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Reclaiming the politics of South-South cooperation

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Abstract

Framed by the North–South conflict, this article conducts a historico-conceptual analysis of the politics of South-South cooperation (SSC) from a decolonial Global South perspective. Based on documentary analysis and a review of academic SSC literature, three distinct periods of SSC post-1945 are identified: *Concertation (1945–1981)*; *Containment (1981–1995)*; and *Cooptation vs Confrontation (1995–present)*. This periodization complements previous endeavours of its kind, whereby the rationale here is that a historical understanding of SSC politics and neo-colonial/imperialist counter-politics is indispensable for emancipatory social praxis. With co-optation of SSC backed by coercion as the Global North's contemporary tactic within the strategy of re-Westernisation, I argue for the Global South to reclaim SSC as a strategy to move from delinking as de-Westernisation towards delinking as decoloniality in the context of crisis of the capitalist world order.

Keywords

South–South cooperation; global South; decolonization; decoloniality; transformative politics

> *The attitude of the North towards South-South co-operation has ranged from lukewarm support to benign neglect, to veiled discouragement, down to overt opposition.*
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> South Commission (1990, p. 206)

Introduction

In February 2021, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg declared that the 'NATO 2030 initiative' serves to 'protect the rules-based order, which is undermined by countries that do not share our values, like Russia and China' (NATO, 2021). The *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* document states these values as the well-known global governance repertoire of 'democracy', 'human rights', 'individual liberty' and 'rule of law', to 'safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of our peoples' (NATO, 2020, p. 51). Obviously, this us-*versus*-them dichotomization is a simple mobilization of Eurocentric othering, where the Western/Northern experience

(or parts thereof) is placed at the centre and viewed as normal and superior, while the lives and cultures of other peoples and places are mystified and represented as deviant, inferior or a threat (Quijano, 2007; Said, 1979). With knowledgeable *versus* ignorant as a historical constant, binarising stereotyping has been instrumental in legitimating colonization and imperialist intervention to the present day: from civilised/enlightened/rational *versus* barbarian/savage/irrational (nineteenth century); via advanced/modern/dynamic/developed *versus* backward/traditional/static/ underdeveloped (twentieth century); to effective *versus* failed states/(corrupt) rogue regimes and democrats *versus* despots/tyrants/terrorists/dictators (twenty-first century). Targeting such key South-South cooperation (SSC) actors as Russia and China, the aggressive NATO 2030 strategy perpetuates the centuries-long East–West/North–South conflict.

Within this geopolitical framing, and the context of an increasing totalitarianisation of the neoliberal regime in response to the crisis of the capitalist world order (Carroll, 2016; Chauí, 2021; Cupples & Glynn, 2016; Gills, 2020; Gills & Chase-Dunn, 2019), this article advances a historico-conceptual periodization of the politics of SSC from a decolonial Global South perspective. The next section introduces relevant key concepts from decolonial thinking, specifically 'decolonisation' and 'decoloniality'; 'the Global South'; and 're-Westernisation', 'de-Westernisation' and 'delinking'. Subsequently, based on documentary analysis and a review of academic SSC literature, the periodization of SSC post-1945 is set out as a framework for understanding conceptual shifts in their global contexts: *Concertation (1945–1981)*; *Containment (1981–1995)*; and *Cooptation vs Confrontation (1995–present)*. As will be discussed, this periodization complements previous endeavours of its kind, whereby the rationale here is that a historical understanding of SSC politics and neo-colonial/imperialist counter-politics is indispensable for emancipatory Global South praxis. With co-optation of SSC backed by coercion as the Global North's contemporary tactic within the strategy of re-Westernisation, I argue for the Global South to reclaim SSC as a strategy to move from delinking as de-Westernisation towards delinking as decoloniality.[1]

Decolonial thinking: conceptual premises

As old as colonization itself, decolonial thinking is not a single theoretical school but subsumes diverse – at times conflictual – cultural, philosophical, political and epistemological currents (Bhambra et al., 2018, p. 2; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, pp. 49–53).[2] Shared referents are the intersectionality of multiple global hierarchies of oppression (economic, epistemic, gender, linguistic, politico-military, racial, sexual, spiritual) established over the past 500 years of

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[1] Clearly, this article is not about the controversially discussed contradictions resulting from the heterogeneous SSC modalities, practices and outcomes. A consensus is emerging that generalizations should be avoided (Bergamaschi et al., 2017; Gray & Gills, 2016; Kragelund, 2019). Nor does it intend to develop some kind of "manual" for enhancing Global South concertation, institution-building or practical problem-solving (for such input, see Cheru, 2011; Gosovic, 2016; Gosovic, 2018; South Commission, 1990).

[2] See, for example, Maldonado-Torres (2011) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, especially Table 2.2) for overviews of the multiplicity of decolonial thinkers, interpretations and strategies.

European modernist colonization and capitalism, and their dispute through justice-driven emancipation from a subaltern perspective (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2011a; Santos, 2014). Walter Mignolo's 'colonial matrix of power' systematises this: constellated around racism and patriarchy, the constitutive elements or spheres of coloniality – economy, authority, knowledge, subjectivity, gender and sexuality – are dialectically interrelated, i.e. understanding of or action on one of them (reproducing coloniality or acting decolonially) impacts on all the others (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 179). While state-centric decolonization, both in nineteenth-century Latin America and as Third World nationalism in Africa and Asia post-1945, achieved formal juridical-political independence, the '"regime of 'global coloniality'"' is maintained through colonial structures and cultures and such institutions as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and NATO (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 220; Quijano, 2007).

