

Why we need a multilateralism that works and what is the role of the BRICS: lessons from the recent Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract

After the dramatic event which humanity has experienced, the Covid-19 pandemic, innumerable questions arise concerning the future of the international system. The pandemic highlighted many contradictions within this system: first of all, the logic of divisions covered by the dichotomy “the West and the rest” has proved to be obsolete as it often generated conflicting positions on the issues that concern the whole humanity, such as the distribution of vaccines. It has also demonstrated the need to seek out ways to improve cooperation and design effective multilateral policies, especially given the other global challenges, many of which will require swift action: we primarily refer to the climate change and, more generally, to the reform of global governance (GG) towards a more democratic system. In this context, the role of the BRICS is fundamental for several reasons. First, the BRICS have repeatedly demanded greater democratization of GG, and their actions seem to be aimed at creating more inclusive decision-making processes in international forums, such as the United Nations and the G20. Furthermore, the BRICS are a group of countries fighting for greater multilateralism, especially at the financial level. Finally, owing to their economic and political weight and the size of the population, the BRICS countries are crucial for building the foundations of the future, more inclusive, international relations as they may guarantee the multilateral character of the reformed GG. As a group, they represent a sustainable partnership that has great potential for laying the foundations

of a different type of global architecture. In this paper we discuss the strategic role that the BRICS could play in the future of multilateralism despite the existing limitations. We do this through the lens of the global development theory that shows the importance of sharing common practices and narratives and overcoming divergences between the global North and South, especially in a post-Covid perspective.

Keywords

BRICS; Global Governance; Multilateralism; COVID-19; Global Development.

JEL: P5, O1, E2.

Introduction

In these chaotic times of pandemic, many questions have arisen regarding the choice of the most pressing issues to be addressed and methods that can be used by the humanity of post-covid era to resolve them. These dramatic times have revealed many aspects which seem to indicate the need for greater international cooperation; moreover, there are problems that require the Global Development approach in order to be tackled effectively. COVID-19 has proved again that humankind is facing an ever-increasing number of global issues which require global answers. Today, we are living in an international system characterized by the existence of many problems, including the pandemic, climate change, global economic crises, migration, and many others.

In our view, the Global Development Theory (GDT) offers guidelines on how to find approaches to the future challenges and tools for dealing with them. The GDT is a theory of international relations that highlights the importance of following common paths and is based on the concept of sharing good practices (Horner and Hulme, 2017). We will come back to this point with more in-depth coverage.

In this context, the role of the BRICS becomes fundamental because they represent a group that could provide an important contribution to reshaping the current - and often criticized (Weiss, 2013; Finkelstein, 1995) - workings of global governance (GG). First of all, the BRICS represent a group that is fighting for greater multilateralism, especially at the level of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) or forums such as the G20 (Abb and Jetschke, 2019; Larionova and Shelepov, 2019; Cooper, 2014). Furthermore, the BRICS stand as indispensable partners for building the foundations of the future international relations, given their population and economic and political weight¹.

¹ BRICS are among the biggest countries in the world: they bring together 41% of the world population and 24% of the global GDP; they account for 50% of world economic growth and 30% of the world land area. Source: BRICS India (2021), 13th BRICS Summit: 'BRICS @ 15: Intra-BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus'. Evolution of BRICS. Link: <https://brics2021.gov.in/about-brics>.

In this paper, we, therefore, seek to prove that the BRICS can play an essential role at a global level in laying the foundations for a different type of global order. If the recent pandemic has taught us anything, it is precisely this that we need to look at in order to find a way to overcome differences and divisions between states, so as to build a future in which it will be possible to address the problems that require common effort. In a world where the “West/the rest” dichotomy often seems to prevail together with obsolete approaches to global issues and outdated structure of the system of international institutions, still based on the Bretton Woods model, the need for building relationships that can form the basis for a different future is becoming more and more urgent.

Here, we discuss the strategic role that the BRICS are called upon to play, despite all limitations and contradictions, gaining a major role in the future global order.

