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Political Intervention for a Methodological Study of the Global South in International Politics

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Abstract: This article examines recent arguments about the centrality of the Global South in international politics. Many pundits and academic specialists engaged with the idea do not offer a methodological way of investigating the material transformations the Global South states brought about. It examines five methodological ways of studying the Global South. Different methodological ways of studying the Global South see the world differently and thus bring different policies and practical solutions. However, any investigation of the Global South that serves a political purpose must also be attentive to the reigning dominance of neo-positivist methodologies in the debates on rules-based international order, including that of big data in the context of the rise of Machine Learning to decipher significant trends on the challenges of the decline of the West. Thus, critical methodologies in studying the Global South, one that aims to bring an alternative political project focused on equality and justice, must challenge the dominance of neo-positivism on its turf. The article offers two tentative reflections on critical methodologies capitalising on big data.

Keywords: Global South, Research Methodology, Scientific Modernity, Subversion, Materialism.

The Global South has become an important locus of debate in recent years in international politics. From popular reports, pundits, and media analysts to academics engage in articulating the centrality or dismissing the utility of the Global South states. Some focus on the decline of the West and show why the Global South – and some ambitious leaders of the Global South, such as India, Brazil, or South Africa will play a central role in global transformation. Here, conversations on the future of the rules-based international order take centre stage.

For John Ikenberry, the Global South states are swing stages that can play a central role in tilting the balance either towards progress and democratic order or towards autocracy and disorder (Ikenberry, 2018, 2024). For Charles Kupchan, the complexities of multiple modernities mean that the West must devise a *modus vivendi* with the Global South instead of

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arrogating its liberal ideologies upon the rest (Kupchan, 2012). Many other academics assert the continuous force of Western hegemony and the unprecedented nature of American power and treat the discussion of the Global South as a sideshow, if not irrelevant. Here, conversations centre on the future of American power, its military and economic dominance, and the limits of any Global South states or its coalitions to challenge the West in an era of weaponised interdependence (Beckley, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2019; Drezner et al., 2021). However, another set of questions that connects these different camps – the subject of this article – has to do with an appropriate methodological way of studying the Global South (Aradau & Huysmans, 2014).

What is it to approach the Global South through method and methodology? One of the important methodological questions concerning the Global South is how to show its political relevance and centrality in international politics. The dominant accounts of how the Global South states have increased their wealth and material transformation do not automatically reveal political influence and judgment. Does the material transformation of Global South states such as Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, India, and Indonesia mean they wield more influence in world politics? Or does their influence arise because of the perspectives and expectations among multiple interlocutors speculating on the prospective transformation of their material condition to power and influence on the world stage? Does the political influence of some Global South states arise because of the ideational thrust of their difference or due to the similarities with the West? The political disagreements on the role of the Global South have a normative component – on what one ought to do in the light of historical injustices against these states. How do the histories and traumas of Western imperialism and colonialism impact the collection and use of data on the Global South? These methodological questions continue to stalk the study of the Global South in international politics.

Different methodological choices made during investigations offer distinctive answers, not objective answers, to the questions about the Global South (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009). This applies to the study of the Global South. This article shows five different ways of methodologically studying the Global South: neo-positivist, interpretive, postcolonial, Marxist, and poststructuralist analysis. Scholars use these different methods to study the world and the impact of the Global South on international politics. Increasingly, scholars rely on a multi-methods approach that uses neo-positivist descriptive statistics backed up by process tracing or interpretive analysis. The answers and “truths” offered through these choices differ in political judgments and perspectives on the Global South. This also brings a complex diversity to understanding the world. However, the condition of scientific modernity and knowledge generation has a hegemonic

influence on the right and wrong answers that arise from this diversity (Allan, 2018; Also see Curini & Franzese, 2020). This has important implications for studying the Global South in the age of Machine Learning or Artificial Intelligence (AI). Here, neo-positivist methodologies take commonplace priority rather than other critical methods to study the Global South. It raises a political question on how to methodologically reorient the study to keep in line with these new techniques of extracting data and information from the world.