For Mignolo, the contemporary East–West/North–South conflict is the conflict between 'de-Westernisation' and 're-Westernisation' politics. While de-Westernisation is a state regulatory project by so-called emerging powers and international SSC formations that contest the control over the colonial matrix through multipolarity, such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), re-Westernisation is the North's (the North Atlantic imperial nation-states') struggle to maintain, reclaim and/or re-legitimate domination over the unipolar neoliberal global order, increasingly by force as hegemony is crumbling (Mignolo, 2021, 2011a). While delinking as de-Westernisation means delinking from the North-dominated institutions of global governance (World Bank, IMF, global corporate media, etc.) without abandoning modernist growth-based capitalist economics, delinking as decoloniality implies delinking from every sphere of the colonial matrix of power, i.e. delinking from both re-Westernisation and de-Westernisation (Mignolo, 2011b, p. 281). Put differently, coloniality, as material and mental domination (Mignolo, 2021, p. 727), requires complementing Samir Amin's political and economic delinking with epistemic decolonization, a 'delinking that leads to de-colonial epistemic shift and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics' (Mignolo, 2007, p. 453).

Rather than a strictly geographical denominator, 'the global South' is a political metaphor with two complementary conceptualisations and their distinct ontological and epistemological underpinnings and spatial articulations (Berger, 2021; Mahler, 2018; Mignolo, 2011a). On one hand, in nation-state centric or methodologically nationalist/territorial terms where countries appear as homogenous absolute spaces (fixed, bounded units or containers of societies and social action), the *global South* (or simply South) refers to formerly colonized countries (from the African, Asian and Latin America-Caribbean continents) and countries subjected to coloniality (e.g. China, Russia, see Mignolo, 2021). Operating at an international scale, this spatially clearly demarcated South–North binary is manifested in such formations as BRICS and NATO. On the other hand, critical scholarship, and the decolonial literature in particular, conceptualize *the Global South* (commonly capitalized, see Berger, 2021; Grosfoguel, 2007; Kleinschmidt, 2018; Mahler, 2018; Mignolo, 2011a) also as transnational relational space produced by/through people's and places' shared historical experiences of and resistances to colonial/imperial subalternisation, exploitation, and the ensuing material and epistemic structural injustices: the

global*ized* South as coexisting with the global*ized* North within and across nation-state territories (countries) in both the geographical north and south (Muhr, 2016, p. 638).[3] Conversely, the Global North, as for instance embodied in the transnational capitalist class (TCC), means that re-Westernisation, and perpetuation of the colonial matrix of power, also involves agents in South countries (usually Westernised elites and petty bourgeoisies), aligned or compliant with the coloniser/imperial powers (Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2021, pp. 732–733). While methodological nationalism/territorialism underlies the (inherently Eurocentric) comparative approaches, the relational approach underscores the dialectical co-constitution of Global North:Global South in which the Global South is not a passive recipient but an actor in its own right (Berger, 2021; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Empirically, however, due to diverse and divergent trajectories, histories and identities, '"the Global South" escapes clear and unambiguous definition' (Berger, 2021, p. 2012). Throughout this article, I use Global South and Global North in relation to both internationalist and transnationalist projects, processes and relations, as these are socio-spatially intertwined and/or mutually constitutive. For example, the inextricability of Western governments/TCC/NATO on one hand, and – as will be discussed – Global South projects like the Tricontinental and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP), on the other.

The politics of SSC: a periodization from a decolonial Global South perspective

The aforementioned Northern/Western ideological categories of 'democracy', 'human rights', 'freedom'/'individual liberty' and 'rule of law' are integral to the colonial matrix of power, enforced via a spectrum of governance mechanisms ranging from conditionalities as part and parcel of official development assistance (ODA) within the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), and overt and covert NATO intervention, including coups d'état and so-called humanitarian intervention. As critical scholarship has exhaustively discussed, *democracy*, as the political complement to neoliberal technocratic economism, denotes elite rule (polyarchy), authoritarian if necessary, legitimated through carefully managed formal electoral procedures and emptied of social justice or equality contents; *human rights*, reduced to (at best) individual civil and political rights at the expense of social, cultural, economic and collective rights, implies their instrumentalisation as 'humanitarian imperialism' and/or 'human rights imperialism'; *freedom* connotes the freedom of capital, combined with 'individual liberty' to exploit and accumulate without constraints within the so-called free-market; and *rule of law* means the establishment and enforcement of the rules for the smooth and effective operating of the free-market order, protecting private property and entrepreneurial liberty against demands for mass-based democratization (Bricmont, 2006; Chauí, 2021; Costa & Zolo, 2007; Erlinder, 2000; Fairclough, 2006; Fine & Saad-Filho, 2017; Gills & Rocamora, 1992; Kiely, 2017; McCormack & Gilbert, 2022; Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). 'Imperialism',

