

## Editors' Introduction

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and Sandhya Shukla*

At the recent meeting of BRICS—the global economic group consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—held in Beijing in September 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that a “historical opportunity” had presented itself as a result of adjustments in “the world economic structure.” He urged enhanced “solidarity and cooperation among emerging market and developing countries” to work against the protectionism that had recently gained traction in Western countries, as evidenced in the ascendancy of Donald Trump in the United States and Great Britain’s imminent departure from the European Union. Xi’s promotion of South-South cooperation as an “irreversible trend” built upon the political positions of earlier periods. The 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, the founding conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961, and the establishment of the South Commission at the NAM summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, in September 1986 all exhibited a similar rhetoric of solidarity.<sup>1</sup> The Global South of our political present consequently has a long and complicated history, yet distinctions between the past and present must also be drawn. As Vijay Prashad has written in *The Darker Nations* (2007), the “Third World” captured not a geography as such, but rather a political project that sought to work against the neo-colonial influences of the United States and its allies (the so-called “First World”) and the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc partners (the “Second World”).<sup>2</sup> The expression “Third World” drew from an earlier genealogy connected to the French Revolution and the notion of a “third estate” representing the common people.<sup>3</sup>

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The Global South, on the other hand, has been more politically inchoate, at once recalling this earlier political program while also mapping, literally and figuratively, a geography that at times betrays more affinities than differences with the Euro-American world. The economic aspirations of BRICS in particular—what Prashad has referred to as “neoliberalism with southern characteristics”—raise fundamental questions about the radical potential of the Global South, whether as a place or project.<sup>4</sup> The acronym BRICS was coined, after all, by a Goldman Sachs analyst in 2001.

The Global South has existed as a provisional category since at least the mid-1970s, though its increasing use and importance as a rubric for political alignments, economic developments, and cultural histories demand a renewed and focused critical engagement. This special issue of *Radical History Review* acknowledges that need by taking stock of the term’s limits, meanings, and prospects for future analytic work. Indeed, the diverse invocations of the Global South, for both late capitalist projects, such as BRICS, and for a variety of insurgent and progressive grassroots alliances which have sought to challenge the continued power of North American and European hierarchies of state power and knowledge, suggest that it remains a highly contested marker for setting global agendas. Scholars in a number of academic fields have proposed that the Global South offers not only a new vantage point for readdressing imperial pasts and aspiring toward new futures, but, as such, presents the potential for new epistemologies to take hold. In this latter regard, it conforms to a range of existing critical paradigms, from the Black Atlantic as promoted by Paul Gilroy, to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s call to “provincialize” Europe, each of which has outlined counter-modernities which unsettle the claims of European thought.<sup>5</sup> In the work of Jean and John Comaroff, Raewyn W. Connell and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the Global South has provided theoretical reorientation, often through the redeployment of older terminology such as decolonization.<sup>6</sup> The decolonial turn, in the work of Enrique Dussel, Walter D. Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, and other Latin Americanists, has directed the recovery of local languages, indigenous practices, and regional worldviews as a means of “decolonizing” knowledge.<sup>7</sup> These critical efforts resemble—and at times directly connect to—research and political agendas such as Subaltern Studies, in both its South Asian and Latin American forms, as well as an argument like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s, for writing in African languages.<sup>8</sup> And yet so much of this work, which has urged different ways of looking at the world in the past and the present and enabled many important historical, anthropological, literary and other projects in recent years, still bears distinct traces of intellectual entanglement with Western epistemologies, whether through shared genealogies of Marxist and poststructuralist thought or by virtue of working against—and thus working through—such legacies.

This special issue of *Radical History Review* embraces this complexity and contradiction, suggesting that while present scholarship has provided compelling insights into the varied histories, diverse itineraries, and provisional maps of the

Global South, critical work still remains to be done on just how the Global South as a radical position can be more fully achieved. Though we do not profess to “newness” vis-à-vis the Global South concept, we do believe that our current historical conjuncture—one of uneven patterns of political-economic crisis, shaped by competing challenges of emergent authoritarian movements and global climate change, to offer two pressing cases—necessitates an especially focused inquiry into political and social formations that provide new critiques of power. The Global South as a political space, extending through formerly colonized regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, certainly challenges the geopolitical frameworks of the United States and Europe from a territorial standpoint, underscoring the role alternative regional and global geographies can play in remaking a new world order. By extension, as an analytic category that is different from preceding terms such as “postcolonial” or “Third World,” the Global South asks us to reconsider the continuing significance of colonialism for understanding countries that have experienced sustained economic growth, such as India and China, while, by the same stroke, accounting for social and political movements—such as *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (India), *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (South Africa), and the World Social Forum—that are not determined by “the West” as traditionally understood. Put simply, the Global South presents a revised temporal framework, in addition to the promise of spatial and epistemological innovation, for thinking through the politics of the present, given that it has been over half a century since decolonization and political independence occurred in many parts of today’s Global South.