In this article, I make two interrelated arguments. First, a critical focus on the Global South necessitates that scholars embrace AI and big data to articulate an explicitly political project on world order. Here, the methodological choice requires using relevant neo-positivist methods, data, and analysis to *overturn* and *subvert* their findings. In other words, a political study of the Global South requires a strategic collaboration with existing “representational” methods of studying the world to offer anti-representational critiques (Doty, 1996). Critical methodological accounts in the past have distanced themselves from neo-positivist methods for political reasons. With the recent advancements in AI, I argue for a reversal where a strategic collaboration with neo-positivist methods to subvert it must be the new political orientation of critical methods to study the Global South. Second, I argue that post-structural and identity-based explanations of the Global South that rest on construction and deconstruction should give way to materialist, class, and caste-based accounts. The political choice in the methodological study of the Global South requires transcending the identity and cultural wars of the present times and foregrounding a critical method that returns to the material realities of the world (Lundborg & Vaughan-Williams, 2015).

The structure of the article is as follows. First, I outline the centrality of the Global South and the five methodological ways of dissecting its role in international politics. Second, I show the massive transformation of international politics in the light of technological advancements, polycrises, and Anthropogenic climate change that fundamentally imposes a different burden upon the Global South. This necessitates methodological innovations and a political position to study the Global South. Third, I outline the political position for a critical study of the Global South that works within neopositivist methods to subvert it. It concludes with reflections on avenues for further research.

Global South and Diverse Methodologies in Motion

The focus on the Global South represents the changing conditions of the liberal international order that many recognise as fundamentally unjust. Many works in International Relations (IR) recognise the necessity of studying the Global South (Grovo, 2011; Mignolo, 2011). However, defining it takes work. Like the erstwhile past called the “Third World” –

which Vijay Prashad diagnosed as a project rather than a geography – the Global South is also a political project (Prashad, 2008). It has economic, sociological, and geopolitical dimensions. The economic focus on the Global South draws from the debates on unequal world systems (Wallerstein, 2011). The Global South is then an economic project in the sense that these states are at the receiving end of the crisis of Global Capitalism, and their objective is to address the problems of economic and wealth inequalities to bring greater prosperity and economic development to their countries (Dados & Connell, 2012; Escobar, 1995).

The sociological focus of the Global South is attentive to alternative ways of looking at the world. In this sense, Global South is a sociological project that aims to bring these alternative and non-mainstream views that predominantly focus on the poor, silenced, and unheard masses in the world system (Braveboy-Wagner, 2016; Prashad, 2014; Tickner & Smith, 2020). This sociological project also focuses on the view that the Global South is a political project where radical resistance to the mainstream ways of looking at the world takes shape (Mahler, 2018). Scholars point out that there is a “South” in the rich North – for example, Baltimore in the United States or Colchester in the United Kingdom, where people live in a more difficult situation than in many “failed states” in world politics (Mahler, 2015). Similarly, these scholars point out that there is a “North” in the poor Global South states – for example, some transnational elites from Mumbai in India or Sao Paulo in Brazil have living standards and a lifestyle that outperforms the lavish lives of many wealthy entrepreneurs in the United States (Parmar, 2018).

Moreover, a geopolitical focus on the Global South is attentive to the crisis of global governance, continuous wars, Anthropogenic climate change, and technological revolution that creates increased survival burdens for these states. A geopolitical project, therefore, strategically seeks a high table in global governance and organises civil society and transnational activism and movements to help augment their voices to address their burdens (Anievas & Nişancıoğlu, 2015). Some Global South states are better at these geopolitical projects than others. For example, in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, India was able to play its strategic role to secure cheap energy imports from Russia better than other states. These three ideas are not exhaustive by any means. However, they show that studying the Global South means paying attention to structural and agential inequalities and injustices as the fundamental problem in international politics. There are at least five methodological ways to study the Global South (Jackson, 2010; for a broader discussion, see Curini & Franzese, 2020). Many of these methodologies overlap, and the following analytical way of examining these methodologies only offers a first cut to see the diversities in dissecting the Global South.