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[3] Also "internal Third Worlds" in the core (Slater, 2004, p. 7); "the south in the north" (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 1); "a periphery outside and inside the core zones and ... a core inside and outside the peripheral regions" (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 220); and "an internal other" (Mahler, 2018, p. 32). On "absolute space" and "relational space", see Harvey (2006).

as a member of the Mont Pèlerin Society, which was instrumental in constructing neoliberal hegemony after the Second World War, stated in 1957, then is 'the geographic expansion of a system of order (rule of law, etc.)' (Schoeck in Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009, p. 259). That is, the 'rules-based order' NATO is determined to 'protect' (NATO, 2021). Thus, colonial fascism enacted by such NATO founding members as Belgium, France, Portugal and the UK – the abrogation of liberal rights in the colonies, which Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* identified as the grounds for fascism in the metropoles (Bogues, 2011, p. 201) – is compatible with the North's value system, as is the fact that Portugal in 1949, as a fascist dictatorship, qualified for NATO founding membership (see Amin, 2014). In 2021, recognizing that the unipolar post-Cold War era with its belief that the 'spread' of free- market democracy 'would continue inexorably' is becoming superseded by a multipolar or polycentric world order, imperialist othering equates this with 'the rise of authoritarianism', as 'authoritarian states with revisionist foreign policy agendas' posing a 'systemic challenge cutting across the domains of security and economics' (NATO, 2020, p. 5, 20).

These are the stakes SSC has been up against from the start. In the absence of a universally endorsed definition, useful for the purposes here is the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC, 2021) characterization of SSC as

> a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South that contributes to their national well-being, their national and collective self-reliance ... [that] must be determined by the countries of the South, guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit.

Often reduced to economy and trade, SSC is a multidimensional set of dialectically intertwined relations and processes across the political, economic, cultural, social, environmental, legal, military and humanitarian domains (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Daley, 2019, for contemporary case studies). While SSC has always been considered a complement to, rather than substitute for, North–South transfers (South Centre, 2005; UN, 1974, 2010), the North/South binarisation is challenged by 'triangular cooperation', where a DAC member or a multilateral organization acts as mediator in SSC, providing resources and/or expertise for best practice or policy transfer (UNOSSC, 2021). Purportedly increasing transparency, efficiency and cost-effectiveness, triangular cooperation appears more like a re-Westernising mechanism that gradually assimilates SSC actors into the Global North-controlled governance norms and structures, as it is often the external (non-South) actor that initiates and/or controls the collaboration, resources and monitoring systems (Kragelund, 2019, p. 116).[4] Concurrently, a discursive appropriation, or cooptation, of the SSC principles of 'horizontality', 'partnership' and 'win-win'/'mutual benefit' by the OECD-DAC community has been observed (Kragelund, 2019, pp. 118–121), as has a 'more pragmatic turn' in SSC discourses towards a 'less affective' framing and greater concern with effectiveness and outcomes (Mawdsley, 2019, p. 266). Nonetheless, in terms of fundamental norms, as will further be seen, the Global North and Global

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[4] "Triangular cooperation" is also practised among Global South partners exclusively, which is here considered a SSC modality. Also, triangular collaborations such as the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility (IBSA Fund) managed by UNOSSC is not (necessarily) a re-Westernising mechanism.

South value systems *are* per definitional fiat incompatible, even though Global South actors themselves have not always fully complied with these norms (Acharya, 2016).

While the emergence of SSC is mostly attributed to the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in which representatives from 29 newly independent nations participated, the 'Bandung spirit' evolved from the centuries of nationalist liberation wars, from Haiti to Ethiopia to Vietnam, in conjunction with local and transnational anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles, including Pan-Asian and Pan-African as much as women's, workers', anti-apartheid and other anti-fascist movements, particularly the Communist internationals. Embracing notions of friendship, solidarity and brotherhood/sisterhood, at Bandung these norms and subaltern struggles attained diplomatic expression while overcoming their compartmentalization (Dinkel, 2018; Eslava et al., 2017; Mahler, 2018; Phạm & Shilliam, 2016). The term 'South-South cooperation' itself gained in currency in the late 1970s, following the Conference on International Economic Co-operation (CIEC) in Paris between 1975 and 1977, generally known as the North–South Conference, and the 4th UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) held in Nairobi in 1976 (see Haq, 1980; Williams, 1987). Prior to the actual adoption of the term, SSC was widely discussed within the framings of the Bandung Conference, Third Worldism, NAM, G-77 and the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and related concepts, especially self-reliance, non-alignment, anti-imperialism and decolonization. As Mignolo highlights, Third World non-alignment and Bandung pursued decolonization as a third option to the two preeminent Western 'macro-narratives', capitalism and communism, which implies that decolonization through delinking as used at Bandung already contained the idea of decoloniality although the term itself only emerged in the 1990s (Mignolo, 2011b, 2021).

