, where fiscal problems have generated instability and crisis through public debt, pressuring monetary authorities to monetize

debt and leading to rapid money growth and high inflation. “If fiscal imbalances are large enough, monetary policy eventually becomes subordinate to fiscal considerations (so-called fiscal dominance) and an inflation target would have to be abandoned or drastically modified” (Mishkin, 2004, p. 7).

A fragile financial system is particularly dangerous and puts the rest of the economy at risk when inflation targets are applied, since central banks cannot raise (even more or enough) interest rates to control inflation, because it could collapse the financial system. An example in the Latin American region has been the experiences of Brazil and Mexico, which have already had moments of crisis generated by trying to contain inflation, resulting in interest rate increases that have caused capital flight, exchange rate instability, currency devaluations, increased debt service, drastic drops in their growth rates, not to mention the social and political problems that this entails.

The financial and banking system plays an important role when analyzing this regime, as it is directly and indirectly impacted by the interest rate management by the Central Banks, struggling to recover its profitability, through moments of great credit expansion and others in which it contracts to achieve higher profits and get out of the risk zone, seeking to place its financing in shorter term loans, decreasing credit to the productive sector, which undoubtedly has a direct impact on the dynamics of aggregate demand and thus on economic growth.

Analyzing the characteristics of this monetary policy strategy, it can be said that achieving price stability through strict inflation-targeting is subject to other variables, such as investment, consumption, and employment. The behavior of the economy as a whole shows that this interrelation in favor of inflation control has been complex, particularly in emerging-market economies. The following section examines the macroeconomic dynamics in South Africa.

The Inflation-Targeting Regime in South Africa

In the case of African countries, it is important to note that, unlike others, such as those in Latin America, they achieved independence only recently, during the 1960s, including South Africa (1961), which implied an extra effort to adapt to an economic system without being colonies. This required the new nations' willingness to form an economic, political, and social organization that would enable them to break with their role as exporters of raw materials inherited from the colonial era.

It is in this context that the process of trying to break with dependence on the large economies of the center arises, which some authors, such as Colom (2007), call autocentrism, whose characteristics are summarized as follows (Colom, 2007, p. 9):

- The development of industry and productive diversification are at the core of the policy, key to breaking the dependency situation.
- The national State must direct and control the development process.
- This process is not contradictory to participation in exchanges within the capitalist system.

This process was successful at first, given that the average annual growth rate of the African region was 4.5%, higher than that of many Latin American countries, until problems with oil prices in the 1970s. However, this upturn in its economy was largely due to exports of raw materials. This reflected the fact that dependence on foreign transactions, mainly with developed or industrialized countries, had not been broken. The oil and mining sectors were the most dynamic.

This attempt to modify the economic model in Africa failed to consolidate, and despite years of increased economic growth and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), dependence on raw material exports, rising imports of capital goods, and oil shocks led to indebtedness that would trigger a crisis in the 1980s.

The increase in oil prices raised energy bills for non-producers, with the consequent difficulties, while crude oil producers saw a significant increase in export revenues (as in Gabon and Nigeria). It is important to note that the extraordinary liquidity in the world's financial markets made access to credit easy, enabling balance-of-payments problems to be easily solved (Colom, 2007, p. 11).

But this period of prosperity was halted by a global decline in the prices of primary products, including oil. In addition, the more developed economies with which Africa conducted its foreign transactions experienced inflation, making the manufactured products it imported more expensive, generating balance-of-payments problems.

As a result of the decrease in export revenues, coupled with internal political problems and low tax collection, the external indebtedness process deteriorated. In the words of Cairó and Colom (2003), this led to the collapse of the African economy; "all this amalgam of external and internal structural factors, and the crisis at the Center of the System, led to the collapse, at the beginning of the 1980s, of the African economies in general" (Cairó & Colom, 2003, p. 8). These crisis processes, closely related to attempts to develop their domestic industries that failed to materialize, would result in an increase in their external debts and a decrease in the flow of financing and FDI, mainly, which would impact the economic growth of the countries.

Thus, the intervention of international organizations was not long in coming, attributing the crises of these countries to domestic policies, state intervention, and protectionism. Therefore, it is not surprising that adjustment policies focused on encouraging free

markets, deregulation, and minimizing the State's participation in "market" decisions. The aim was to realign these economies with the world economy, whose trends ensured them a place that would perpetuate their status as exporters of certain goods, mainly primary goods (such as timber, cotton, minerals, and oil).

This gave rise to the so-called structural reforms, which were nothing more than a series of recommendations promoted by the IMF, the World Bank (WB) and the governments of the developed countries led by the United States, so that the economies in trouble could return to the path of economic growth, but above all so that they could solve the problem of their debts, i.e., restructure them.

Sanahuja (2001) concentrates these reforms into four major themes, which were presented in a Decalogue that would go down in history as the so-called *Washington Consensus* (Sanahuja, 2001, p. 122):

1. Domestic macroeconomic control. Countries must commit to containing domestic demand to avoid inflationary pressures, reduce imports, and eliminate the fiscal deficit. This will be achieved through the application of restrictive fiscal and monetary policies.
2. External rebalancing. To reach this point, economies resort to currency devaluations, aiming to make imports more expensive and boost exports, thereby improving the balance of payments.
3. Institutional Framework. The economy is liberalized to eliminate distortions introduced by state intervention, thereby establishing a framework that increases competition and efficiency.
4. Openness. The only possible growth strategy for underdeveloped countries is based on exports. Consequently, reforms include liberalizing not only trade, but also the financial system.

These neoliberal structural reforms began to be implemented forcefully in Africa during the 1980s; by 1985, 12 countries in the region were already implementing them. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) was largely persuaded by national elites to adopt neoliberalism immediately after the first democratic election in 1994. Its first foray into neoliberalism was the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Plan, which included a standard austerity package, trade liberalization, and privatization.

One of the most problematic policies implemented during this period was the South African government's abandonment of the principle of access to clean, affordable water as a human right and its shift to market-based water provision (i.e., privatization) involving large multinational water corporations. With serious results on society, increasing poverty due to rising water prices, and mass cholera outbreaks.

After slow growth, rising inequality, and increasing dissatisfaction with the lack of public services, Congress shifted its focus, adopting microfinance and market-based anti-poverty strategies through the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA¹) (Nega & Scheneider, 2014). Highlighting the notion of addressing poverty and unemployment via microfinance and social entrepreneurship rather than state-led development, based on the lessons of the Grameen Bank² (from Bangladesh), this approach has consequences that also generate poverty.

The African economy's dependence on exports to more developed countries did not change during this readjustment; rather, it

¹ AsgiSA emphasized addressing poverty and unemployment through microfinance and social network entrepreneurship rather than state-led development, drawing on lessons from Grameen Bank.

