CHAPTER SIX

MOBILISING BRAZIL AS ‘SIGNIFICANT OTHER’ IN THE FIGHT FOR HIV/AIDS TREATMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE TREATMENT ACTION CAMPAIGN (TAC) AND ITS GLOBAL ALLIES

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The globalization of politics is not a one-way street. If relations of rule and systems of exploitation have become transnational, so have forms of resistance ... (Ferguson 2006: 109).

Abstract

This chapter examines how a local South African HIV/AIDS NGO negotiated an emerging multipolar world and turned for inspiration and support to Brazil, a ‘significant other’ in the global fight against HIV/AIDS due to its early model for universal access to AIDS medication funded by the state. The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) mobilised the Brazilian government, NGOs like Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), and a host of activist organisations to ensure that ordinary South Africans could access life-saving medication. At the same time it meant to demonstrate to the South African government that a universal AIDS medication programme was a viable solution in South Africa also, even in resource-poor settings. In the process, the TAC became a valuable partner for Brazil and other global allies because it inspired the global campaign for treatment access and demonstrated how being locally rooted could be married with global action. Eventually Brazil, TAC, and others in the transnational activist HIV/AIDS network even managed to positively influence the Doha Declaration in terms of trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS), which made it possible to distribute generic medication for public health emergencies.
Introduction

In the second decade of the 21st century, the prominent role of China in Africa is hotly debated. Without denying the importance of this development, this chapter aims to shift focus to another emergent actor in Africa: Brazil. By focusing on the first decade of the 21st century and the fight against HIV/AIDS in South Africa, the role of Brazil is examined. This is done through the lens of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) – the most prominent HIV/AIDS organisation in South Africa and also a global actor – which vigorously battled the South African government that refused to establish a universal HIV/AIDS treatment programme. The TAC negotiated an emerging multipolar world and turned for inspiration and support to Brazil, a global model for universal access to publicly financed antiretroviral therapy (ART)¹ and at the same time a dominant actor in striving to strengthen the position of the Global South through improved South-South links and coalitions.

In the last two decades, Brazil seems to have shed its veil of modesty and transformed from a relatively humble actor to a much more dominant player on the global level. Although nearly everyone is aware of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) initiative, countervailing the power of the Global North, the recent IBSA initiative, also known as the G3, is less well known. According to Arkhangelskaya, India, Brazil and South Africa formed the India, Brazil and South Africa Dialogue Forum in 2003, with the aim to promote South-South cooperation “in the spirit of the 1955 Bandung Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement” (2010: 1). Its establishment is described by Celso Amorim (2010: 231), Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time under popular President Lula da Silva:

On President Lula’s second day in office, I hosted Minister Nkosazana Zuma of South Africa and she raised the need for new mechanisms of coordination among some major countries of the South. Having gone through ... so many failed attempts of establishing such groups, ... I suggested we should try something relatively simple: a small group – only three countries – one in each continent of the South, all of them vibrant multiethnic, multicultural democracies, with an ever-increasing role in the world: India, South Africa and Brazil.

¹ The drugs that suppress the HI virus in a HIV-positive patient and prevent the patient becoming ill with full-blown AIDS.