

Dakar 1972

Recovering IPE's Anti-colonial Moment¹

Felipe Antunes de Oliveira and Ingrid Harvold Kvangraven

This chapter attempts to reclaim a neglected international political economy (IPE) perspective. Emerging in parallel with Global North mainstream IPE, dependency theory encountered the same disruptive global conditions and tackled many of the same problems that led to the establishment of IPE in the 1970s. We argue that from the start the dependency tradition offered insightful and policy-relevant ways to think about IPE's main concerns, but from a Global South or “peripheral” vantage point. Returning to 1972, we place the forgotten Dakar Conference as one of the founding moments of IPE. Convened by Samir Amin, that conference brought together leading scholars and activists from Latin American and African countries. The meeting offers a glimpse into what IPE could have been, had the voices from the Global South been heard in the North.

According to Benjamin Cohen, arguably the most influential intellectual historian of IPE, the “IPE’s hall of fame” or the “Magnificent Seven” of IPE consists of Cox, Gilpin, Katzenstein, Keohane, Kindleberger, Krasner, and Strange. Cohen argued that “A more diverse group could hardly be imagined”.² We beg to differ. It is not only that this is an all-white group constituted by six men and one woman. They are

-
- 1 This is a shortened version of an article published in *Review of International Political Economy*.
 - 2 Cohen, Benjamin J. (2008). *International Political Economy: An Intellectual History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 8–9.

primarily concerned with the impact and policy implications of the 1970s multiple crises to and for the US and the UK. Their social position in elite universities limits what they can see. It also determines the style of the analysis and what counts as rigorous research methods. All the fundamental IPE themes look very different from the perspective of the global periphery. Instead of discussing the benefits and challenges of hegemonic stability, the key concern is how to resist imperialism.³ Instead of domestic sources of policy decisions, the relevant question is about the role of dominated–dominant classes in reproducing brutal capitalist super-exploitation.⁴ In a nutshell, “interdependence” looks much more like “dependence”.

Dependency Theory: A Neglected IPE Tradition

Susan Strange’s seminal “International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect”,⁵ arguably the founding “manifesto” of the British school of IPE,⁶ reveals a second case of neglect, beyond the one intended by the author. Not only is Strange exclusively concerned with how the challenges she identifies impact the world from a North Atlantic perspective, but all the authors she engages with are based in Global North institutions. The idea that something could be learned from scholars in the Global South also trying to bridge international economics and international politics does not seem to have occurred to Strange, at least at that moment.

A renewed engagement with dependency theory involves taking a fresh look at the contribution of original dependency scholars, as well as a renewed disposition to hear the new voices of scholars and activists

3 Furtado, Celso (1978). *A Hegemonia dos Estados Unidos e o Subdesenvolvimento da America Latina*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilizacao Brasileira.

4 Bamber, Vania (1978). *Teoria de La Dependencia – um Anticritica*. Mexico City: ERA.

5 Strange, Susan (1970). International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect. *International Affairs* 46(2), 304–315.

6 Cohen (2008), op. cit., 13.

from the global periphery. As with any body of scholarship, the definition of dependency theory is highly contested. The most influential definition of dependency may be that of Dos Santos, who sees it as “a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another”.⁷ This definition is broad enough to allow for many different theoretical and methodological entry points for explaining what being “conditioned by” means, how this conditioning has evolved, and how it persists. Dependency theorists saw the global economy as consisting of mutually interlinked social formations, which satisfies Hobson’s call for what non-Eurocentric theories in IPE must do.⁸ Of course, dependency theorists were writing long before this introspection began in IPE.

Considering the relative theoretical openness of dependency theory, with space for various forms of Marxism, structuralism, and institutionalism, it may be fruitful to think of the tradition as a Latin American school of IPE⁹ or as a research program,¹⁰ rather than a formalized theory. Despite the necessarily open-ended nature of these conceptual debates, there are two particularly consequential features of the dependency tradition in general that differentiate it from other IPE traditions: first, its commitment to theorizing from the South, and second, its commitment to a political project of social emancipation.