² The Grameen Bank is known for calling itself the bank of the poor and for providing mainly credit in rural areas of Bangladesh. It considers credit as a tool to fight poverty. For more details on how this bank works, see www.grameen.com/introduction.

intensified. Mining and oil activities, being the most closely related to this dynamic, have generated a strong exposure of its economy, due to its structural fragility and to international crises linked to speculation in the prices of raw materials. In addition to the serious social and ecological problems related to the exploitation of these resources.

In addition to the above, understanding the current state of South African economy, requires consideration of the legacy of apartheid. This form of political, economic and social structure consisted of racial segregation, with a discourse of superiority of the white race led by the so-called “Afrikaners” (settlers of Dutch origin) and although racism against the black population was not something new, it was during apartheid that it was normalized and had political and legal backing, until it was abolished during the 1990s³.

With the slogan “Better life for all,” South Africa would enter a new stage in its political, economic, and social structure, led by the first black president, Nelson Mandela. Although the process of change has been complicated and has been surrounded by problems of corruption and the concentration of wealth and even power, it has passed from the control of the white race to the representatives of the black race. In a study conducted by Cesce (2022), in this regard, it is noted:

(...) South Africa is currently the most unequal country in the world. The data are devastating. More than 80% of the country's wealth is in the hands of 10% of the population. Meanwhile, more than 60% of the population lives in poverty. Some analysts believe that South Africa is even more unequal today than it

³ After apartheid, a democratic system was established, and there have been five presidents: Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe, Jacob Zuma, and Cyril Ramaphosa (current).

was during the apartheid era. Today, however, the distribution of wealth is not only racially motivated. Whereas in the 1990s all wealth was concentrated among the white population, today a significant percentage of the wealthiest population is made up of non-whites, the colored, blacks or Asians. (Cesce, 2022, p. 3)

The current President, Ramaphosa (since 2018), has had to face a strong group of detractors led by his predecessor, Jacob Zuma⁴, who is accused of corruption and of leaving South Africa with a very weakened economy, high levels of unemployment and poverty, and significant debt. Ramaphosa's response has been a program to implement the aforementioned structural reforms, with a strong focus on opening the market to international trade and attracting foreign capital.

Among his proposals, those considered most radical are a land reform based on expropriation without compensation and the nationalization of the Central Bank, questioning the institution's independence. In addition, citing the Cesce study (2022):

He has carried out a major administrative renewal with the appointment of new positions at the head of the main public companies (Eskom and South African Airlines) (...) his management has been marked by the crisis caused by COVID-19. The continued deterioration of public services and the population's lack of confidence in institutions added to the health challenge (Cesce, 2022, p. 6).

In addition to pointing out this complicated context, for the purpose of this paper, it is important to emphasize South Africa's labor market, since, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, monetary

⁴ In 2021, a judge ordered Zuma's arrest, accused of corruption, state capture, and contempt of court.

policy committed to inflation targets and other structural problems such as poverty and access to education, have left aside public policies that focus on generating jobs and a solid labor market in the long term.

South Africa is a country with more than 60 million inhabitants, of which 51.3% are women and 49% men. The economically active population is 58.5% of the total population aged 15 or older. The employment rate is 41.6%, the unemployment rate is 28%, and the informality rate is 41.5%⁵. From these data, we can reinforce the argument that in this country there is a high level of unemployment; although the pandemic of COVID-19, the constant problem of corruption, and the crises in the international context have directly influenced the maintenance of these levels, some studies indicate that access to education and its quality have a fundamental role in the conformation of this variable.

Although in the post-apartheid era, attempts have been made to modify access to education, the educational system remains unequal. Previously, investment in education was based on a condition of racial segregation, with access mainly for the white population, and the black population being taught the basics of low-skilled functions. Later, the ANC implemented a policy to increase access for the black community.

The South African education system is still tremendously unequal. The main difference with the past is that now the children of the new black elite are also among the privileged who receive quality education. Meanwhile, 30% of the mostly black students who have been taught for 6 years cannot read and about 50% cannot do basic operations. Such a situation is ex-

⁵ For population and labor market data, we used as a reference the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the Internet at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> and the World Bank on the Internet at <https://datos.bancomundial.org/>.

plained by the low level of training of teachers, many of whom were educated during apartheid. (Cesce, 2022, p. 4)

Under these conditions of privileged access to education and poor-quality education, in which the population does not attain the skills necessary for integration into a labor market already restricted and depleted due to the lack of public policies, a drop in their standard of living is inevitable, given low incomes. This leads to social inequality and income concentration, which, within a regime of inflation targets, become second-order problems.

The inflation-targeting regime increases social inequality by raising interest rates that, although they reduce inflation, also reduce aggregate demand, thereby reducing the income of salaried families, whose income is mainly destined to consumption, exposed to monetary policy shocks, and increasing unemployment. Those who hold assets in financial markets (mainly businessmen), who can access extraordinary resources and thus handle inflation-control measures with less pressure, are less affected.

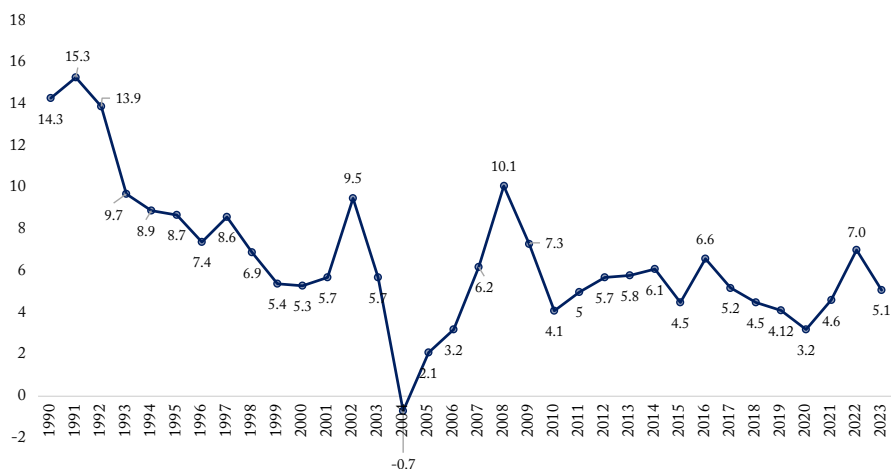
In the study conducted by Villarreal (2018), this inequality is analyzed, distinguishing between two types of households: those who earn income through wages (working households) and those who are entrepreneurs (business owners). Although it could be said that the world is oversimplified by reducing it into two types of households, it clearly presents the relationship between inflation-targeting as a monetary policy strategy and inequality; in this sense, Villarreal states that:

As a direct consequence of the resulting increase in the real interest rate, a reallocation of resources in the economy is observed, which translates into reductions in both the level of activity and inflation. This reduction in resources, however, is distributed differently among households. While both types of households see their labor income diminished as a consequen-

ce of a lower demand for labor, working households -whose consumption patterns are more sensitive to income fluctuations due to the valuation of the risks faced- do not manage to compensate the reduction in labor income with other sources of income, as it happens in the case of entrepreneurial households. (Villarreal, 2018, p. 29)

Based on what has been analyzed so far, an important question arises for the debate: Can the inflation-targeting regime in South Africa really be considered successful? The first is the behavior of inflation itself, as shown in Graph 1. Prior to the implementation of inflation-targeting in 2000, inflation was above 7%, reaching 15% in the early nineties. In 23 years of the implementation of this strategy it can be seen that in 7 years the target was not reached, exceeding the 6% limit, being strict when looking at this data the initial conclusion could be that it is a successful strategy, since on average inflation has been kept below the target, but before considering this as a fact it is necessary to analyze other variables.