Origin of the BRICS and reform of Global Governance

The BRICS group has existed for over ten years now. It has represented, over the last few years, a phenomenon which has made great strides in terms of growth from an economic, political and institutional point of view. The BRICS, in fact, first consolidated their ranks by means of informal meetings during major international events held by the UN and the G20. Subsequently, starting from the symbolic date of 2015, they gave rise to financial institutions considered “parallel institutions”, such as the New Development Bank (NDB) or the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), which openly offered an alternative to the traditional and obsolete institutions of Bretton Woods. According to many scholars (Stiglitz, 2002), Bretton Woods institutions have represented and still represent places where democratization of decision-making processes has not occurred. For example, the voting system of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), despite the countless attempts to reform it, is still characterized by an imbalance, whereby, greater power and influence is given to Western countries (Weisbrot and Johnston, 2016 and 2009; Woodward, 2007; Leech, 2002).

However, the claims linked to the BRICS’ greater demand for the democratization of governance processes are manifold. For example, the BRICS have begun to call for a reform of GG, especially from a financial point of view (BRIC, 2009), which would reflect the changes in the world economy that have occurred in recent times. Indeed, these countries, led above all by China, have given rise to truly impressive economic growth processes. From the BRICS’ point of view, this needs to be taken into consideration in today’s global context, where they should have the same rights, in their view, as those of the Western countries, to exert their influence in global decision-making processes.

In some cases, these countries have been seen as potential threats to the global order (Petroni, 2019). However, if we look at their rise and claims, the BRICS are a group which, at least in theory, is fighting to make its voice heard at the global level. In practice, what they claim is that they are contributing to the creation of a new, more

inclusive global order where the dominance of Western countries (with the US first and foremost) will cease to be overwhelming, so as to improve GG practices and give rise to a multilateralism that *de facto* already exists (Andreoni and Casado, 2019). Thus, broadly speaking, the BRICS strengthened involvement in the system of GG has resulted in benefits, achieved by promoting multilateralism within the current world order (Stuenkel, 2020; Larionova and Kirton, 2018).

Possible clashes

The impressive growth that has characterized the BRICS in recent years has often generated mixed reactions. On the one hand, especially in the view of scholars who came from the Global South (Guo, Sun and Demidov, 2020; Xiujun, 2020; Stuenkel, 2016), these countries have a potential to hinder the globalization that has increasingly taken on a “Western face”, i.e. with the characteristics of Western countries, the US first and foremost, in different fields, such as cooperation, trade, humanitarian aid, “hegemony” in international institutions of GG, and others. These authors argue that the West has imposed its liberal principles - free markets, humanitarian aid and the “export” of democracy which has caused several wars - on globalization. The Western countries have thus presented an important bulwark against those trying to avoid falling victim to the US-led order, and therefore to a unipolar system. They used their advantages on the international arena to maintain the order that would suit their own interests and moods. According to these Global South authors, the BRICS’ potential to cause an upheaval of the global order lies in the fact that these countries would be an alternative to the Western/US-led liberal international order (LIO). The LIO was considered to be the “perfect” international order which, according to Francis Fukuyama, had no more alternatives (Fukuyama, 1992). However, in many non-Western countries this system has been regarded as a threat because it was promulgating common values, cultural uniformity, and (neo) imperialist policies hiding economic interests, which very often were imposed by force of the US/West through the promotion of LIO (Parmar, 2018). There are recent examples that can help our understanding of these processes, for example, the case of Venezuela. The country had been threatened with invasion by the US as (The New York Times, 2017) the US seemed interested in overturning Nicolás Maduro’s regime, accusing it of becoming a dictatorship. Most likely, the US was also interested in having a deeper footing in the Venezuelan economy with its huge oil reserves. However, the intervening of Russia and China has blocked this attempt (Reuters, 2019 a, b; Herrero and MacFarquhar, 2019) and Venezuela continues to maintain its regime.

There is also the case of Iran, which is one of the world’s most important oil suppliers (it supplies, for example, to China). Iran has been hit with an embargo from the Western countries because of the allegation of building nuclear weapons (Edelman, Krepinevich, and Montgomery, 2011). Furthermore, at a certain moment it seemed that an invasion of Iran was being prepared. However, despite threats, Iran has not been

invaded militarily by Western countries. At the moment, Iran is one of the countries that is benefiting the most from the Chinese “Silk and Road” (Alamuddin, 2020).