In sum, to fully play out the possibilities of this concept’s intervention, the contributions to this special issue suggest a wider and deeper reach—geographically, intellectually, and politically—into spaces that have been heretofore less examined, despite the sweep of the Global South. Indeed in contrast to previous approaches that have stressed (quite naturally) a global perspective on this geography, we have taken a counterintuitive approach, by foregrounding stories of the everyday and their intersectional components of race, class, and gender, thus departing from “grand narratives” of the Global South, as defined by occasions like Bandung, as well as “great men,” whether Jawarhalal Nehru, Fidel Castro, or Frantz Fanon. We believe that the Global South and its possibilities might be better grasped through an emphasis on the texture of interpersonal exchanges and categories of analysis that might be seen, *prima facie*, as peripheral, but in practice retain value and meaning for local and regional communities, rather than global ones. We have aimed to put together a collection of materials that renders the Global South less abstract and more palpable—a space of ordinary concerns of work, politics, and livelihood, in addition to being a generative setting for critical theory. In short, the Global South, as we position it here, is less a monolithic geography, a diplomatic project, or a transnational historical space and paradigm, as argued elsewhere, but instead a crucible for sustaining popular agency, one that allows for old and new forms of cultural

freedom to express themselves through a myriad of mediums against structures of power, national and international alike.

### **Hidden Histories and Generative Itineraries of the Global South**

To begin, can we think of the Global South as offering up a “map, counter-map and modus operandi” all at the same time, as suggested by this issue’s contributor Emily Callaci? Or can we shift the terms of debate and consider the Global South to be a “path,” following contributor Aharon de Grassi, thus making it more of an innovative tool to be used in a diversity of settings? Similarly, what happens when we take “Global North” events and recast them from the vantage point of the Global South, as Michelle Moyd and Maurice Jr. M. Labelle do for World War I and Lebanon’s decolonization, respectively? Or, what if we juxtapose and compare the divergent scales of South-South entanglements, such as the role of China in Africa (Ronald Po, Phineas Bbaala, and Mingwei Huang), Black and Asian solidarities in the United States (Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange), or a female country singer (Pahole Sookkasikon) based in Thailand? What happens if we take on peripheral places—the margins of the marginal—like Melanesia (Quito Swan) and Guyana (Sarah Vaughn) and attach them to more familiar circuits and flows of people, ideas, and things? Can we utilize such refigured landscapes to, in turn, refigure the Global South? What methodological possibilities emerge when we position such locations as a permanent starting point—not simply as sites for data collection to be mined, assessed, and extracted by the Global North, but rather as a source of interpretive theory? We raise these questions at the start to resituate ongoing inflections of North and South as being less in a state of opposition to one another and instead as already historically enmeshed. Put differently, we want to open up the category of “the North” to interrogation as we do “the South” by recognizing that Southern formations can also be located in the North, underscoring multidirectional flows of politics, culture, and history that require an attentive methodology.

The potential power of Global South thought is especially vivid in moments of political, cultural, and economic transition. As some of our contributors make clear, the Global South is often the theater for other liberatory dramas which draw attention to the ordinary and peripheral. The frictions of freedom whetted on difference become visible in such settings. One ongoing flashpoint can be seen in recent student movements all over the world. Student activists in South Africa, India, Chile, and Mexico have raised specific issues like tuition fees and housing as part of a broader inquiry about educational opportunity and economic futures, in some instances promoting the issue of workers’ rights on college campuses; this student-worker alignment is part of a larger project to make and remake the laboring nation. Another vector of critique that connects and perhaps reformulates the “South” can be seen in efforts to confront the racialized memorialization of national history. The colonial-era statue of Cecil John Rhodes that had stood on the University of Cape

Town campus since 1934 was brought down in February 2015 by a student movement, which then fed into a nationwide campaign to decolonize curricula across South Africa. The white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, which resulted in the death of activist Heather D. Heyer and the injury of nineteen others, laid bare deep fissures of racism based on revisionist histories of the Confederacy and inflamed by Trump's America. These episodes cannot be seen as autonomous from one another. Representations of brutal colonial pasts and institutionalized racism, seized upon in various ways by authoritarian political leaders and deeply anxious citizens of "new" economies, have quickly become instruments of divisive spectacle in our media-saturated, global age.