As stated, the periodization of SSC developed subsequently complements previous endeavours of its kind. As Emma Mawdsley argues, any particular periodization is analytically purposeful in accordance with the argument(s) developed, and a periodization is not a chronology (Mawdsley, 2019). Neither is a periodization about 'waves', 'tides', 'cycles' or similar naturalistic-mechanistic categories that obfuscate agency in social struggle. Specifically, Michelle Morais de Sá e Silva, interested in 'forms and modalities', distinguishes between *Self-reliance and Political Strengthening (1949–79)*; *Demobilization (1980–98)*; and *'Best Practice' Transfer (1999-)* (Morais de Sá e Silva, 2009). Mawdsley (2019), within a geoeconomic approach concerned with 'visibility and influence', also elaborates three periods: *SSC 1.0*, from the early 1950s to the late 1990s/early 2000s; *SSC 2.0*, from the late 1990s/early 2000s until about 2015; and *SSC 3.0*, from around 2015 onwards. And, Branislav Gosovic structures his account around the South–North encounter within the UN system throughout the so-called Development Decades (Gosovic, 2016[2014]). To reiterate, my own analysis is interested in eliciting conceptual shifts in their global geopolitical contexts as a basis for reclaiming the politics of SSC for decolonial social praxis. The schematic, rigid temporal demarcations derive from historical turning points manifested in particular events and documents while, naturally, the underlying processes unfolded in a much more intertwined, dialectical and incoherent fashion.

Concertation (1945–1981): decolonization and Third World internationalism

In the bipolar Cold War context, efforts of Third World organization were intertwined with struggles for political, economic and cultural liberation. Starting with the formation of the League of Arab States (also 'Arab League') in March 1945, shortly before the end of the Second World War[5], other landmark events included the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, convened in India prior to formal independence and assembling leaders from Asian independence movements; and the 1954 China–India Panchsheel Agreement, which established the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that were incorporated into the Bandung agenda: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence (Opondo, 2016). These, alongside the principles of collective self-reliance and self-determination, were institutionalized at global scales via the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), formed in Baghdad in 1960; the NAM, created in Belgrade in 1961, with 120 members in 2021; and the G-77 (today comprising 134 countries, China included[6]), launched at the first UNCTAD in Geneva in 1964 as a counterweight to the OECD (founded in 1961), and constituted as a permanent group via the 1967 *Charter of Algiers*. Concomitantly, global regionalisms, including the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA), the Organization of African Unity (OAU, reconstituted as African Union in 2002), and the Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (also, Gulf Co-operation Council, GCC), were formed in 1960, 1963, and 1981, respectively. Non-alignment never meant neutrality or impartiality but becoming independent co-shapers in a decolonial democratization of the world order (Phạm & Shilliam, 2016). Reflecting the movements-based antecedents of SSC, states-led decolonization concerted with anti-colonial mass popular organization, notably the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) formed in Cairo in January 1958.[7] Following the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the AAPSO was geographically extended at the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana, as the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL). For Anne Mahler, the historical importance of the Tricontinental consists in, first, transcending Bandung's nation-state centric decolonization through 'transnational dialogue' among diverse decolonial governments, political leaders and movements, and, second, its reverberations in today's notion of Global South (Mahler, 2018, p. 23).

Efforts of economic decolonization culminated in the NIEO, which denounced 'neo-colonialism in all its forms' (UN, 1974, Points 1, 4i), demanded fairer terms of trade, reparations for colonial exploitation, a reformation of the international monetary system, and the right to regulation and nationalization of transnational corporations (TNCs). Asserting the right to 'self-determination of all peoples' and '[t]he right of every country to adopt the economic and social system that it deems the most appropriate for its own development' (UN, 1974, Point 4), the NIEO anticipated the 1986 UN *Declaration on the Right to Development*, whose recognition the South never managed to uphold. Whether the NIEO with its global Keynesian and dependency theoretical underpinnings – global redistributive measures (North–South resource transfers) combined with market intervention in recognition of the structural

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[5] See http://www.lasportal.org/Pages/Welcome.aspx (accessed 03/05/2022).
[6] See http://www.g77.org/doc/members.html (accessed 03/05/2022).
[7] See https://www.aapsorg.org/en/about-us/aapso-constitution.html (accessed 03/05/2022).

constraints on national development – had decolonial potential was subject to much debate (Cox, 1979; Ruggie, 1982; Taylor & Smith, 2007). Strategically, by recognizing and accepting North/South interdependence (UN, 1974, Point 3), national and collective self-reliance never meant absolute commercial, financial and technological autarky from the North, but delinking as the selective replacement of exploitative dependency-perpetuating relations by more egalitarian South-South relations, promoting economic and productive complementarity and interdependences grounded in people-centred, endogenous development approaches (Galtung, 1986; Hope, 1983; Matthies, 1979; South Commission, 1990, p. 211). As Amin (1982, p. 24) stated, 'constructing a diversified national and regional economy which, through its own internal dynamics and autonomy, would be capable of acting as a partner in an interdependent world system rather than being a mere excrescence of the transnationals'.