Neo-positivist Approach

In International Relations (IR), the neo-positivist approach is the common way of studying the politics of the Global South (Jackson, 2010). Any neo-positivist research aims to study the world through falsification, not verification, by testing different hypotheses against the objective world. The analyst presents these hypotheses scientifically in the sense that they are grounded in experience rather than speculation, and different hypotheses are falsified through empirical analysis. Most scholars using this methodology use empirical analysis in the form of statistics, quantitative data, and methods also to generate generalisable knowledge about political phenomena. This approach assumes that political reality can be objectively observed, measured, and analysed using scientific techniques like those used in the natural sciences. Neo-positivists aim to identify patterns, correlations, and causal relationships.

A neo-positivist method of studying the Global South focuses on data about the military and economic inequalities between the West and the rest (Park, 2012). Alternatively, gather systematic data on transactions within and across state borders or study the behavior of Northern and Southern actors that are identifiable and measurable. The objective might also extend from a correlational analysis to study if the hypothesis about the workings of Global South states shows a causal account of the world. For example, large-N cross-national studies to determine the factors contributing to the underdevelopment and poverty in Global South states or using econometric models to assess the impact of foreign aid on economic growth is the most preferred way of neo-positivist analysis. However, neopositivist accounts of the Global South states focus on measurable aspects of historical, cultural, and social issues and sideline the normative issues that affect the Global South states. The neo-positivist focus on generalizability and quantification eliminates the diverse experiences of injustices of the Global South states and thus takes the three political projects – economic, sociological, and geopolitical – at face value rather than its deeper normative dimension.

Interpretive Hermeneutic Analysis

Interpretive hermeneutic analysis is a methodological approach that focuses on the meanings that political actors in the Global South bring to bear in the world and interpret their actions, institutions, and environments (On general interpretivist debate see Bevir, 2016; Braveboy-Wagner, 2016). Rooted in the hermeneutic tradition, this approach argues that political phenomena cannot be fully understood through empirical observation alone but require a deeper engagement with the subjective experiences and cultural contexts of those involved. A contextual investigation involves carefully interpreting texts, speeches, and other forms of communication to uncover the underlying meanings and

intentions of political actors. In studying the Global South, scholars using this approach might focus on how local political leaders, social movements, or ordinary citizens understand concepts like poverty, underdevelopment, or crises in their own cultural and historical contexts (Mbembe, 1992; Rajagopal, 2003; Calhoun, 1993). With IR, a constructivist study of interpretations of Southern actors examines how their dispositions, including identity and culture, influence the meaning they accord to manage the hierarchical international order (Hacking, 1999; James et al., 2018). In the contingent world, the shifting meaning held by political actors in their communications and interactions makes for a shifting meaning of the Global South in world politics (Habermas, 2014). Thus, the meaning accorded to democracy, human rights, or warfare changed in different historical periods. As constructivists are quick to reckon, ideas like the Global South are subject to interpretive battles.

Postcolonial Psycho-Analysis and Trauma of Colonialism

The postcolonial psycho-analytic approach focuses on the psychological and emotional legacies of colonialism (Nandy, 1983; Bhabha, 1994, 2003). Focusing on the Global South, such methodologies draw on various understandings of "Othering", including through psychoanalytic theories (Fanon, 1966; Said, 1978, 1993). This methodology seeks to understand how colonial violence, exploitation, and oppression have shaped the identities, psyches, and social relations of formerly colonised peoples (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006; Chatterjee & Menon, 2010; The classic subaltern studies follow from a postcolonial method Guha, 1998). This approach emphasises the importance of understanding the trauma of colonialism as a central factor influencing contemporary political life in the Global South. Scholars employing this approach analyse how colonial experiences of domination and resistance continue to manifest in the collective unconscious of postcolonial societies, shaping political behaviour, social movements, and state policies. Recently, a focus on ontological insecurity in IR, for example, focuses on the collective trauma of colonial violence and its impact on the (auto)biographical narrative of national identity, cultural memory, or inter-ethnic conflict (Chacko, 2014; Zarakol, 2011; Browning & Joenniemi, 2017).