This special issue foregrounds the Global South vis-à-vis these emergent situations. In order to underwrite the potential of this expression, we approach the Global South as marking both a departure from the "postcolonial," "decolonization," and the "Third World" while not sacrificing the importance of readdressing the long-term legacies of colonialism and decolonization across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Our contributors have looked for new archives that tell different stories and have read old archives in new ways, confirming the continued vitality of postcolonial critique. The work in this issue disrupts facile assumptions of uniform solidarity within the Global South. We see as much tension as cooperation. Race-making both divides and binds, creating a consistent fault line that troubles political affinities and exposes what author Labelle calls "the forgotten color line within the global color line." If Moyd pushes back our timeline for conceptualizing the Global South, calling troops from the colonies in World War I "Global South soldiers," Labelle exposes how Lebanese nationalists after World War II reiterated and fixed Western-generated ideas of race to mark distinctions between themselves and the West African troops that occupied Lebanon. Nation-making claims against the metropole mobilized European race-making practices that constrained the liberty of Africans subjected by the same empire. These dynamics strain and pucker the smooth surface of common cause associated with decolonizing countries, with shared oppression, and with solidarity across the Global South.

Swan similarly mines a contradiction at what is often considered the Global South's generative place and moment. He takes us on a tour of Melanesia, an area that is rich in the Western ethnographic imaginary through the influential work of Bronislaw Malinowski, but less so in the historical archival one. Swan introduces an analytic of blindness to show the ways in which the Indonesia-led Bandung Conference of 1955 overshadowed, or rather blinded, Black power movements to Indonesia's aggressive imperial role in the Pacific, discriminating against a Black Melanesian population in West Papua in the aftermath of Dutch colonialism. Blindness becomes an active component of archival amnesia—or, rather, political not-seeing (by historians and activists alike) to what happened to this marginalized group—that persists in the ongoing decolonizing moment. Swan unearths new archival materials

and brings forth fresh dissenting voices. This minority Black Asian diaspora, despite having made alliances across multiple Black diasporas (with Senghor's Senegal and Black internationalism), continues to struggle for political self-determination, employing the political discourses of Blackness and Oceanic belonging against the Global South powerhouse that is Indonesia.

Interest in the sometimes unequal encounters within the Global South led us to develop a full section on China and Africa, which contends with the important economic and geopolitical dominance of China in the Global South. It is a nod to the contemporary, yes, but with serious ramifications for how we think about all kinds of national and nationalist histories. The China in Africa forum showcases a variety of contact zones between China and the Global South. Ronald Po revisits the ambitious idea of the "China dream" in the Global South from a twenty-first century perspective. He looks at its slow buildup and expanding role across Asia and Africa from three angles: historic, economic, and geostrategic (military). Historically, he showcases China's strong ties to Southeast Asia and South Asia via migration; economically, he takes on China's involvement in bankrolling infrastructural developments in the Global South; and finally, he focuses on the geostrategic by taking us on a tour of China's military build-up in three African nations—Sudan, Zimbabwe and Uganda. Phinneas Bbaala provides a more generalized overview of China's expanding ideological and infrastructural role in Africa (its *zouchuqu*, going out) policy that took root in 1971. That program has included membership in BRICS, support of liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, an anti-apartheid stance in South Africa, the building of the Tanzania-Zambia Rail line (TAZARA), and more recently, trade deals (of weapons and loans) with Zambia and the Congo. Bbaala reorients our thinking from looking at China's role as being of the Global South to now operating in the Global South. Shifting the scale, Mingwei Huang sets up two "China in Africa" ethnographic scenes from her recent fieldwork in Johannesburg. It is 2015, the self-declared "Year of China in South Africa," when she is working at China Mall in Johannesburg as a sales clerk in one of its many shops. South Africa and China's joint meetings, advertisements, and infrastructural investments fill in that cultural-economic landscape of the first scene, while the mysterious murder of a female Chinese trader, most likely by her Malawian workers, is the backdrop for the second. Both of these episodes capture the fraught, anxious, and intimate encounters between Africans employees and Chinese bosses that transform everyday lives and make us rethink China's increasingly "ungrounded" imperial role (following Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini 1997) in postcolonial Africa, as well as through more vertically oriented South-South engagements.<sup>9</sup>