Formal juridical-political decolonization did not dismantle the regime of global coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 220). It would be wrong, however, to assume that the Global South had not been conscious of the colonial matrix and the role of colonialist elites in its maintenance or reproduction. Already in his opening speech of the Bandung Conference, Indonesian President Sukarno stated, 'do not think of colonialism only in the classic form ... Colonialism has also its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control, actual physical control by a small but alien community within a nation' (Sukarno, 1955). Understanding the Global North:Global South as co-constituted (the relational approach) thus requires also considering the Global South's role in perpetuating coloniality. First, despite successes, such as the China-financed Tanzania-Zambia railway completed in 1975, objective difficulties in the practical implementation of SSC initiatives (ineffective institutions, scarce resources) often joined with governments' lack of commitment (Kragelund, 2019). Second, many of the Western order's foundational organizing principles were affirmed and internalized: territorial nation-state sovereignty within the colonially drawn borders, which engendered internal colonialism over minoritised nationalities, driving conflict and disunity; the universal human rights regime, which the North itself has never truly been committed to in the light of continued colonial fascism and (neo)imperialist politics; and modernist development with its (unsustainable) ideas of progress and unlimited economic growth (although the developmentalist discourse at the same time provided a unifying framework across ideological differences) (Acharya, 2016; Eslava et al., 2017; Hongoh, 2016; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2015; Phạm & Shilliam, 2016; Phillips, 2016; Weber & Winanti, 2016). Third, Global South unity was further undermined by OPEC's strategic failure (in the context of the 1970s oil crisis) to build a South counter-structure, as OPEC members' interests started to diverge from those of oil-importing developing countries (Taylor & Smith, 2007; Toye, 2014; Williams, 1987). However, intra-South tensions or divisions may not have been as severe as frequently stated, as several OPEC members established solidarity programmes for petroleum-importing developing countries (Kuczynski, 1982).[8] Finally, rather than delinking, the South integrated in, thus legitimated, the global colonial matrix, remodelled and re-instituted via the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank), the

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[8] For example, the 1980 Economic Cooperation Programme for Central American Countries ("San José Oil Accord") was considered the "first collaborative aid effort" between an OPEC (Venezuela) and non-OPEC (Mexico) oil producer (Grayson, 1985, p. 394). The ALBA-TCP/Petrocaribe are a continuation and expansion of this solidarity cooperation.

IMF, the UN system, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) – all
established between 1944 and 1947 when most South countries did not even exist as
sovereign states.

Containment (1981–1995): re-Westernisation through the neoliberal counter-offensive

The Global South's internal contradictions and strategic shortcomings
notwithstanding, the Global North, despite occasional issue-specific discordances,
operated in unison on two interrelated fronts to thwart decolonial aspirations: on one
hand, condescending othering combined with tactical delaying and blocking of South
initiatives and overt and covert warfare, ranging from imprisonments and
assassinations (e.g. Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba in 1960) to
post-independence destabilisations and coups d'état. On the other hand, intra-South
frictions and ideological, social, and cultural differences were actively accentuated
using political, economic, and informational and communicational power. It was at
the 1981 Cancún International Meeting for Cooperation and Development, however,
where the North unilaterally aborted the twenty-year effort of UNCTAD-mediated
South–North diplomatic dialogue. By then, the Global North's neoliberal counter-
offensive had gained ground with the instalment of pro-Western military dictator-
ships, most notoriously in Indonesia (1965) and Chile (1973). For the Reagan and
Thatcher-led USA and UK governments, at Cancún, the South's demands – the NIEO
and a democratization of the governance regime – were plainly non-negotiable
(Gosovic, 2018; Ruggie, 1982; South Commission, 1990, p. 217).

Re-Westernisation was reinforced by the 1981 World Bank report *Accelerated
Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*, which was a landmark
document in the promotion of neoliberal structural adjustment policies (SAPs) –
privatization, deindustrialization, and North-oriented export-orientation based on
comparative advantage (Amin, 1982; Ruggie, 1982). Subsequently, as is well-
documented, a combination of factors and forces corroded decolonial developmental
state action while exacerbating disunity and undermining the South's bargaining
power: global economic recession and a significant deterioration of the terms of trade,
which drove competition in global commodity markets and for foreign direct
investment; the debt crisis, starting with Mexico in 1982, and SAPs-induced
neoliberal re-Westernising elite formation in South countries; the dissolution of the
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and with it the Council for Mutual Economic
Assistance (COMECON) as an alternative (de-Westernising) system; the Global
North-driven strengthening of the World Bank and IMF over the UN system as global
development decision-makers; the reconfiguration – and neutralization – of UNCTAD
which, after facing acute hostility by the North especially since the late 1970s, had
eventually accommodated the post-Cold War 'good governance' conditionalities of
free-market, liberal democracy, rule of law, anti-corruption, and effective
government; and the GATT Uruguay Round negotiations (1986–1994), where, in the
absence of organized G-77 negotiating leadership, the South (once more) failed to act
in concert (Gosovic, 2016[2014]; Taylor & Smith, 2007; Toye, 2014). By 1995, when
GATT was integrated in the newly established OECD-designed World Trade

Organization (WTO), the Third Worldist, decolonial vision of SSC had been marginalized to the annual G-77 and tri-annual NAM meetings (Toye, 2014).

Cooptation vs confrontation (1995-present): re-Westernisation, de-Westernisation, and decoloniality

Between 1995 and 2017, intra-South merchandise trade significantly increased, from USD 0.6 trillion to USD 5 trillion; in 2017, one quarter of world total trade occurred among South countries, and 33 per cent of total South-South exports were non-traditional, higher value-added technology-intensive products, as compared to 28 per cent for South–North exports (UNCTAD, 2019). Despite this being biased towards Asia, and disproportionately revolving around China (UNCTAD, 2019), the Global South today is in a more favourable structural position to pursue self-reliance. In this context, three trends can be observed: triangular cooperation as re-Westernisation; SSC for delinking as de-Westernisation; and SSC for delinking as decoloniality.