Marxist Account of Transnational Capital

A Marxist methodology for studying the politics of the Global South emphasises the role of transnational capital and class struggle in shaping political and economic outcomes (Matin, 2007; Anievas & Nişancıoğlu, 2015). Marxist scholars argue that the Global South cannot be understood in isolation from the global capitalist system, which perpetuates exploitation and inequality through mechanisms such as imperialism, neo-colonialism, and international trade. Marxist methodologies focus on analysing the dynamics of capital accumulation, class relations, and state

power in the Global South (Panitch & Gindin, 2013). This approach often involves a critique of how global capitalism reinforces underdevelopment and dependency in these regions, often through the extraction of natural resources, exploitation of labour, and imposition of neoliberal policies by international financial institutions. Many studies of transnational corporations and global financial institutions show the impact it has on the economies of developing countries, shaping their political systems and social structures in ways that perpetuate inequalities. As intermediaries and collaborators with global capital, the local elites play an important role in exploitation and domination (Domingues, 2012; Moyn, 2022).

Poststructuralist Analysis

Poststructuralist approaches to studying politics draw on the works of thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault to analyse how power, knowledge, and discourse shape political realities (Derrida, 1985; Foucault, 1982; Edkins, 1999). It is applied to the study of the Global South. This methodology is based on the idea that meaning is constructed through a larger discourse rather than inter-subjective language games and that this discourse involves power that puts all interlocutors – both North and South – to a particular way of engaging with the world (Angermuller et al., 2014). Deconstruction, a key poststructuralist technique, involves critically examining texts, discourses, and representations to reveal the assumptions, contradictions, and power dynamics embedded within them (Arfi, 2012). In the context of studying the Global South, a poststructuralist methodology focuses on how Western discourses legitimise a very idea and distinction between the Global North and South. As feminist scholarship using poststructuralism and deconstruction shows, there is no objective truth about this discourse, but it wields power over all interlocutors and conditions the realms of possibilities (Goikoetxea & Clua-Losada, 2024; Haeney, 2017; Spivak, 1988). Even if the Global South could resist or subvert these dominant discourses, they often work within a force field of these discourses. Agents creating alternative narratives and forms of knowledge face an uphill task against the dominant discourse.

All these different methodologies to study the Global South offer one way to make sense of the growing complexities of international politics. Each has a valid claim about the world. Some dissect the Global South to study significant trends and causal relations (neo-positivism); some examine the intentions and meanings of political actors in the Global South and analyse their interactions in line with identity, culture, and intertextuality (interpretive hermeneutics); some others push these interpretations to show the impact of Western empire and imperialism on the conduct and practices of states (postcolonial); and in this way have closer affinity with material inequalities, exploitation, and domination of transnational elites (Marxist analysis). Some others offer a thoroughly deconstructionist idea

to focus on the power embedded in discourse, such as the Global South, and as feminist and gender studies scholars show, such power serves some purpose in keeping the hierarchy in one way rather than the other.

Scientific Modernity, Dystopia, and the Global South

All these methodological interventions now face a turbocharged world. In recent years, the world has witnessed a series of developments in continuous wars, improvements in warfare, technological developments, culture wars, and hyper-polarisation due to the influence of social media. Such developments have created new challenges, including methodological challenges, and exacerbated the limits of existing ones, particularly for the Global South. I will briefly look at three of these developments to argue for a political methodology based on materialist realities that are attentive to concrete problems of class and caste in international politics. These three developments are also selective in the sense that they arise from a distinct normative commitment in the face of scientific modernity, which studies from the perspective of Indigenous cultures have long pointed out (Ballantyne et al., 2020)