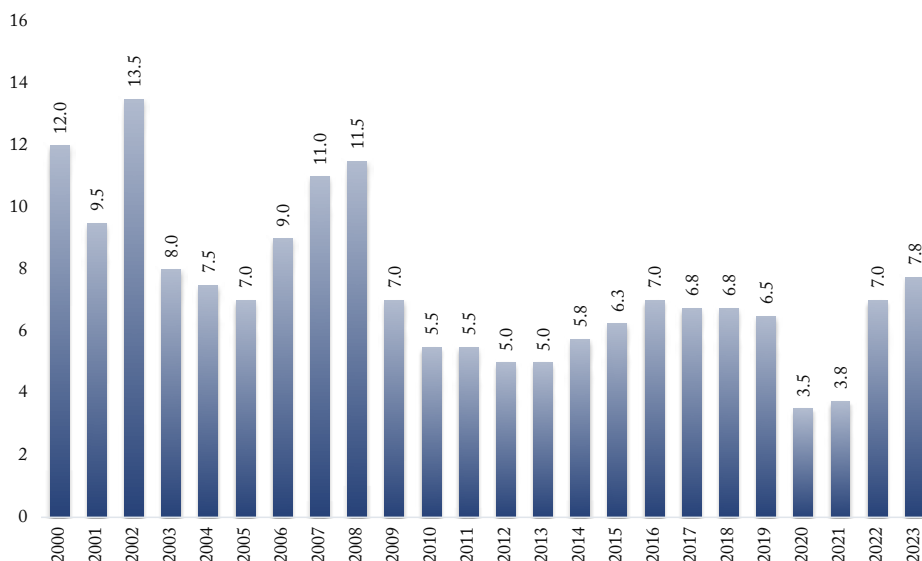
Graph 1. Inflation Rate in South Africa (1990-2023)



Source: Own elaboration whit information from Organisation for Economic OECD

As mentioned above, Central Banks' strategy to reduce demand and thus inflation is through the real interest rate, the target interest rate, or the monetary policy interest rate (depending on each country). In South Africa, the REPO is the interest rate that the South African Reserve Bank moves to achieve the 6% inflation target. As expected, the interest rate increases at the same rate as inflation. It can be observed in graph 2 that during the pandemic, the interest rate dropped sharply, remaining around 3.5%, to reanimate the economy, which had been affected by the shutdown of productive activity. The price increase was not long in coming, and the strategy of raising interest rates was reactivated, with the South African Federal Reserve reporting on its website in March 2024 that the rate is 8.25%.

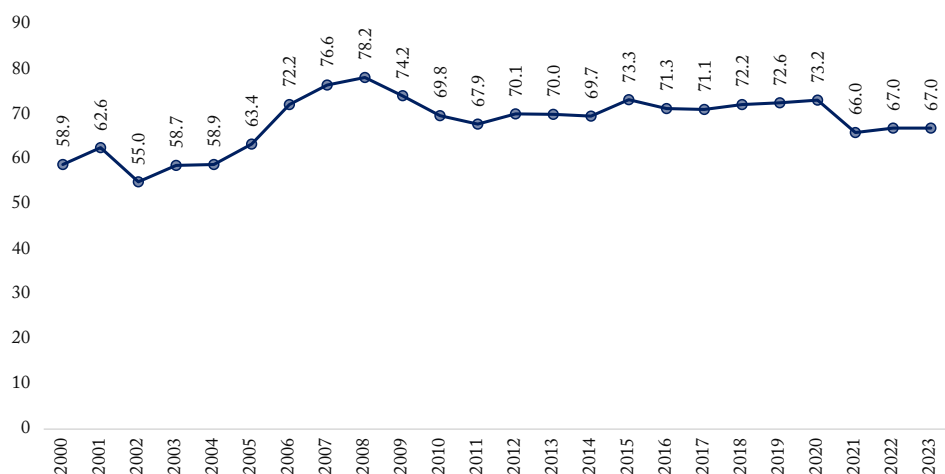
Graph 2. Interest Rate in South Africa



Source: Own elaboration with information from International Monetary Fund in www.imf.org and the South African Reserve Bank in www.resbank.co.za

When examining the behavior of interest rates, their impact on financial markets cannot be ignored. In this paper's analysis, it is important to note that the impact of the interest rate increase is reflected in changes in income from holding assets in financial markets and in credit. Credit becomes more expensive, compromising households that use it to meet short and long-term needs, since it is mainly used for consumption. Long-term financing for production contracts is preferred by banks, which also limit short-term credit during times of high interest rates.

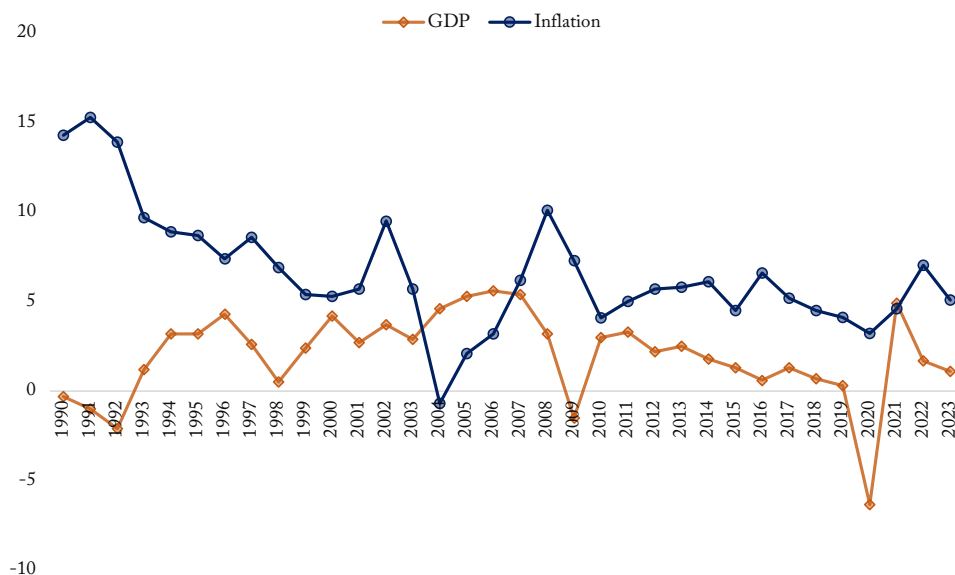
Graph 3. Credit to the non-financial private sector (% of GDP) in South Africa



Source: Own elaboration with information from Bank for International Settlements

Graph 3 shows the behavior of credit granted to the non-financial private sector as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since 2000, when the inflation target began. After the 2002 credit decline, an increase is observed, related to the dynamics of a stable interest rate. After 2008, with interest rates rising, credit remained around 70%, with a pronounced decline due to the COVID-19 health crisis. Currently, it has not recovered to the levels it had before the pandemic, and interest rates continue to rise.