Triangular cooperation as re-Westernisation
Possibly in response to the South's growing economic leverage, the Global North's adoption of a (on the surface) more conciliatory approach to SSC implies its 'mainstreaming' (UN, 2019b) into the North-dominated governance structure – a process that already started with the 1978 *Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC)* (UNDP, 1978). Widely celebrated as a milestone in the formalization of SSC in international fora, the BAPA reduced SSC to technical cooperation, entailing a shift from a decolonial structuralist-transformative to an instrumentalist problem-solving approach (Ernst, 1979). Frequently associated with depoliticization, however, recasting SSC in managerial-technical terms as an order-stabilising or re-Westernising practice is as political as SSC as a system-changing, de-Westernising/decolonial process. Furthermore, by calling for support from North countries and institutions for TCDC activities, the BAPA laid the foundation for triangular cooperation (UNDP, 1978, Recommendations 35, 36, 38). It was the 1995 UN report *New Directions for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries* though that explicitly started promoting triangular cooperation while endorsing Global South countries' integration into the new neoliberal global order (UN, 1995), shifting power from governments to private business and NGO sectors, i.e. transnational capital. A form of public-private partnerships at a global scale, this agenda has been codified via the OECD-orchestrated high-level fora on aid effectiveness in Rome, Paris, Accra and Busan in 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2011, respectively, culminating in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation endorsed by over one hundred governments.[9] As the Busan document claims by evoking a global consensus that discounts the North–South conflict,

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[9] https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/thehighlevelforaonaideffectivenessahistory.htm (retrieved 07/10/2021).

we now all form an integral part of a new and more inclusive development agenda, in which
these actors participate on the basis of common goals, shared principles and differential
commitments. On this same basis, we welcome the inclusion of civil society, the private
sector and other actors. (OECD, 2011, Point 14)

In the UN system, this re-Westernising agenda was ratified, inter alia, via the two
high-level conferences on SSC in Nairobi in 2009 and Buenos Aires in 2019 (also
dubbed 'BAPA+40'), the 2015 *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International
Conference on Financing for Development*, and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development* (SDGs 17.6/17.9). Certainly, strategic partnerships between South
actors and UN institutions may boost the legitimation, visibility and recognition of
SSC while enabling these institutions to reclaim their mandates and influence in the
global development regime (Milhorance & Soule-Kohndou, 2017). However, despite
the UN's continued discursive adherence to the decolonial Third Worldist framing,
the now dominant compound 'South-South and triangular cooperation' (SSTC)
accentuates the creeping assimilation and subordinate co-optation of SSC into the
Global North's conditionality norms of '[g]ood governance, rule of law, human
rights, fundamental freedoms ... and measures to combat corruption' (UN, 2019a
Point 14). Thus, together with the aforementioned discursive cooptation of key SSC
principles by the ODA community (horizontality, partnership, win-win/mutual
benefit), the 'harnessing' and 'reshaping' of the norms and practices of SSC (Abdenur
& Fonseca, 2013) is further consolidated. Indeed, already in the 1980s, the OECD's
and World Bank's endorsement of 'self- reliance' involved its cooptive
reconceptualisation as entrepreneurial development (microcredit and microenterprise
schemes) for self-reliance through local capacity- and institution-building, shifting the
responsibility for development to the national (country) scale, effectively ignoring
global historical structures – colonization/coloniality, imperialism, and the resulting
dependencies and inequalities (Cox, 1979; OECD, 1991; Santos, 2017; UN, 2010,
Annex, Point 10, 2019a, Point 21).

SSC for delinking as de-Westernisation
Re-Westernising cooptation of SSC has been paralleled by a range of de-Westernising
SSC projects, including: the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the
India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), each tri-annually convened since 2000 and 2008,
respectively; and the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001, the
India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) in 2003, the Union of South
American Nations (UNASUR) in 2008, the BRIC from 2006 onward (officialized as
BRICS in 2010), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
(CELAC) in 2010. The extent to which each of these initiatives truly pursues and
actually drives global structural transformation and/or delinking as de-Westernisation,
varies and has been subject to much controversial debate, which cannot be reproduced
here (see, e.g. Bergamaschi et al., 2017; Cheru, 2011; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Daley,
2019; Gray & Gills, 2016; Gürcan, 2019; Kragelund, 2019). In any case, while such
de-Westernising institutions as the BRICS New Development Bank are established
(Al-Kassimi, 2018; Mignolo, 2021), confrontation joins with contestation within the
institutions of global coloniality, where especially the BRICS – individually or collec-
tively – frequently strategically ally with the G-77 (Cooper, 2021; Gürcan, 2019;
Hopewell, 2017). Although SSC may indeed have engendered a partial 'fracturing' of

the historical North–South hierarchies (Mawdsley, 2020), the North's 'manipulation' of the World Bank voting power adjustment process (see Vestergaard & Wade, 2013), however, is indicative of the limits to such a strategy, and of the Global North's steadfast resistance to any more substantive democratization of the global order, i.e. the even slightest challenge to the colonial matrix of power.