The first is the rapid development of AI technology that has revolutionised industries, economies, and societies worldwide with severe material consequences and disruption (Crawford, 2021). One of the primary burdens imposed by AI on the Global South is the risk of deepening economic inequality, augmenting the environmental crisis, and the perpetuation of (crony) capitalism that remains unhinged against the poor. The critique of the AI revolution in its neoliberal variant as an innovative and competitive project often focuses on the monopolistic agenda of big technology firms. However, the idea is not that abandoning monopolistic practices can help make the AI revolution better serve the world. Instead, the AI revolution has created a new turning point where a dystopic reality of offering solutions through big data is searching for problems in an already disorderly world. Innovations and creativity in AI thrive on problems, whereas the uncertainties of the world cannot afford to have existing problems of inequalities and injustices unresolved, let alone face newer challenges due to the interconnection between technologies and disorder. The problems of data collection, acquisition, “data colonialism,” and AI regulation are all well documented in the literature (Adams, 2021; Manheim & Kaplan, 2019). The bigger problem in the AI revolution is a new form of empire that is also uncontrollable and unaccountable.

The second is the global intersections of multiple crises simultaneously – what Adam Tooze calls polycrises (Tooze, 2020) (Snyder & Diesing, 2015). Many crises, such as economic downturns, political instability and assaults on democracy, health and pandemic woes, and social unrest, intersect and interact in ways that exacerbate their individual impacts. The Global South face the poly-crises first as victims whose tragic bare life

becomes dispensable and second as providers of data points so that others can devise mechanisms for survival. In this sense, their economic dependence, weak governance, and social inequalities serve both to dispense and discard the Global South and use these disposals for the betterment of others. One recent example of a polycrisis disproportionately affecting the Global South is the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered a cascade of economic, social, and political challenges. Despite the unprecedented death of people, the patents on the vaccines were not eliminated. Thus, much of the structural consequence of the pandemic was a continuation of the past and had a long-lasting influence on the Global South rather than the North. In several Global South states such as Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Venezuela, the continuing political crises have intersected with economic challenges and the pandemic, creating a complex web of crises that are difficult to disentangle and address. Furthermore, women in the Global South faced increased domestic burdens, reduced access to healthcare and education, and heightened risks of gender-based violence. Similarly, marginalised communities, such as the Indigenous peoples and refugees, have been disproportionately affected by both the direct and indirect impacts of polycrisis, exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

The third big challenge is the problem of Anthropogenic climate change (Chakrabarty, 2021). The impact of Anthropogenic Climate Change is unevenly distributed, with the Global South bearing a disproportionate share of the burden. This is due to a combination of geographical, economic, and social factors that make these regions more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and shifts in agricultural productivity. Countries in the Global South are particularly susceptible to climate-related disasters, including droughts, floods, hurricanes, and heatwaves, which are becoming more frequent and intense due to global warming. These disasters can have devastating effects on communities, destroying homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods. For example, countries like Bangladesh, Mozambique, and the Philippines have experienced increasingly severe cyclones and floods that displace millions of people, damage critical infrastructure, and undermine economic development. In addition to immediate, acute impacts, climate change also poses long-term risks to food security, water availability, and public health in the Global South. This is particularly concerning for countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where a large proportion of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. Water scarcity, exacerbated by climate change, can also lead to conflicts over resources, as seen in regions like the Middle East and North Africa.

Furthermore, the effects of climate change are often compounded by existing social and economic inequalities. Poor communities, already marginalised and with limited access to resources and services, are often

the most affected by climate-related shocks. For instance, informal settlements in urban areas are particularly vulnerable to flooding and heat waves. At the same time, rural communities with limited access to healthcare and clean water are more susceptible to climate-related health risks.

These three challenges – by no means exhaustive – create a complex and multifaceted burden for the Global South. These challenges are interconnected and also unpredictable, and the ability to address one challenge is often constrained by the presence of others. For example, the AI revolution has a severe environmental impact that augments the economic and social disruptions caused by Anthropogenic climate-related disasters. These intersections create migration and refugee crises that become a tool for populism (climate change denial, for example), increase political polarisation, and contribute to crises of democracy, political instability, and conflict. Mere financial and technical support for adaptation and mitigation efforts is also unhelpful. AI technologies and digital infrastructures, by their very feature based on perfecting big data, require experimenting on the bare lives of people in the Global South. Perversely, the rhetoric of the promise of AI and its equitable access justifies these experiments, thereby perpetuating economic inequality, political instability, and social exclusion. Thus, addressing these challenges requires a political commitment. The research on the Global South also requires foregrounding a political focus on research methodology committed to social justice, equity, and global solidarity.