Graph 4. Economic growth rate and inflation in South Africa (%)



Source: Own elaboration with information from OECD

Graph 4 shows the overall dynamics of the inflation rate and economic growth, highlighting the sharp declines in GDP in 2009 and 2020 due to international crises. It is only in subsequent years of recovery that inflation dynamics begin to rise, driven by higher production and aggregate demand. But once the inflation target is exceeded, inflation is automatically brought under control, at the expense of economic growth.

Conclusions

Understanding the macroeconomic dynamics of any country is an inconclusive debate, and even more so when discussing monetary policy, particularly when the inflation-targeting strategy is questioned. This paper analyzed the theory behind the strategy and how it is reflected in the reality of an emerging market economy such as South Africa. Thus, the proposal for discussion is that the behavior of a variable such as inflation cannot be prioritized over compromising aggregate demand, household income, increasing social inequality, or negatively impacting a country's labor market, given unresolved structural problems. Therefore, a strategy is needed to make inflation targets more flexible and to make them a long-term objective. This strategy should prioritize economic development through higher incomes, quality education and services, an inclusive labor market, an industry that generates jobs, and a strong domestic market.

Economic development cannot be achieved without production growth, without formal jobs that allow households to access social security, quality education, and health systems, and without incomes that allow the majority to live with dignity. The theory is far from reality when it deepens inequalities and is limited to achieving some objectives. This happens with inflation-targeting regimes in emerging economies that do not achieve economic development and are far from it, but paradoxically, if they are ready

to implement economic policies made by industrialized countries. And these arguments are exposed when considering that this reflection is worthwhile.

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The Cash Crisis and the eNaira in Nigeria

César Duarte

Introduction

The apparition and popularization of cryptocurrencies have attracted the attention of academic and government circles alike. However, one unexpected outcome of this phenomenon was the development of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs), a type of cryptocurrency issued by a central bank and based on blockchain technology. An array of reactions, articles, and reports has been published to study and analyze the characteristics and implications of the new currencies; however, since most of them are still in development, the analysis has been largely speculative.

Only two fully public CBDCs have been launched to date: the Sand Dollar in the Bahamas and the eNaira in Nigeria. Since the Bahamas is a small country with particular characteristics, Nigeria's case has attracted more attention. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the sixth most populous in the world, and has the second-largest economy on the continent.

The objective of this article is to discuss the launch and operation of the eNaira, focusing on its role as a privileged instrument of government policy. It is shown that adoption of CBDC remains very limited to this day, even though the country faced severe cash shortages that led to social unrest and violent outbursts. The eNaira is designed to function as a cash substitute, but failed to prevent a cash crisis, mainly due to inadequate infrastructure, the cultural attachment to physical money, and the State's inability to compel merchants to accept the new instrument. This approach minimizes social reaction to these changes; however, the intention is to discuss the new monetary tools that different states are implementing in response to the growth of the private sector.

The article presents a general definition and characterization of CBDCs in the first section, followed by an explanation of the eNaira's specific characteristics. In the third section, the cash crisis is analyzed, and in the fourth section, the reasons why the eNaira was unable to serve as a good substitute for cash are discussed. Lastly, some final remarks are presented.

Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs)

The emergence of Bitcoin and the proliferation of cryptocurrencies appeared to threaten the State's control over money. Since the first decades of the 20th century, most of the money circulating in the economy has been issued by private banks (Keynes, 2013). They can do so only because they are granted permission by the monetary authorities. The regulation of the quantity and quality of circulating money resides with the State. With cryptocurrencies, this is no longer the case. Private agents issue different kinds of crypto assets that are supposed to function as money, are not regulated by any monetary authority, and are intended to overcome the difficulties associated with public money issued by central banks.

At its origin, Bitcoin appeared to solve a technical difficulty: the possibility of double-spending with electronic payments. Under the current system, any payment not made in cash may be reversed upon the payer's demand. A transaction made with a credit card, for example, can be reversed if the payer does not recognize it, even if the commodity received in exchange for the money has been delivered, or if the payer does not have enough funds. This requires an intermediary that settles disputes and verifies the proper execution of transactions. The verification process implies that mediation costs increase transaction costs. All of this affects the seller, who must wait a considerable time for their payments to be processed and face the uncertainty of a possible reversal, leading to the collection of more information from the buyer than would

usually be needed. This is not required with cash, so Bitcoin appeared as a cash substitute for electronic payments. The incorporation of cryptographic proofs enables direct transactions without intermediaries, making electronic transactions automatic and more efficient (Nakamoto, 2009).

The technical aspect soon became surrounded by a political discourse. The removal of the intermediary also removed a regulator. The political discourse around Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies emphasized the idea that these instruments represented an alternative to state-controlled money, corrupted by the influence of too-big-to-fail banks in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Supporters of this idea criticize the significant influence that these private intermediaries have over monetary policy, which has led to large bailouts and the socialization of losses (Dodd, 2018). They also criticize, following the Hayekian argument of the denationalization of money (Hayek, 1996), the central bank's tendency to increase the money supply to respond to political demands, even if it results in high inflation.

The lack of regulation and the cryptographic proof guaranteed that money was not used for political ends. Even the "production" of additional units is decentralized through miners, in the context of a limit on the number of bitcoins in circulation. In this way, it was impossible to increase the money supply within certain limits, thereby avoiding a reduction in the purchasing power of holders.

However, the possibility that cryptocurrencies could serve as alternative money rapidly faded. This can be explained mainly because of the instability of their value. What has characterized cryptocurrencies over the last few years is rapid price growth, followed by deep falls. This has led to the use of cryptocurrencies as risk assets, with the main reason people buy them being the potential for financial gains. This instability makes them unusable as money. For prices to be stable, the value of the instrument used as a means of payment also needs to be stable. With the instrument's value

continually changing, prices need to be adjusted accordingly, as in a hyperinflationary environment. If cryptocurrencies were used as money, their continually rising value would drive prices down, triggering a deflationary spiral with severe implications for economic activity. Cryptocurrencies can be best characterized as crypto assets.

Following the appearance of cryptocurrencies, central banks have responded in different ways. After an initial generalized negative reaction, central banks began to consider the technological possibilities of cryptocurrencies. The blockchain technology underlying cryptocurrencies could be used by central authorities to manage the issuance of money, potentially enabling direct issuance to the public and avoiding intermediaries. Central bank digital currency (CBDC) projects started to appear.