Often overlooked, these de-Westernising initiatives were launched in the context of a revitalization of the decolonial, Third Worldist vision of SSC, related to the establishment of the Geneva-based South Centre in 1995 as an intergovernmental Global South organization. The Centre originates in the work of the South Commission, which was an independent group of Global South intellectual and political leaders formed with NAM support in 1987, and its report *The Challenge to the South* (South Commission, 1990). As a think tank, the Centre seeks to promote 'South solidarity' and 'South consciousness' as much as knowledge exchange to realize the many plans of action, schemes and ideas developed over the decades, often not implemented due to objective constraints (ineffective institutions, scarce resources, limited complementarities) but also governments' lack of commitment (South Centre, 2005; UN, 1994). However, underfunded and with only 54 members in 2022,[10] the Centre's contribution to providing a permanent institutional core for the NAM and G-77 is limited. As Gosovic (2016, p. 738) states, 'The hope ... that its member governments would allow and help it to evolve into a major organisation, 'an OECD of the South' as some used to call it, has not materialised so far'.[11] Nonetheless, the Centre provided some input to the first and second G-77-convened South Summits, in Havana in 2000 and Doha in 2005 (see, e.g. South Centre, 2005), which reiterated the historical demands for systemic transformation (G-77, 2000, 2005). The 1st South Summit, in particular, confronted Global North neoliberal norms by reclaiming *rule of law* as 'full respect for the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations', highlighting the unlawfulness of unilateral 'coercive economic measures' (sanctions); *democracy* as 'democracy in decision-making', fundamental to a 'new global system'; and *freedom* as the 'protection of all universally recognized human rights and fundamental free- doms, including the right to development' (G-77, 2000, Points 6, 21, 48, 49).

SSC for delinking as decoloniality
Transcending de-Westernisation, two SSC initiatives are regarded as most assertively resuscitating decolonization/decoloniality and anti-imperialism: the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), signed at the Asian-African Summit in 2005, with the explicit mission to 'reinvigorate the Spirit of Bandung' (NAASP, 2005); and the institutionally overlapping ALBA-TCP/Petrocaribe, launched in 2004 and 2005, respectively, directly inspired by the South Commission report (Gosovic, 2018*n*28; see South Commission, 1990, especially Chapter 4). While the NAASP apparently has had only limited (if any) materialization (Dlamini, 2019), the ALBA-TCP/Petrocaribe had, for instance, by the early 2010s become 'by far the largest

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[10] See https://www.southcentre.int/member-countries/ (accessed 29/04/22).
[11] Moreover, the Centre also runs the risk of cooptation. The current mission and vision statements rather uncritically endorse the SDGs-promoted growth-based green-capitalism-with-poverty-reduction, alongside triangular cooperation and private sector/NGO involvement, rather than envisioning (deco-lonial) alternatives (e.g. de-growth, eco-socialism) (see South Centre, n.d.).

provider of concessionary finance in absolute terms' to Caribbean partner countries,
exceeding development assistance from the major Global North institutions (Girvan,
2011, p. 163; also, SELA, 2015). As Khaled Al-Kassimi elucidates, in contrast to
BRICS's delinking as de-Westernisation, the ALBA-TCP is a 'decolonial delinking
project' that tackles the colonial matrix for its (at least partial and/or pursued) de-
linking from colonial modernity, striving to develop 'an alternative to development
project' (Al-Kassimi, 2018, pp. 26– 27). This struggle institutionalizes the historical
aspiration – as inherent in the Bandung spirit and explicit in the Tricontinental
(Mahler, 2018) – of articulating states-led internationalism with popular movements-
based transnationalism (Al-Kassimi, 2018; Eder, 2016; Gürcan, 2019; Muhr, 2013;
Weber, 2016): the formal ALBA-TCP member states and over 400 mass-based
popular movements/organisations from 25 Our American countries.[12] Structurally, the
two pillars connect via the ALBA Movements Continental Coordination, which
supercedes the original ALBA-TCP Social Movements Council.[13] Participation in the
Continental Coordination requires movements to have established national chapters in
their countries, as the geographical place of organization and struggle against national
and transnational bourgeoisies. The Continental Coordination's Political Coordination
then articulates with the ALBA-TCP member governments and the ALBA-TCP
institutions (ALBA Movimentos, 2021).

It is the relative system-challenging success that has put the major ALBA-TCP
members Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, which all are also members of the
South Centre, in the frontline of Global North hybrid warfare – a combination of
disinformation campaigns (fake news usually claiming 'authoritarianism') with
coercive economic, financial and military measures by state and private actors (banks,
NGOs, TNCs), including embargoes, confiscations, paramilitary terrorism, coups
d'état and cybernetic attacks (AFGJ, 2018; Antonopoulos & Cottle, 2018; Camp &
Greenburg, 2020; Jacobs & Kitzen, 2021; Norton, 2021; Tricontinental, 2020). It is
the intensified imperialist aggression since 2015, rather than agency-less 'decline',
'crisis' and 'collapse', as neo- colonialist representations purport, that has caused a
reduction of intra-ALBA-TPC/Petrocaribe economic, productive and financial
cooperation, however, certainly not its destruction[14] (Aponte-García & Linares, 2019;
UN, 2021). With reportedly 39 countries subjected to USA-led sanctions (Sterling et
al., 2021), considered a 'violation of international law' (UN, 2021, Point 84), in July
2021, 16 NAM members plus China and Russia launched the UN-based Group of
Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations, to defend multilateralism and
'the prevalence of legality over force' (GoF, 2021, Point 4).