There is also criticism about the BRICS growing presence in the Global South. In fact, in some authors' views, this large-scale influence could lead to forms of sub-imperialism (Nayyar, 2016). However, in our opinion, this growing influence of the BRICS in the Global South can also be seen as a sort of alternative to Western dominance in the area: the BRICS, through historical affinity (some of the BRICS have been colonized by Western countries), as well as a result of strategic interests, can be considered to be privileged partners for the countries of the Global South. Therefore, not only would the dependence of the Global South on Western countries be broken, but above all that dichotomy “center-periphery” theorized by Wallerstein (1974), which characterized international relations at least until the end of the last century, could be transformed. Thus, the BRICS could be a means of giving a greater voice to the Global South.

If, on the one hand, these countries have been hailed as an alternative to the Western system, which prevails globally, on the other hand they have also been considered serious threats (Petroni, 2018). In the case of the latter, the impressive growth of the BRICS, as well as the role they have played in international contexts, and which has been characterized by their increased involvement in global processes, has been seen as undermining Western predominance. In practice, the BRICS have undermined the very system that has up to now guaranteed the world order, and which was the result of the Bretton Woods agreements. Generally speaking, they are giving a shakeup to the system that emerged from the Second World War.

It is precisely the 2008 crisis, that became a real watershed for the birth and affirmation of the BRICS, which symbolically represents the decline of the unilateral system dominated by the US and its vision of the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992).

In our view, the rise of the BRICS has a great value at an international level, mainly because it represents an important event, being a symbol of the ongoing change of the paradigm that is still present in the international system. Even at an epistemological level, the growth of the BRICS brings about both a new form of approaching international relations and, in general, global politics, and also the advent of new social, political, and economic narratives that have an important impact on the system of GG. Finally, the rise of the BRICS represents a real blow to the unipolarity/multipolarity dichotomy, with the emergence of a true interest in attempting to build a multipolar system. Therefore, the existence of BRICS proves the fact that we are already living in a multipolar world, and that their contribution to the creation of this new multilateral order has been fundamental.

Multilateralism and COVID-19

In this controversial context, with the rise of the BRICS shaking up the international order, the COVID-19 pandemic had represented an important moment in history when the necessity of consolidation and creation of a different type of GG became obvious:

many countries felt it was time to put into practice the new global strategies aiming at greater inclusion in decision-making processes.

The recent pandemic has indeed shown, once again, how interdependent the international system is and that, in general, we need more policies based on safeguarding the rights and interests of everyone. In recent years, for example, issues of global concern, such as climate change, have increasingly required decisive and rapid action. However, despite countless alarms, and the ongoing Conferences of the Parties (COPs) organized by the UN, there is lack of cohesion in seeking agreement on climate change and consensus as to how best and decisively tackle these problems.

In the case of COVID-19, our impression is that the lessons which should have been drawn are even greater and more radical given the speed at which the virus spread, in addition to the fact that within a matter of months it caused several million deaths, as well as restrictive measures around the world. In theory, it should have been a watershed moment sending a hugely important message to humanity. In our opinion, the pandemic highlighted even more the need to find shared answers to global problems. However, we found that in many cases multilateralism had been somewhat defeated. In fact, was there really a true sense of closeness and multilateralism during this period?

Although this virus had represented an opportunity of fundamental importance for the creation of a broader and more inclusive decision-making system, in many cases nothing has been achieved except reproducing the previously existing global divisions, which unfortunately, currently persist. This concerns, for example, the distribution of vaccines, which had been both unequal and imbalanced worldwide, penalizing less developed states and, on the other hand, providing more advantages to the wealthiest (Western) states (UN News, 2021).

Another example is about how states responded to the pandemic. If we take the BRICS, these countries tried to act quickly and independently, when compared to the international system, in dealing with the virus (Petrone, 2020; Akon and Rahman 2020). The BRICS were among the countries most deeply impacted by the pandemic, and often their action, especially thanks to the NDB system, specifically addressed this situation on a parallel track to that of traditional international institutions. In fact, traditional institutions of GG, such as the IMF, responded slowly to the crisis (Petrone, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of solidarity among states was also alarming, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. This was the case of European Union (EU) countries: there appeared divisions among them delaying quick action in coping with the pandemic crisis. On the whole, the behavior of some of the EU member states, at least at the beginning of the pandemic, demonstrated a dramatic lack of mutual support and solidarity (Akon and Rahman, 2020).