A CBDC can be characterized as a universally accessible “electronic form of central bank money that can be exchanged in a decentralized manner known as peer-to-peer, meaning that transactions occur directly between the payer and the payee without the need for a central intermediary” (Bech & Garratt, 2017, p. 56). Usually, two varieties of CBDCs are considered. A wholesale CBDC would be restricted to a reduced group of users, mainly banks and other financial intermediaries, who would use it for interbank transactions and similar operations. A retail CBDC would be accessible to everyone, allowing the central bank to interact directly with the public without intermediation by the banking system. Ordinary people will be able to make electronic payments using money issued by the central bank, or they could open deposit accounts directly in the central bank (Carstens, 2019, p. 2). A retail CBDC can also be anonymous; the central bank could be the sole issuer without requiring customer information, as with a traditional banking account (Bech & Garratt, 2017), resembling cash.

The implications of a wholesale CBDC would be mainly technological, making transactions more efficient. Conversely, a retail CBDC could have important implications for the functioning of

monetary systems. Traditionally, central banks depend on bank intermediaries to put money in circulation. If a central bank wants to increase the quantity of money in circulation, it increases the amount of funds available to the banking system, which can also increase the quantity available to the public. With a CBDC, central banks do not need the banking system; they can increase (or decrease) the quantity of money available to the public directly.

This has several advantages. It could reduce the transaction costs for individuals with little access to banking services. Access to financial services is not easy, especially in developing regions, where bank branches are scarce. People need to travel to far towns or cities to open or manage their bank accounts, which costs time and money. Using credit and debit cards is also costly for small businesses that cannot afford the fees associated with accepting them. This limits access to other financial services, such as credit or insurance, which are also more expensive for this population because they are associated with higher risks. CBDCs can help financially include populations of these regions, since all that would be needed is a smartphone to access an account opened directly with the central bank.

CBDCs can also compete with private payment networks, potentially reducing transaction costs. The app associated with the CBDC used to manage the account could also be used to make electronic payments, similar to systems such as AliPay, Google Pay, and Apple Wallet. Since the central bank's objective is not financial gains, the appearance of a state-owned competitor could help reduce fees charged by other alternatives.

The transmission of monetary policy could also be improved with a CBDC (He, 2018; Nuño, 2018). When a central bank wants to implement an expansionary monetary policy, it will reduce the official interest rate. The idea is that this reduction will lead to a similar decrease in bank lending rates, affecting the cost of borrowing for consumers and businesses. With cheaper credit, more

investment and consumption will take place, enhancing aggregate demand and promoting production and employment. However, the events of recent years have shown that this mechanism does not always work; central banks can bring the official interest rate to zero without affecting the cost of borrowing or the broader economic conditions (Bernanke, 2020; Bullio *et al.*, 2019; Palley, 2019). With a CBDC, the central bank can change the conditions for access to the money supply directly with the public, without relying on the banking system. In this way, the impact of monetary policy will be more certain.

Finally, CBDCs could help some economies transition to a cashless economy (Carstens, 2019). In some countries, such as China and Sweden, cash use is almost eradicated. Most of the transactions are made with credit cards or electronic payments. The state still produces cash in most countries, and although it is introduced into the markets through financial intermediaries, its quantity is directly regulated by the state. Without cash, all money would be issued by private intermediaries, thereby eroding the state's role in regulating money. Having a CBDC would allow the central bank to issue a cash substitute directly, overcoming the difficulties associated with a cashless economy.

In this context, substituting cash with a CBDC can even enhance the state's regulatory capacity. The number of resources managed by everyone can be directly known to the state, helping with tax collection and identifying illegal activities, although privacy issues need to be considered.

Considering these advantages, many countries are studying the possibility of creating their own CBDC or are already developing one, including Uruguay, the Bahamas, China, Sweden, Venezuela, Canada, the European Union, Mexico, and the United States. One of these projects that has already come to fruition is the eNaira issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria in 2021.

The eNaira

The eNaira is a CBDC issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) as legal tender. It is the digital form of the naira (Nigeria's national currency) intended to be used just like cash. The project contemplates that it would function as a unit of account (prices would be stated in it), a store of value (people could use it to retain purchasing power for future use), and a medium of exchange (payments could be made with it), following the functional definition of money. It is another kind of state money. To use it, it is necessary to have an eNaira wallet, which can be downloaded to a smartphone. It functions just like a bank app, allowing users to transfer money, make payments, and manage their eNaira.

The eNaira circulates through different channels. It can be used for transactions between individuals via money transfers; between individuals and businesses or merchants for payments with the wallet; and between individuals and the government for the payment of taxes and other services. To fund their eNaira wallets, users can transfer funds from their bank accounts or use cash through some designated agents or bank branches. Funds can also be withdrawn by transferring them to the user's bank account or by requesting a withdrawal at specific offices, agents, or bank branches. In this way, perfect convertibility between the naira and the eNaira is guaranteed, whether the user has a bank account or not.

The CBN emphasized that the eNaira initiative had two main objectives: building a more inclusive financial system and enhancing the effectiveness of monetary policy transmission (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2021, p. 54). It represents an alternative to the traditional financial system while also promoting financial inclusion. Access to the new instrument means opening a bank account directly with the central bank. In this way, the bancarization of the population has increased. However, this could be seen as a threat to private intermediaries' market position. It opens the possibility that

users would prefer the eNaira wallet over bank accounts, harming the market position of the private banks. The central bank could be a significant competitor to commercial banks.

Some considerations limit this possibility, even as they help traditional intermediaries acquire new customers. The eNaira wallet operates in four categories: bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. While bronze and silver users require only a phone number or a national identification number, respectively, the gold and platinum wallets require a bank account. The difference between these categories lies in the limits on capitalization and withdrawals from the account. With the bronze category, the wallet capitalization is limited to 120,000.00 (80 USD approx¹) and the daily withdrawal to 500.00 (0.33 USD); with the silver category, the maximum capitalization is 300,000.00 (200 USD) and the daily withdrawal is 50,000.00 (33 USD). If the users have a bank account, the maximum can be 500,000.00 (330 USD) or 5,000,000.00 (3,300 USD), respectively. So, to have access to these benefits, users are incentivized to open bank accounts. This means that the eNaira opens new markets, as many new users of the digital currency can expand the customer base for financial services. Using bank branches to fund wallets can also help provide financial services to users who are not bank customers.

As mentioned in the last section, the digitalization of money enhances the Central Bank of Nigeria's ability to influence broader economic conditions through monetary policy. Dealing directly with the public makes the transmission mechanism of CBN policies more effective, directly impacting the availability of circulating money in the economy.

Some additional benefits resulting from the circulation of the eNaira can be mentioned. The new instrument accepts dias-

¹ Considering the official exchange rate to be approximately 1 USD=1,500 Naira as of March 2024, however, the black-market rate is around 1 USD=1,650 Naira.

pora remittances, allowing users to receive funds sent from abroad in eNaira, as well as in US dollars and naira. This is particularly important for a country such as Nigeria, where millions of Nigerians live abroad, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. According to John *et al.* (2020), in 2018, remittance inflows to Nigeria were approximately seven times greater than the amount of development assistance received. The growth of remittances received was greater than that of other sources of capital inflows, such as foreign direct investment and foreign portfolio investments. The collection of remittances could be more efficient: the sender could send a transfer to the eNaira wallet, avoiding international intermediaries and the high transaction charges. In this way, the eNaira helps the population without a traditional bank account access some of its benefits.