Conclusion: from delinking as de-Westernisation towards delinking as decoloniality

With co-optation of SSC backed by coercion as a contemporary tactic within the
strategy of re-Westernisation, NATO (2020) leaves little doubt that, in the context of
crisis of the capitalist world order, the Global North is determined to step up its

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[12] See: http://albamovimientos.net/ (accessed 28/04/22).
[13] See: Muhr (2013, p. 6) for the original ALBA-TCP structure, including the Social Movements
Council.
[14] See: https://www.albatcp.org; https://bancodelalba.org/en/home (both accessed 25/04/22).

'global totalitarianism' (Gosovic, 2016, p. 741; also, Mignolo, 2021, p. 734). After all, virtually all Global South governments that pose only the slightest challenge to the 'rules-based order' – 'authoritarian states' in NATO newspeak – have become targets of Global North aggression, notoriously legitimated by fake news (Blum, 2013; Bricmont, 2006; Chandler, 2006; Erlinder, 2000; McCormack & Gilbert, 2022; Zolo, 2009). Thus viewed, the current Russia-Ukraine war is not so much about Russian imperialism, but an act of 'resistance' to 'Western encroachment' provoked by three decades of continual NATO expansion (Roberts, 2017; also Greene, 2022; Prashad, 2022). If Amin's (2014) anticipation of a 'return of fascism' and events such as the International Summit Against Fascism in Caracas, Venezuela, in April 2022 (teleSUR, 2022) are taken seriously, targets will be both de-Westernising/ decolonising Global South countries (states, leaders, peoples) and resistances in the geographical north and south. The following propositional remarks seek to contribute to emancipatory social praxis, that the Global South reclaim SSC as a strategy to move from delinking as de-Westernisation towards delinking as decoloniality.

Collectively, the Global South today is in a structurally – economically, technologically, infra- structurally, communicationally and epistemic – more advantageous position to pursue self- reliance than in previous periods (Gilpin, 2021; Kragelund, 2019; UNCTAD, 2019). This idea was reaffirmed, inter alia, by the African Union (2015) *Declaration on Self-Reliance*, and it may be argued that Global North sanctioning actually catalyzes delinking. Exemplary across the multidimensionality of SSC are the development and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines (e.g. Chinese CanSino; Cuban Soberana; Indian Covaxin; Russian Sputnik V); the Russian financial messages transfer system SPSF, whose creation anticipated the banning of Russian banks from SWIFT in March 2022; and the SSC-induced redirection of international university student flows, from South–North to intra-South (Thondhlana et al., 2021). Delinking neither implies absolute autarky or isolation, nor should it mean abandoning contestation within institutions of global coloniality, such as the Venezuelan government's denouncing of the Global North's 'crimes against humanity' to the International Criminal Court (UN, 2021, Point 29). It requires, however, careful examination of which global governance institutions to abandon, as was done at the 2021 CELAC Summit with regard to the neo-colonial Organisation of American States (OAS) (Romano & Lajtman, 2021).

Overcoming the inherent dichotomization of de-Westernisation as inter-state projects and decoloniality through 'global political society' (Mignolo, 2021, pp. 732–733; also Al-Kassimi, 2018, p. 26) should be integral to epistemic delinking. First, SSC projects such as BRICS (de-Westernising) and ALBA-TCP (decolonial) simultaneously are separate absolute spaces (the de jure member blocs) *and* a spatio-structurally intertwined, relational Global South space produced through individual and collective relations among members of BRICS, ALBA-TCP/Petrocaribe, G-77, South Centre, and so forth. While the ALBA-TCP's quest for delinking as decoloniality – delinking from both re-Westernisation and de-Westernisation (Mignolo, 2011b, p. 281) – is an ongoing struggle, delinking as de-Westernisation, however, produces a spatiality within/through which delinking as decoloniality becomes an option (cf. Muhr, 2016, p. 639). Second, the ALBA-TCP's articulation of states-led internationalism with popular movements-based transnationalism overcomes the state/society dichotomy while reconciling unity with transversal plurality (ALBA Movimentos, 2021). The ALBA-TCP's 'pluri-scalar war of position' (Muhr, 2022) can be *one* way to form

such a *Global South bloc*. This depends, inter alia, on committed and determined political leadership (Carroll, 2016; Gosovic, 2018; South Commission, 1990; South Centre, 2005, p. 4) and on progressive minds in the Global North countries also decolonising (themselves) 'from within' (Reynolds, 2017, p. 262). As was already observed during NATO's wars against Yugoslavia and Libya, concerted disinformation campaigns divided 'the international left' (Blum, 2013, p. 154) as fake news subtly reinforce an internalized, subconscious Eurocentrism, and, at times, anti-statist sentiments, generating misconception of, or even contempt for, popular-revolutionary projects that misfit the liberal-modern and/or post-modern imagery and habitus (AFGJ, 2018; Baraka, 2021; MacLeod, 2018; Perry & Sterling, 2021).

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Disclosure statement

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