Other examples of divisions and lack of a cooperative approach include, for instance, the repeated allegations against China, which had been accused of being responsible for the virus' diffusion (Donald Trump, the former US President, called the virus "the Chinese virus" in a very derogatory way) (Jakes, Rogers and Swanson, 2020). At other times, both China and Russia were repeatedly accused of taking advantage

of the pandemic crisis in order to expand their sphere of influence in the EU countries (Giles, 2020). Not to mention the attempt to discredit the Russian and Chinese vaccines, which have often been considered ineffective when compared to those produced in Western countries, such as Pfizer and/or Astrazeneca. Our aim, however, is not to give a scientific study of this situation, since this is not our field of expertise. What we wish to underline here is that the vaccination campaign can also be read as a form of “West/ the rest” division (Western vaccines were the good ones, while those from the BRICS were not) which only created greater distance between countries.

In short, we can say that this pandemic, despite its drama, seems to have frequently and severely tested relations between states. Quite often, rather than seeking out shared solutions, a way has been found to use this catastrophe to claim greater superiority, efficiency, sovereignty and ability in response to the threat of the virus. Above all, the use of discriminatory and derogatory means against non-Western countries has often been put in place to defend Western primacy and leadership, as has many times occurred over the centuries (Stuenkel, 2016).

It is our belief, however, that these divisions will continue to be dangerous in the future, despite the lessons of the pandemic, especially if concrete measures to overcome contradictions between “the West and the rest” are not found. Based on these reflections, we should attempt to predict what may happen in the future, and whether we are going to be able to draw the lessons from this dramatic period in history. The situation which the world has just experienced should have opened our eyes to how interconnected the world is and to the need to develop common and global political strategies. At the same time, it has made us understand that mankind is far from having total control over nature. The myth of humanity’s capacity to mold and control nature, thanks to scientific and technological advancements emerged during the Renaissance period, receiving its philosophical substantiation in the works of Francis Bacon. The English philosopher assumed that man could control and exert his will over nature given that he was the most developed being on the planet and that he had the capacity to develop a means to this end (Bacon, 2009). However, the tragedy of COVID-19, and climatic change, has been enough to cause the implosion of centuries-old certainties.

At the same time, the calls to work together in order to face future challenges are growing louder and louder with each passing day. Above all, the number of voices demanding a more global approach to global problems continues to grow. In particular, these voices are gathering around the GDT and it seems to us that in the forthcoming years the global development approach will offer us a good starting point on the path to building a more humane future.

The Global Development Theory

The GDT should first be considered in terms of growth and development. However, it is our opinion that the exchange of practices that it calls for, ranging from policy innovation and inclusive green economies to global food security as well as poverty

reduction, may also be of fundamental value in helping to tackle future problems that are of concern to everyone. There are many problems that will require swift joint action. The way in which we provide more concrete answers to these problems will depend on the degree in which we adopt the global approach.

GDT may be able to give a pivotal theoretical framework through which the current order can be understood. Indeed, this theory could provide an overarching focus by which to consider development in relation to the whole world. GDT shares the idea that we live in a world where many of the causes of development cannot be divided along North–South lines or national boundaries. Thus, the future of GG lies in its ability to advocate for a “one-world” approach and in its capability of promoting the need for “greater mutual learning, and associated collaborative action, across and within the Global North and South” (Horner 2019, p. 429).

There are several practices, already in place, which seem to indicate that this approach is starting to be put into practice; using Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is one of them. Ever since the SDG introduction in 2015, its goals have seemed oriented in particular toward a global approach to global issues. Even if in recent years a certain degree of populism has arisen, supported by neo-mercantilist view of a state’s central role in international relations, the direction initiated in this field by the SDGs is important for understanding that our “common neighborhood” (Commission on Global Governance 1995) has to be considered as a whole (Petrone, 2021a).

This approach is useful because it offers a vision which is aimed at overcoming divisions, short-sighted national interests, and a certain degree of populism that is spreading worldwide. It is exactly by taking into account the importance of bypassing divergences that the current international order could be shaped.

Why the BRICS can be a vehicle for the Global Development approach to global issues

In our opinion, the BRICS represent a group that, given their ability to create alternatives to a unipolar system, could become a pivotal vehicle which can put into practice the global development approach to global issues. Although we have already discussed some of their limitations and contradictions (Petrone, 2021a), we believe that one of the main objectives of the BRICS should be that of promoting a multilateral global order, as they are currently calling for: an order which aims at a truly global development approach. Due to their potential and their projection, the BRICS undoubtedly represent a valid group that could demand the implementation of a multilateralism which leads to a global approach to those issues that concern us all.