Political Methodologies to Study the Global South

Any research on the Global South has an implicit political purpose that must be made explicit. However, bringing these political aspects to the foreground creates severe methodological challenges. Part of the problem is the concern for objective and scientific analysis that does not look like pursuing the partisan agenda of any government. Another part of this reluctance to make political concern on the Global South explicit is the countervailing politics in American hegemony, which rarely funds or appreciates projects that aim to challenge the status quo. My plea to focus on the political aspect of the research methodology is not to request researchers to play the part of propaganda of a political party. We should be cautious about partisan agendas that revisit the past for political purposes. There is still an appropriate way of returning to this politics by standing on the representational shoulder of neo-positivism to subvert it as well as focusing on the material aspects of the struggles of the Global South that emphasise class and caste rather than identity wars as primary factors for a progressive and rational reconstruction of history. Let me elaborate.

The first reason to build on the powers and strengths of neo-positivism rests on a rather basic truism of our scientific modernity. It is the

understanding that our world relies on science and scientific methodology, and social sciences treat physics and mathematics as gold standards of proper research despite criticisms in multifarious ways. Even decades of critical theory, poststructuralism, and postmodern debates have been unable to challenge the fundamental textbook commitments to scientific rigour, testing, falsification, and analysis. (Kuhn & Hacking, 2012; For the renewed focus on science in IR see Allan, 2018). Although the diversity of recent scientific debates and its focus on Quantum Physics does show concerns with erstwhile challenges to science, it is still a long way when traditional and Indigenous knowledge structures get similar treatment as Western science. Even during the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s of the Cold War, when multiple knowledge systems competed, both the superpowers rested on Western modernity, excluding the rest. However, more importantly, in the intervening years, many non-European states have made far more advancements in scientific research and development. Western science itself is globalised as universal in a broadly uncontested manner. The advancements in AI have only turbocharged this powerful hegemonic embrace of universal science that refuses any spatial, temporal, or cultural understandings of other sciences. This means all social sciences – as science – cannot escape the powerful embrace of the most commonplace scientific method based on neo-positivism. In the past, critical researchers rejected the ideological project of science and scientific methodologies because it exterminated millions of people around the world. Such rejections seem no longer viable, justifiable, or necessary anymore. The world is in a deep crisis and disorder that requires a radical method of subversion (Davidson & da Silva, 2022; McKeil, 2022)

A political subversion must be attentive to the critical and postcolonial scholarship, whose fundamental commitment to studying the Global South is the problem of inequalities and injustices and the domination of the West in its material and ideational aspects. Such work has shown that political commitment is political in the left-wing sense of according importance to equality, justice, and freedom from oppression. Its normative commitment is the production of a less hierarchical world, which offers avenues for the poor and the underdeveloped to improve their life. Thus, a political commitment to the Global South must be attentive to its postcolonial predecessors. However, it cannot be oblivious to power, diplomacy, and strategy. The early postcolonial works spent an inordinate amount of time deconstructing works of literature and art with endless debates on the subjectivities – ignoring the material and historical politics of empire and imperial formations in the present (For this critique, see Stoler, 2016). The new political commitment to study the Global South must be thoroughly strategic. It requires a commitment to the normative commitment of equality and justice and a subversive route towards achieving those goals.

This means methodologically making use of neo-positivist research on the Global South. Many such important works from policy think tanks, universities, business corporations such as risk analysis firms, multinational corporations, and research from government bodies mostly – and sometimes only – rely on neopositivist methodologies. A political methodology requires using this research and its representational ideals on the Global South to subvert its findings and recommendations. Such strength of such subversions can come only from the ideological strength and commitment to the progressive visions of the Global South (For views, see Robinson, 2000; Mignolo, 2021).