With eNaira, government aid can also be provided. The government does not need to rely on commercial banks and other financial intermediaries to transfer funds to the beneficiaries. The transfer can occur directly from the government to individuals, facilitating access, avoiding the need to open a bank account, and eliminating transaction fees. This way, the resources are readily available to beneficiaries, enhancing the impact of the programs. The formalization of the Nigerian economy can also be enhanced with the eNaira. The informal economy represents over half of GDP and 80% of employment (Ree, 2023). Since eNaira transactions are traceable, informal payments could be identified, strengthening the tax base. The eNaira can also enhance user safety by allowing them to hold money electronically. Having their resources in digital form reduces the risk of loss or theft, which is more likely with cash. It also enables faster transactions and transfers between users.

The new currency was launched on October 25, 2021. During the first three months of operation, over 600,000 wallet downloads were recorded (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2021, p. 54). Still, only 100,000 merchant wallets had been downloaded by June, repre-

senting one-eleventh of the number of merchants with terminals that accept credit or debit card payments (Ree, 2023). A year later, on October 2022, 5 billion eNaira had been minted of which around 59% were issued to financial institutions; 2.1 million wallets had been activated; 1.3 million additional wallets were created for the beneficiaries of social intervention funds; 875,000 transactions amounting to 11.83 billion had been recorded and the integration of all banks and a substantial number of payment service providers with the eNaira platform was achieved (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2022, p. 52). However, the use of the wallets was limited; the average number of transactions per week during the first year was 14,000, representing only 1.5% of the number of wallets opened (Ree, 2023). At the end of 2022, of the 3,012.06 billion naira in circulation, only 2.55 billion were eNaira (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2022, p. 111).

Still, up to this point, the project was considered successful: “The implementation of the eNaira has put Nigeria in the global spotlight as one of the pioneers to deploy CBDC into live production” (Nwanisobi, 2022). At the beginning of 2023, it was announced that Nigeria ranked sixth globally in electronic transactions, as a result of measures taken by the CBN to promote a cashless economy (Bakare, 2023). This could mean that the Nigerian economy was ready to embrace and generalize the use of the new CBDC; however, about 90% of transactions in Nigeria’s informal economy are conducted using cash (Onu, 2023), and only 45% of adults have a bank account (Asadu, 2023).

The Cash Crisis

In October 2022, the CBN announced the redesign of the 200-, 500-, and 1,000-naira banknotes. This occurred due to a series of difficulties the Nigerian monetary system faced. The public was hoarding the banknotes, over 85% of currency in circulation was outside the vaults of commercial banks; there was a shortage of “clean and fit”

banknotes that affected the perception of the CBN risking financial stability; and there was an increasing risk of counterfeiting especially of the banknotes of higher denominations, 500 and 1,000 naira (Emefiele, 2022). The plan was meant to be complemented by the growth of the eNaira, aiming to consolidate a cashless economy that would diminish currency outside the banking system, enhancing the efficiency of monetary policy (Emefiele, 2022).

In theory, if a larger amount of currency is under the central bank's control, the effectiveness of the policy it implements increases. Since some of the most important monetary policy transmission mechanisms operate through the banking system, any measure affecting the market conditions faced by banks will have a larger impact on the economy when most currency is held by these intermediaries. In the Nigerian context, if, for example, the CBN had wanted to control inflation by raising monetary policy rates, its effect would have been minimal, since only around 15% of the currency was under bank control. The higher interest rate would only have affected the price of obtaining this small percentage, leaving the remaining 85% unaffected. This was especially relevant for the Nigerian economy, where the inflation rate rose to 18.8% in 2022.

Security was also considered as a motif for the banknote redesign. According to the Governor of the CBN, Godwin Emefiele, limiting access to large volumes of cash outside the banking system would minimize incidents of terrorism and kidnapping, as an important source of ransom funds would be severely diminished (Emefiele, 2022). Electoral aspects were also discussed; limiting the amount of notes in circulation would reduce the undeclared cash held by politicians for use in influencing voters during the 2023 presidential election (Adetayo, 2023).

It was announced that the new banknotes would begin circulating on December 15, 2022, and that the old banknotes would cease to be legal tender on January 31, 2023. Customers were supposed to deposit their old banknotes into their bank accounts so

the banks could return them to the CBN in exchange for new notes. During the transition period, bank charges on cash deposits were suspended, and the old banknotes were not to be rejected until the mentioned date (Emefiele, 2022).

On January 29, six weeks after the circulation of the new banknotes began, Emefiele announced that 1.9 trillion naira had been collected from circulation, representing over 75% of the total currency held outside the banking system. The deadline for the cessation of legal tender status of the old banknotes was extended to February 10, 2023 (Emefiele, 2023).

Although the collection of old banknotes was proceeding rapidly, the issuance of new banknotes was slow. The CBN did not report the number of new banknotes printed and put into circulation; however, some reports claimed that only 500 billion naira were printed (Adetayo, 2023). Were this number true, circulating currency would have faced a net decrease of 1.4 trillion naira, almost 50% of the currency circulating in October. The concentration of currency in the banking system excluded around 60% of Nigerians without an account number (Adetayo, 2023).

As a consequence, at the end of February, “long queues have become permanent outside banks and ATMs across Nigeria in recent weeks, as Nigerians are struggling to get their hands on the naira” (Adetayo, 2023). This led to outbursts of violence and frustration, including the burning down of banks in several cities. The cash shortage created a black market, where a 20% premium was being charged. Sales were also affected, as electronic payments were not yet ready to replace cash in an economy largely dependent on cash (Adetayo, 2023).

The outburst forced the CBN to take a step back in March; the timeline to swap the old currency was extended until December 31, in response to a directive issued by the country’s Supreme Court, which stated that the implementation of the program of substitution of the old notes broke the law (AbdulMumim, 2023b). The

cost of the crisis, until mid-March, was estimated at around 20 trillion naira due to the effects of the shortage on sales, business bankruptcies, and the contraction of the agricultural sector (Asadu, 2023).

Although the crisis was managed and contained in the following weeks, the CBN's trust and reputation were severely damaged. The spread of rumors and fake news about the central bank's operation reflects a loss of confidence in the institution. In April, the CBN had to state that it did not have a plan to withdraw the new banknotes from circulation, contrary to rumors (AbdulMumim, 2023a). In June, it was reported that the CBN devalued the Naira to 630 per USD from 465, a claim the institution had to deny (AbdulMumin, 2023b). There were even text messages circulating that suggested that the CBN was planning to redenominate the Naira from January 2024 (AbdulMumin, 2023e).