In our view, the role of the BRICS in building a multilateral world, based on a conception of global development, mainly lies in two areas, theoretical and practical.

From a theoretical point of view, the influence that the BRICS have acquired on the international scene should also be translated into an attempt to place their visions and their theoretical narratives at the center of international discussions. Indeed,

the field of International Relations (IR) is still profoundly marked by a predominance of West-generated theories that are often regarded as a theoretical justification for the LIO practices. It seems important today to bridge the existing gap in the field of IR studies, where scholars should favour the development and dissemination of theories of IR not only of Western origin, being able to offer different and new ideas for thinking about the world today. In recent years, many voices have been raised on this issue (Acharya and Buzan, 2010), underlining that, even in developing countries, there are international theories and conceptions that have scientific validity but which have not found a place at the level of global discussions yet. In practice, the central role is still played by theories and narratives from Western countries, which is no longer sufficient to explain the complexity of today's world (Benabdallah, Murillo-Zamora and Adetula, 2017; Qin, 2010).

The BRICS can offer active support for the development and dissemination of theories from developing countries thus ensuring that they have an ever increasing importance in the international debate. Their new narratives offer different visions, and therefore may lead to the broadening of horizons, which would in turn contribute to a greater democratization of decision-making processes as the ability to keep in mind different points of view is one of the cornerstones of democracy. Furthermore, a plurality of visions could lead to a renewal of GG, could grow from the contribution of more wide-ranging visions concerning different areas of the world. However, as Hagmann and Biersteker (2014) show in their research, this plurality of visions in the IR field is not observed: the two scholars surveyed 23 Global Politics/International Relations graduate programs from Western institutions (in Europe and the US) and found that none of these institutions relies on non-Western studies to explain international politics. World politics, as explained to students, is conceptualized and analyzed exclusively using the theories of Western academics.

We could therefore define the role of the BRICS as fundamental for the building of an "epistemological democratization of GG" by promoting a more global approach to IR study (also in Western countries). At the same time, by doing this, the BRICS could act as the "spokesperson" for the visions coming from the Global South.

This approach could also be beneficial for the GG theory and its practical application. Based on the definition of the 1995 Commission on Global Governance, GG should be "the sum of many ways in which individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest" (Commission on Global Governance 1995, p. 70). However, even though GG claims to be in favor of greater inclusion, its conceptual limitations are still highly significant due to the Anglo-Saxon origin of the word and its current use in the IR field (Friedrichs, 2005). Also, it has been the subject of heavy criticism with regard to its functioning and legitimacy (Zürn, 2018 a and b). For this reason, by incorporating new narratives, i.e. non-Western theories of IR, we could ensure

an improvement in decision-making processes and, more generally, in democratization of GG.

On the other hand, from a practical point of view, the BRICS are a fundamental bloc for the realization of more democratic decision-making processes in different areas: for example in international institutions (UN, IMF, etc.), or in international forums (G20), but also with regard to the spread of greater international cooperation to address global issues that affect everyone.

These countries have already demonstrated that they have grown in power and ability, as a group, to reshape the above-mentioned international institutions (Stuenkel, 2020). Broadly speaking, they have demonstrated the ability to give a new impetus to the current GG, whose structure they reject. The bloc has stated in several arenas its desire to reshape the international order, so as to reflect the changed world and its commitment to multilateralism. The BRICS wish to provide new input within the context of the G20 framework (Larionova and Shelepov, 2019), in which they aim at “leveraging their position inside the G20 for great fairness and equality of the system” (Cooper, 2014, p. 106). Moreover, the BRICS have strengthened policy coordination, the promotion of growth in the world economy, and the development of cooperation among its members. Broadly speaking, its strengthened involvement in the system of GG has resulted in benefits provided by promoting multilateralism within the current world order (Kirton and Larionova, 2018; Stuenkel, 2020). Furthermore, BRICS can play an important role in the future implementation of the trade-related UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to international trade (Andronova and Sakharov, 2019).

It is true that the BRICS still have their limitations within this framework, which we have already explored in other papers (Petrone, 2021a). However, their role is fundamental, for example, in promoting the reform process of the UN Security Council: the BRICS have repeatedly expressed the desire for the Council’s reform, even if in practice their intentions have not been effective to date (Petrone, 2021b; Abb and Jetschke, 2019). At the same time, BRICS representatives more than once have highlighted the importance of acting on climate change issues, although, there are still gaps in this area, as the recent COP26 (in Glasgow) and the COP27 (in Sharm el Sheikh) have shown (Mathiesen, 2021; Alayza et al., 2022). Their role in building a more accountable global finance system is another important tool to enhance multilateralism and GG.