The frame of encounter helps us think about gender and racial formations differently in and across the Global South. Michelle Moyd, for example, argues for redefining Black and Brown soldiers from the empire fighting in World War I as "Global South soldiers." That analytic makes the work of these soldiers and role

of empire in war visible. Global South thinking, she asserts, raises new questions about how violence brought subjects of different corners of empire together through war and enlarged the violence of conquest on African populations. Moyd's article productively challenges a Global South timeline that overlaps with decolonization while reiterating the entanglements we associate with the postcolonial: specifically, its imbrication with colonial epistemologies and violences. She suggests that there are Global South histories still to be written, but only if we are "willing to look." Moving into the field of biography, Muhammad Ali's recent death offers Sean Jacobs an opportunity to take up Moyd's cue and to revisit the politically complicated subject onto whom so much has been projected. Jacobs argues for seeing Ali's many and shifting perspectives on US imperialism and Third-World struggles as part of a necessary discussion on the vexed relationship between race and nationality. But he reminds us that contradictions, too, illuminate a particular historical moment and a life lived like many others: desirous, aspirational, and deeply aware. Unlike so much that has been written and said about Ali, Jacobs declines hero worship in favor of a fuller, though still appreciative, appraisal of the man.

Two other pieces in this collection stress the importance of seeing the imbrication of the local and the global a bit differently from the perspective of the Global South. Maurice Jr. M. Labelle takes up Lebanon's decolonization in the wake of World War II. Promised sovereignty at the end of the war, Lebanon instead found itself occupied by French colonial troops: *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The French did what Moyd describes in World War I: they used soldiers from one colony to secure another. Lebanese nationalists invoked European imperial racial thinking and hierarchies inherited from Lebanon's Ottoman past to protest the French presence. By the same token, Lebanese nationalists racialized French occupation, describing it as uncivilized and retrograde. At the very moment decolonization undid racialized imperial hierarchies across North-South lines, some nationalist movements reinforced them between South-South locations. In a contrasting example, Sarah Vaughn's essay considers how the work of engineers to manage water in the "small state" of Guyana was, and continues to be, articulated vis-à-vis pressing issues such as climate change. Her careful ethnographic and historical analyses of debates on damming practices show the complicated relationship between colonialism and science. But an awareness of the half-life of that project of control (of lands, of peoples, of resources) and the need to adapt to a changing environment were also mobilized in an insurgent regionalism tied to decolonization, in order to develop the area on terms not entirely of colonial administrators' making.

### Mobile Artifacts

Contributors to this issue attend to various kinds of objects, highlighting the significance of interdisciplinary inquiry. Emily Callaci looks at Depo-Provera, a highly mobile form of biomedical contraception, or what she refers to as a "traveling tech-

nology of the Global South.” Beginning in the 1970s, Depo-Provera use came to embody distinctions between the Global North and South: banned in the United States, it was promoted as a tool of population control in the developing world. Ignoring the legacies of colonialism, aid agencies and the population establishment naturalized poor health and reproductive conditions in the Global South. Callaci explores three sets of actors working at different scales—the “population establishment,” transnationally organized anti-Depo-Provera activists, and “local gatekeepers.” Tracing multiple iterations of this biomedical contraceptive, including its uses and the discourses and debates around it, Callaci argues that the Global South as an open concept enables connections of solidarity, vulnerability, and dispossession to be traced at once.

Three short pieces additionally focus on cultural products and their itineraries. Pahole Sookkasikon looks at Thai country singer Pumpuang Duangjan’s transformative role in the genre. Her music—its sounds, theme, and “forlorn lyrics”—emphasized quotidian elements of gender, class, and location that pressed against the patriarchal, monarchical, and Bangkok-centric construction of Thai identity. Duangjan embodied the struggles of migrant rural women in the city who shored up this emerging Global South economy. Sarah Van Beurden explores how the modernism of the Zairoise avant-garde makes visible previously hidden Global South networks: not just links between artistic movements, but between news forms of authoritarianisms, like that of Mobutu and Communist China, where artists found enduring markets. Her work raises the intriguing possibility of studying connections between novel aesthetic practices and transnational authoritarian governance as also productive of the Global South. This approach might help us think recent interventions in the global art world by Global South players like Angola and China. Keith Wagner looks at the Hollywood film *Total Recall* (2012) as an imagination of an urban “divided Anthropocene” Global South and the resistant, maybe even revolutionary, potentials therein. He offers the expression “Aesthetic Cooperation among Developing and Developed Countries” to underscore the aesthetic hybridity in cinematic North and South megacity spaces.