Finally, in November, the CBN had to accept defeat. As the new deadline approached, reports of cash scarcity in some major cities began circulating, driven by high-volume withdrawals from CBN branches by banks and by panic withdrawals from the ATMs by customers. The CBN had to reaffirm that old and new banknotes remained legal tender until the end of the year and that the currency stock was sufficient for economic activities (AbdulMumin, 2023a, 2023f). Finally, it was announced that the deadline for the legal tender status of the old banknotes was extended "ad infinitum". All CBN branches were ordered to accept and issue all denominations of banknotes, old and redesigned, and the public was encouraged to follow suit (Sidi Ali, 2023). "Also, the general public is encouraged to embrace alternative modes of payment, e-channels, for day-to-day transactions" (AbdulMumin, 2023).

Alternative Money in Times of Crisis: The eNaira

Amid the challenging environment, one winner could surge: the eNaira. The cash shortage could signal the consolidation of the new

digital currency. The eNaira seems like a perfect substitute for cash because it does not require a bank account. In a context of cash scarcity, there was an opportunity to consolidate digital currency. In this way, the CBN strategy could be successful, forcing people into opening wallets and start transacting with them, consolidating a cashless economy by force.

Between October 2022 and March 2023, 13 million wallets were opened, representing a 12-fold increase, of which about 4 million were opened to pay the welfare programs, and transactions surged 63% to 22 billion naira (ONU, 2023). Although the increase was considerable, the number of eNaira in circulation was about 3.4 billion (ONU, 2023), still short of the 1 trillion naira announced to have been taken out of circulation. The expansion of the eNaira continued in the next months, representing 10.26 billion naira at the end of the third quarter of 2023. However, physical notes and coins fell to 2,751 billion from 3,009.51 billion in December 2022 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2023). The new digital currency accounted for only about 4% of the decline in currency in circulation.

This begs the question of the causes that prevented the generalization of the eNaira during the cash crisis. The first element to mention is the measure's rush (Shumba, 2023). Although the eNaira was launched in October 2021, it did not gain sufficient adoption to become a suitable alternative to cash. People were still not used to it, and there was insufficient understanding of the possible benefits it could bring. The project was still not ready for launch. The pilot program for the CBDC was announced in June 2021, after two years of research (Shumba, 2023); in contrast, in countries such as China, research on a CBDC started in 2014, the pilot program was launched in 2020, and an official date for the launch has not been announced to this day.

The lack of the necessary infrastructure to support the digital currency was also an important factor to consider. Using the eNaira requires a smartphone and internet access. The number of

smartphone users amounts to approximately 40% of the Nigerian population, compared to countries like Indonesia and Brazil, which have similar total population figures but where smartphone users represent roughly 70% of the population. The number of people able to adopt and use the eNaira is severely limited by a technological barrier that can only be overcome if the general economic conditions of the population improve enough for people to afford a smartphone.

Cultural and sociological aspects also need to be considered. When people are not accustomed to electronic transactions, adopting a new digital currency is difficult. The materiality of money still plays an important role in trust, especially in contrast to instruments that most of the population does not fully understand. In October 2023, the CBN published a book titled *Economics of Digital Currencies: A Book of Readings*, in which it was stated that cryptocurrencies could pose a threat to financial stability. This led to reports stating that eNaira posed a potential risk to financial stability, confusing it with private cryptocurrencies (AbdulMumin, 2023d).

Finally, the limit on the number of transaction options available for the digital currency can be mentioned. The quantity of merchants willing to accept the eNaira is small (Shumba, 2023). This points to one of the more important requisites for the successful circulation of a new instrument, the ability to impose it on the merchants. Although consumers have some influence on the choice of currency, merchants play a much more critical role. They can accept or reject any specific kind of money. Legal tender laws can be imposed to force merchants to accept the new digital currency; however, if the State is unable to enforce the law, merchants are free to choose their preferred transaction instrument.

The high rate of informality in the Nigerian economy is a good indicator of the limits that the Nigerian State faces in imposing its will over society. Informality can also explain why the merchants do not want to use the eNaira. Transaction traceability

can help the State identify operations in informal settings, facilitating their identification and formalization. The informal merchants would then be forced to formalize their operations and pay the associated taxes.

This means that the central bank's strategy was not meant to force the economy into cashless transactions. eNaira was not used as an important instrument in the strategy to combat banknote hoarding. This could mean that the CBN strategy was to withdraw the old banknotes without providing a good substitute from the outset. The banks served as the main channel for exchanging new banknotes for old; however, they did not issue enough banknotes to perform this operation. In the official documents used to write this article, there is almost no mention of using the eNaira to support the transition. The old banknotes could be exchanged for funds for wallets, forcing people to adopt the new instrument.

This leads to the conclusion that the objective was to diminish the quantity of currency in circulation. Interestingly this important contraction and the cash crisis it provoked, complemented by an upward tendency of the monetary policy rate which surged to 18.75% in July did not avoid the growth of prices; the inflation rate for the country in 2023 was 25.1%, the highest since 1996 when the growth of the average consumer prices rose to 29.3%, according to the International Monetary Fund. The variable most affected was Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, which was 2.87%, below the 3.6% and 3.2% rates for 2021 and 2022, respectively. These economic results raise the question of monetary policy's effectiveness in curbing inflation; however, this is not the objective of the present article.

Conclusions

Money is usually studied from a purely economic perspective. This led to the identification of merely economic factors to explain the

phenomena surrounding its circulation; however, money is a social institution that also involves cultural, sociological, and political aspects.

CBDCs, like other forms of money, are no exception. The eNaira project was launched in October 2021, one and a half years before the explosion of the cash crisis triggered by the withdrawal of old banknotes. From a purely economic perspective, the expected outcome would be the widespread adoption of the eNaira in place of cash. Agents would be looking for the “second best” alternative, and, given that a significant percentage of Nigerians do not have bank accounts, this alternative was the eNaira. Its adoption was limited by the small number of smartphone users; however, additional considerations are needed.

The article has emphasized the State’s objectives and strategies for implementing these changes, focusing on its aim to enhance control over monetary systems. The social and political perspectives need to be analyzed further to better understand the phenomenon. The Nigerian population is used to using cash for daily transactions, which makes the adoption of electronic payments difficult. When people are accustomed to the materiality of cash, adopting a digital currency needs to occur gradually. Also, the merchants were not willing to accept the new currency, since it could serve as an instrument to trace their transactions and force them to pay taxes. This shows the cultural and political aspects of money. To fully understand monetary phenomena, we need to move beyond economics and incorporate a multidisciplinary approach.