In short, the BRICS will be called upon to play an important role in the coming years, and considering their continually growing potential, they should be able to do it.

The question remains whether their intentions are really oriented towards contributing to enhanced multilateralism and GG and promoting a Global Development perspective on the world stage. In our opinion, in the next few years, especially in post-covid time, these countries will be called upon to prove this.

Their role could also be of fundamental importance in terms of “soft power” (Nye, 2004). By improving their image as globally accountable countries, they can contribute to solving problems that concern everyone.

In the coming years the BRICS, both from a theoretical and a practical points of view, will need to prove that they truly intend to build a different type of GG towards making decisions-making processes on issues of global concern more democratic. In this sense, it is important that they overcome the gaps that divide them, and that they show this at a global level.

As far as the Western countries are concerned, these new BRICS influences could provoke mixed reactions. However, there are many signs that the BRICS can indeed play an important role, and that in the future there may be forms of cooperation inspired by global development practices.

If this pandemic has taught us anything, both in the East and the West, perhaps now is the time to aspire to reaching new heights and start building a global order with a more humane face, thus creating a GG inspired by the prospect of global benefit.

BRICS and Civil Society

In a recent research paper (Petroni, 2021c), we have described the fundamental role that civil society (CS) plays in giving a more democratic shape to multilateralism and decision-making processes. Broadly speaking, CS is pivotal to promoting a more inclusive GG. In particular, we have focused our research on the meaning and importance of CS in BRICS countries, where CS has an even greater role for the future of multilateralism.

“The civil society organizations within BRICS must pool their resources, campaigns and ideas. They have to form strategic alliances across the BRICS countries. Strategic alliances among BRICS civil society organizations will give them the critical mass not only to influence the BRICS agenda but also give them critical mass to influence the global agenda, debates and priorities of global multilateral organizations” (Gumedde, 2018).

However, CS in BRICS countries suffers from certain limitations that have been increased by the recent pandemic. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has had negative impact on CS worldwide, we consider it relevant to investigate what happened in BRICS countries because of the key role that CS should have within the bloc, considering the above-mentioned reasons. We have found that (Petroni 2021c), “In the case of BRICS during the pandemic, strong measures were used to try to deal with the contagion. These measures also inevitably weakened the organizational capacities of CS. In fact, in India the lockdown prevented large, organized protests. However, a number of protests came from migrant workers and from some activist and CS networks. In South Africa, there were more protests and mobilizations at the local level but they were not able to achieve coordination at a national level, which activists aspired to. Also, Russia witnessed a number of protests “ranging from online live-streams to mass gatherings”, above all directed against the way in which government had been dealing with the pandemic (Nilsen and von Holdt, 2020).

In Brazil, much criticism has been directed toward Bolsonaro's handling of the pandemic—at the beginning, he even denied its importance. The civil society networks have organized activities ranging from mutual solidarity to food supplies, demanding healthcare, and talks against the government's actions in dealing with COVID-19. However, it also seems that in Brazil a lack of coordination has characterized these actions by CS. Moreover, the large number of infections weakened the ability of organized CS to get better results. In China, the majority of protests have been held in Hong Kong, which is undergoing a period of turbulence and political dissent. The coronavirus first appeared in China, and after a severe lockdown to try to contain it, the Chinese government has worked to establish global leadership in dealing with the virus (Gramer and Soendergaard, 2020; Ninio, 2020)".

An important mission for the BRICS, therefore, is to try to overcome the gap in participation, on the part of CS, that the recent pandemic seems to have worsened. Certain signs of this came from the two latest BRICS' Summits, celebrated in India in 2021 and in China in 2022. In the first, Indian, Summit and especially during the 7th meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Environment, the "New Delhi Statement on Environment" was presented. This statement stressed "the need for taking concrete collective global actions against global environment and climate challenge, guided by equity, national priorities and circumstances, and the principles of *Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities*" (BRICS Environment Ministerial, 2021). For what concerns the 2022 Summit, under the Chinese presidency, it is noteworthy that under the auspices of President Xi Jinping, who has been inspired by the need to implement a "global development", a BRICS Civil Society Organizations Forum took place. During this Forum, over three hundred representatives of CS from from all BRICS countries have conversed about key topics such as: "Strengthening People-to-People Cooperation to Improve People's Livelihood and Well-being", "Multilateralism and Participation in Global Governance", and "Improving People-to-People Exchanges and Connectivity" (BRICS Civil Society Organisations Forum, 2022).