How might the Global South change how we think about the work we do as scholars and researchers? In the section “Historians, Geographers, and Activists at Work,” a group of contributors suggest the porous boundaries between academic disciplines. Jelmer Vos plumbs the forgotten archive of nineteenth-century Dutch-Angolan trading records to highlight Angolan coffee producers as consumers. This short piece underscores the temporary dominance of European traders in longer history of Angolan commerce, which today is focused on major manufacturers of the Global South. Aharon de Grassi produces a new artifact: a map of precolonial African paths. He urges us to reconsider the infrastructural significance of this fundamental human mode of social meaning making. Understanding old



paths as dynamic processes can brighten the possibilities for new political alliances. The Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective presents a similar manifesto, albeit academic: they advocate for collaborative work by historians to open up dispersed archives and employ digital humanities to bring nonstate transnational actors of the Global South into the historical record. Likewise working at the interface of activism and the academy, anthropologists Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange propose “thick solidarity” as a research methodology with much potential for traversing the fraught territory of Black-Asian solidarity in US racial politics.

Finally, in his Afterword entitled “Between Two Clarities,” Vijay Prashad charts the collision course between capitalism and the environment, in this instance how state-led Global South coalitions have promoted the interests of elites while small Pacific island states face the threat of complete territorial erasure. Prashad asks how we will answer the global challenge of putting the earth and human lives before capitalist growth and elite-centric development. This afterword presses on the crisis of the present where Global North and Global South are bound most tightly, yet where old political equations and new inequalities continue to fragment common cause. Giving visual force to Prashad’s clarion call are the photographs of Kiluanji Kia Henda. His images and text explore the birth, life, and death of a city in the desert in *A City Called Mirage*. The framing of construction at a building’s birth anticipates the void it contains at its death. Using Dubai as model, Angolan politicians have rebuilt Luanda, Kia Henda’s hometown, as a Dubai on the Atlantic in a post-war oil boom. Kia Henda’s work questions the value of this south-south exchange.

### Global South Futures

The Global South intrigues partly because its power of diction lies in the contemplation of the universal and the particular. While certainly far-reaching, this category also elevates the importance of the directional, of a set of places with a specific temporality. As editors who are positioned in both the Global North and the Global South, we cannot help but underscore how profoundly the dense dynamics of late capitalism are shared across a North-South divide yet continue to be shaped by the inequalities that have been formed and experienced in terms of that very opposition. The challenge, then, is to confront and acknowledge a shared history that is not flattening or simplifying but that retains a political coherence that offers ideological direction and enables political mobilization. To put it most directly: the recent emergence of autocratic-minded figures in the Global North like Donald Trump is part of a global political landscape with counterparts in India, the Philippines, and South Africa. The growing power of the Global South in the new world economy does not mean that Narendra Modi, Rodrigo Duterte, or Jacob Zuma can wreak the sort of political, military, economic and ecological damage that Trump can. Nonetheless, this political pattern of populist nativism led by flagrant demagoguery that

has quickly surfaced across the world over the past several years indicates that a common struggle must be forged. As many of the contributions in this issue show, such solidarities are possible, even if they have not always been fulfilled.

Considered together, the work of this volume exposes old and new linkages in the Global South and repositions what have been considered peripheral histories, which have often emerged in unexpected and sometimes hopeful moments, into the center of a constantly unfolding story of the world. To remap is to reveal and to take lessons from the South, and not only to rethink the North. It is to see the peoples of the Global South as living less in the shadow of the West, but rather as taking on innovative processes of place-making. Through this project there has been a commitment to make visible the possibilities that emerge even from bleak analyses of unequal power relations. Are we seeing the resurgence of a resilient state playing itself out in certain spaces of the Global South in new and insidious ways? Or are we witnessing a resurgence of grassroots social movements against the weakening apparatuses of the nation-state and against intensely globalized capital formations? Either way, we would like to think that both sets of conditions have been predicted in the exchanges and futures we offer here. The intervention of radical historians, we believe, should ultimately offer methods for negotiating complexity in moments of historical, political, and economic crisis, as so many of the works collected here do.

—Pamila Gupta, Christopher J. Lee, Marissa J. Moorman, and Sandhya Shukla

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## Notes

1. On these events, see, for example, Acharya and Tan, eds., *Bandung Revisited*; and Prashad, *The Poorer Nations*.
2. Prashad, *The Darker Nations*.
3. *Ibid.*, 11.
4. Prashad, *The Poorer Nations*, 10.
5. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
6. Connell, *Southern Theory*; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*; de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*.
7. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Morana, Dussel, and Jauregui, eds., *Coloniality at Large*.
8. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*. On subaltern studies, see, for example, Guha and Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies*; and Rodriguez and Lopez, eds., *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*.
9. Ong and Nonini, eds., *Ungrounded Empires*.

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