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Abstracts

Oscar Mateos

This chapter critically assesses Africa's evolving role in the current global order, particularly in light of contemporary global shifts and polycrisis. It first challenges the traditional narrative that marginalises Africa in global history. The chapter argues that the continent has been central to modern global capitalism. Through the concepts of processes, discourses, and agency, it shows how African actors have shaped and influenced global dynamics. This contrasts with Eurocentric views that have systematically marginalised Africa. Second, the chapter argues that Africa and global processes do indeed share a co-constitutive historical relationship. African experiences have shaped, and been shaped by, global dynamics. These include historical stages such as the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and the current process of globalisation. This perspective rejects determinism and emphasises that global capitalism and Africa are inextricably linked. There are complex, networked, and entangled interactions between African and global actors that shape both realities. Finally, the chapter examines Africa's place in the contemporary "post-hegemonic" global moment. As traditional Western dominance wanes, the Global South is increasingly challenging Western hegemony in Africa. This leads to what has been described as a "new scramble for Africa." This section analyses the continuities and novelties of this phase. It focuses on the growing agency of African states as they engage in "strategic polygamy", forming complex and shifting alliances with both emerging and established powers. This renewed competition is resulting in a more plural and competitive geopolitical landscape. African actors are exercising greater strategic autonomy, raising new questions and dilemmas in this particular debate.

José Luis Gázquez

In the first part of this chapter, some aspects of the longstanding effects of colonial legacies in Africa are discussed, including the export-oriented economic model introduced by Western powers and the French monetary system adopted in its colonies at the eve of decolonization and maintained during the postcolonial period. This section argues that African independent countries, under the current global economic system, carry the historical burden of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism. Once this historical perspective is established, the second part of the chapter examines African countries' vulnerability in the current context of climate change and the global capitalist economy. It is argued that while Africa is the most affected region in the world by climate change dynamics, it is the least responsible for it and the one that benefits the least. Examples are provided of capitalist activities carried out by powers—Western and non-Western alike—that have a profound impact on the environment and African societies.

Finally, the third part of the chapter focuses on the challenge of achieving development for African countries—especially bridging the energy gap between the continent and the rest of the world—while protecting the environment. For African countries, especially in the current shifting geopolitical landscape, the key will be their capacity to conceive and implement economic models that seriously take into account indigenous knowledge systems and their care for nature and the environment.

Adriana Franco

Since the start of the 21st century, Russia's presence in Africa has grown. This growth follows the logic of the inter-capitalist dispute, which has been fostered since the Russo-Ukrainian war began. Besides, even though it was argued that the armed conflict could have negative consequences in Africa, Russia's image has not been damaged by the war. On the contrary, Russia has strengthened its relations with some countries on the

continent. In this text, it is considered that the presence and acceptance of Russian interests have increased in political spaces where fatigue with Western interference has also augmented. To analyze the resonances of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in Africa, a decolonial perspective will be included to historicize the process and understand the region's dynamics.

Ahmed Taher

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis prompted various countries of the world to increase the volume of their military spending, not only on the two sides of the crisis (Russia and Ukraine), but also extended to various regions of the world, as revealed in several reports, indicating that there is a significant change in the military balance in 2023. In some areas, such as Europe and Asia, increased military spending has affected many countries. From this standpoint, the Ukrainian crisis was a significant factor in changing armament strategies worldwide, which in turn affected economic development, as the reduction affected other regions due to high inflation and the financial repercussions of the war.

African countries have always been among the main arenas of competition among major actors. In light of the escalation of the arms race this crisis has led to, especially among developed countries, there is no doubt that it has had a wide-ranging impact on development on the African continent, with effects on its security conditions and internal stability.

Óscar Ugarteche, Brandon Young

The West understands the sizeable Chinese presence in Africa as a debt trap and an invasion following the Soviet presence in the 1970s and 80s. The idea developed in this text is taken from Rawnsley, Ma, and Rawnsley (2015), who argue that the People's Republic of China ensures its long-term provision of raw materials and energy by investing and lending in the short term. We hypothesise that loans do not generate profits on their own, but rather, the focus is on making the objects of the loans

profitable. It represents a different logic from sovereign credit risk. Western criteria of political risk are irrelevant in this analysis, which centres on long-run great-power competition and the provision of raw materials and energy. The object is long-term gain while providing security, meaning physical control of the commodities and the loss to the West of that supply at the expense of short-term difficulties.

This paper aims to identify the countries and sectors in which Chinese capital invests. The long-run power competition is about whose financial markets, eastern or western, control prices and volumes, and the importance of the Yuan and local currencies in the long run. Western analysis, by itself, does not comprehend this long-run view. Risk Analysis, on the whole, keeps a short-run view. Chinese investors have a long-run strategic view rather than a Western short-term tactical one.

Antonina Ivanova

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an emerging economy-led initiative, represents one of the largest infrastructure, trade, and economic agendas in history. Amid current lower global growth and intensifying trade tensions, it demands the utmost attention. In 2023, BRI marked 10 years of activities and began the BRI 2.0 stage. A series of studies by the World Bank estimates that it can increase developing countries' GDP by 2.6 to 3.9 percent on average. The growing South-South cooperation (SSC) is a very promising instrument for advancing towards the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals, including successful climate action under the Paris Agreement. Through SSC, developing countries can prioritize their knowledge and technology transfer needs to find sustainable, inclusive, and economically efficient long-term solutions. This study examines the BRI's orientation towards African countries, green infrastructure, and low-carbon post-COVID recovery pathways in Africa. To develop the study, the PRISMA methodology was applied to ensure the selection of a large number of studies on the research topic and to assess and analyze the results. First, the Belt and Road initiative is presented as an SSC project. Special attention is paid to low-carbon development

pathways in BRI countries and to the agreements and principles that promote them. Some risks presented in the BRI 1.0 stage are highlighted. The second part, dedicated to African BRI countries, explains the importance of low-carbon growth and introduces some projects implemented by China, discussing the challenges and opportunities of Chinese loans. Finally, we present our concluding remarks and recommendations.

Wendolyn Bravo

This chapter examines the theory surrounding the so-called inflation-targeting regime, studying its concepts and essential characteristics and then analyzing the process of adoption or adaptation of the South African economy, which has been applying a numerical inflation target of 3-6% since 2000. This path has shown that, in emerging economies, the effectiveness of this strategy could be questioned, since achieving the inflation control target has directly affected production, income, and employment, and, as a result, social inequality continues to be a constant that distances these countries from economic development.

César Duarte

The eNaira, Nigeria's Central Bank Digital Currency, was issued on October 21, 2021, making it the world's second fully public CBDC. However, until the beginning of 2024, its acceptance remained very limited, even though the country faced a deep cash shortage that led to social unrest and violent outbursts in 2023. The eNaira, designed to serve as a cash substitute, was unable to compensate for the scarcity of banknotes or help manage the crisis. The article analyzes the reasons explaining the low use of the new instrument in the Nigerian economy. It argues that the lack of proper infrastructure and the project's lack of time to be fully developed are explanatory factors. However, some political and cultural factors, such as the merchant's resistance to accepting the eNaira, the State's inability to force its circulation, and distrust of electronic payments, also played an important role.

*Framing Africa as the World Epicenter? Reflections from
a Global South Perspective* was published on February
2026 by Programa Universitario de Estudios sobre
Asia, África y Oceanía of the Universidad Nacional
Autónoma de México.