It seems that on these occasions some of the requests coming from the Civil BRICS Forum (2021) and the BRICS Civil Society Organisations Forum (2022) were heard. However, there is still a lot to do to give a more central role to CS. The impact and the accountability of the BRICS, as well as their real commitment to shape a more democratic GG, will also strongly depend on how they will be able to give more voice to CS demands. As mentioned above, CS is a key component to enhancing multilateralism. In this sense, BRICS countries should improve the way in which they promote the inclusion of more CS representatives through practices of dialogue and more active participation. Furthermore, each member of the bloc could try to give more concrete answers to the social issues that CS represents, above all in the light of the rise of major challenges after the pandemic crisis. The post-COVID period should represent a core moment in the development of new responses to social challenges thus giving greater weight to the voice of CS, which is essential for the correct functioning

of GG and for its progressive democratization, because through participation in public debates, people share ideas and practices, and decide which policies are better for them. Finally, as already noted, (Petroni, 2021c, p. 92), we are faced with a two-fold path which involves, on the one hand, the BRICS countries “that need to grant greater space for inclusion and participation, and on the other, the members of CS who must act as critical and proactive subjects in order to provoke a greater democratization of governance processes”.

Final remarks

According to the theory of the Hegelian dialectic, History moves on the basis of the realization/manifestation of the “Reason” in the world (Hegel, 2010). In practice, without going too deeply into this matter, we can summarize the role of the Reason (Hegel calls it also “Spirit” or “Absolute”) as something that represents a moment in which global equilibrium, and perhaps peace, should be reached at the international level. Obviously, Hegel states that we will not know when this moment will happen, i.e. when this Reason will manifest itself integrally. However, the moments that mark its progressive realization are moments that are based on the “dialectic”, that is to say on three distinct moments: the “thesis”, the “antithesis” and the “synthesis”. In practice, the first moment (the thesis) represents a given reality, the second (the antithesis) represents a moment that opposes the first, while the third (the synthesis) represents a moment of clash and overcoming by the two previous moments that, after merging with each other, give rise to another moment that is the synthesis of both (that were at first opposed).

If we apply this scheme to the contemporary world, we could say that the post Second World War moment represented the moment of the thesis, the rise of these emerging powers would represent the antithesis, and the new global order that may be created should be a synthesis between these two moments. Only the new global order remains uncertain. We have seen that there are so many lessons we should have learned from the pandemic, as well as from other global issues, but in practice there still seem to be overwhelming divisions globally. Therefore, we are still in a phase of transition towards a synthesis. This means that we are still in a moment in time in which the final result - that derives specifically from the clash between a unipolar and a multipolar system - has not yet materialized. Thus, it is in our hands to influence the events so that they could take the right path.

However, the BRICS reflect a world system that is changing. As a consequence, they express the existence of a multipolar order. It is their challenge to make a positive contribution, bypassing the above-mentioned limitations, in order to build a different and modernized GG.

If we are to draw lessons from the past, these should actually lead us to sharing practices and overcoming the dichotomy between the North and the South of the world, as well as the tendency to promote a unilateral order.

The BRICS represent a reality that is going to be present for many years to come, although there is often a tendency to denigrate them because of their uncoordinated policies, or to see in them an ephemeral phenomenon without any significant impact on the current global order (Nuruzzaman, 2020; Brutsch and Papa, 2013).

Sometimes it seems that the BRICS countries only participate in this grouping out of their own national interests, thus benefiting from this union in order to get more recognition worldwide. However, overcoming the limitations is also among their most urgent challenges, as well as avoiding the divisions that often arise within the group. How the BRICS will be able to overcome internal problems in each country and possible conflicts among them will depend on the accountability and the duration of the group's existence. Furthermore, the role that will be given to CS in their decision-making processes will also determine the nature and shape that they wish to give to the GG for the future. Above all, their capacity to become leaders on these issues will also have a major impact on the future of the global order, of multilateralism and, broadly speaking, of GG.

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