A second aspect of the political commitment to the Global South requires foregrounding the material realities of Global South states. Alongside important discussions on the ideational aspects of Western dominance, including its colonisation of the minds, there is a continuous material disadvantage of the people in the Global South. These material conditions include abject poverty, lack of sanitary facilities, schools, and classrooms, and the direct conditions of national and local infrastructures for transportation, communication, and agricultural productivity. Despite the debates about the moral and cultural lack of the West and the spiritual power and civilisational glories of the East, the material realities stare right in front of our faces. Such material inequalities exist even when descriptive statistics show that China's GDP will outmatch America's by 2027; China is the leading foreign purchaser of American treasuries, holding about 1.2 trillion in the US. However, not all Global South states can replicate the juggernaut growth of China. The extrapolation from China's economic development to the "rise of the rest" situation does not wash. Even within China, many scholars believe that there are widespread inequalities, corruption, and development problems that do not come to light due to the strict censorship of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Rapley, 2023).

The Global South states, in general, still have a long way to go. The so-called Thucydides trap and the debates on the coming war between China and the US forestall adequate attention to these other developing states. Part of the problem is that the military-industrial-academic complex in the United States benefits from the China threat theory. It then subsumes all other issues facing the Global South states with the US-China strategic competition or plainly ignores it. Under these global conditions, a proper political perspective requires foregrounding the material realities of the Global South states rather than partaking in the ideological debates on the future of the West. Thus, returning to the materialities of our world involves focusing on the lived experience and realities of states and people in the Global South. A research methodology that does advance the lived realities of the Global South states, under the grab of objectivity, fails to stand scrutiny. However, when a research methodology coopts the neopositivist method with material attention to the Global South, we have

a solid grounding for studying the Global South with a purpose.

In this light, race and class are two common denominators contributing to the unequal material realities of the Global South states. Important research on racial capitalism shows that many of the fundamentally taken-for-granted assumptions of the free hand of the market are deeply embedded with racial features that tilt the political economy in the direction of the White-Western world. These racial features are part of the precapitalist division in Europe or between slavery and capitalist development (Go, 2021). Asking more profound questions about the perverse racial side of capitalism is to bring material inequalities to the foreground. Similarly, caste in India and "castist" features among different class members in Asia, Africa, and Latin America show that our modern world has not (or never) moved away from deprecating some humans as unworthy and uncivilised (Rao, 2018; Stroud, 2023). For lower caste members, their inability to be recognised as humans in the first place has given rise to manifold predicaments, erasures, and problems that have concrete material manifestations. A political and materialist research methodology that aims to study the Global South must be attentive to the manifold problems of race, caste, and class in world politics. In this sense, there remains a commonality of this method to Marxist and Neo-Marxist analysis. However, unlike Marxist analysis of the past that offered a teleological view of development and homogenised every country in the name of class struggle and revolution, the newer goals – translated into explicit research methodology – require attention to interconnections and diversities that are layered over and over with different problems. It moves beyond identity and culture wars and focuses on the material realities of the Global South states.

Conclusion

This article focused on offering an explicitly political project in research methodologies focused on the Global South. Part of the problem is that the diversity of research methodologies in dissecting the world shows divergent ways of looking at the world. This undermines the fundamental challenge of inequalities and injustices the Global South states face. Furthermore, the recent technological advancements, in the form of AI revolution, anthropogenic climate change, and political polarisation, mean that traditional methodologies siloed in different world views cannot work. After articulating five common methodologies in studying the Global South, this article called for an explicitly political methodology that uses neo-positivist research attuned to scientific modernity but one that subverts this representational perspective for far more progressive ends.

Furthermore, it argued for a political research methodology on the Global South that is materialist and attentive to race, caste, and class issues and its manifold material implications in the world. Further research on

methodologies should focus on how Indigenous knowledge networks from Asia, Africa, and the Americas can enable us to bring this political project up front by subverting scientism from within. If a proper study of Global South is to have cash value, in its pragmatic sense, then an explicitly political goal to study these states to address inequalities and injustices is perhaps one way to go forward.

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