Dependency theory starts with the particularity of the periphery, theorizes about the persistence of uneven development, explores how

-
- 7 Dos Santos, Theotonio (1970). The Structure of Dependence. *American Economic Review* 60(2), 231.
 - 8 Hobson, John M. (2013). Part 1 – Revealing the Eurocentric Foundations of IPE: A Critical Historiography of the Discipline from the Classical to the Modern Era. *Review of International Political Economy* 20(5), 1024–1054.
 - 9 Reis, Nadine & Antunes de Oliveira, Felipe (2021). Peripheral Financialization and the Transformation of Dependency: A View from Latin America. *Review of International Political Economy*, online first; Tussie, Diana & Chagas-Bastos, Fabrício H. (2022). Misrecognised, Misfit and Misperceived: Why Not a Latin American School of IPE? *Review of International Political Economy*, online first.
 - 10 Kvangraven, Ingrid H. (2021). Beyond the Stereotype: Restating the Relevance of the Dependency Research Programme. *Development and Change* 52(1), 76–112.

colonialism historically shaped the global economy and the internal structures of dependent societies, and highlights the constraints countries in the periphery face.¹¹ While dependency theory is often associated with Latin America, strands of dependency theory emerged across the world, including in Africa and the Caribbean.¹² While most dependency theorists were preoccupied with building alternative theoretical and empirical frameworks for understanding development challenges from the vantage point of the periphery, be they related to financial constraints, unequal exchange, super-exploitation of labor, agrarian change, or technological development, some also made far-reaching theoretical contributions that challenged Eurocentric frameworks directly.¹³

The second key characteristic of dependency scholarship is its political commitment to and active engagement in material struggles against colonial and neo-colonial relations, as well as the fight against capitalist dictatorships in Latin America. This commitment ensured that dependency theorists very often participated in both policy and political debates at domestic and international levels, but also within social and revolutionary movements. Samir Amin, for example, advised governments and helped to build alternative institutions in Africa and globally, such as Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the World Social Forum.¹⁴ The Brazilian Marxist dependency theorist Ruy Mauro Marini was regarded as a source of intellectual inspiration for revolutionary movements in Brazil

11 Ibid.

12 Amin, Samir (1976). *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. Translated from French by Brain Pearce. New York: Monthly Review Press; Best, Lloyd (1968). A Model of Pure Plantation Economy. *Social and Economic Studies* 17(3), 283–326; Girvan, Norman (2005). W.A. Lewis, the Plantation School and Dependency: An Interpretation. *Social and Economic Studies* 54(3), 198–221; Rodney, Walter (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

13 E.g. Amin, Samir (1988). *Eurocentrism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

14 Kvangraven, Ingrid H. (2020). Samir Amin: A Pioneering Marxist and Third World Activist. *Development and Change* 51(2), 631–649.

and beyond.¹⁵ Dependency theorists across Africa and Latin America were keen to learn from each other and exchange ideas regarding both theoretical and political developments. As we shall see, the Dakar Conference in 1972 is an excellent example of this.

Before delving into the Dakar Conference, let us dwell for a moment on what is left of the dependency tradition in Africa. As in Latin America, radical scholarship certainly had its heyday on the continent in the 1960s and 1970s, before neoliberal reforms imposed through structural adjustment programs started to marginalize radical scholarship in universities.¹⁶ However, there has been a revival of the dependency tradition in recent years in Africa as well as globally. For example, the decolonial scholarship in Africa in recent years – with the work of Ndlovu-Gatsheni at the forefront – is arguably close theoretically to dependency theory, often drawing directly on Samir Amin and other African Marxists. Furthermore, there is a visible employment of dependency theory and radical anti-colonial Marxist theory across the continent, including among scholars that engage in debates about intellectual decolonization.¹⁷ Given the continued development of imperial structures and dynamics of underdevelopment, scholarship that employs the dependency tradition to make sense of local realities continues to yield incredibly rich and relevant insights.¹⁸ A case in point is the Special Issue of the *African*

-
- 15 Traspadini, Roberta & Stedile, João P. (eds.) (2011). *Ruy Mauro Marini – vida e obra*. São Paulo: Expressao Popular.
- 16 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo (2023). Intellectual Imperialism and Decolonisation in African Studies. *Third World Quarterly*. Early View.
- 17 E.g. Smith, Michael N. & Lester, Claire-Anne (2023). From 'Dependency' To 'Decoloniality'? The Enduring Relevance of Materialist Political Economy and the Problems of a 'Decolonial' Alternative. *Social Dynamics* 49(2), 196–219.
- 18 See for example Adesina, Jimi O. (2022). Variations in Postcolonial Imagination: Reflection on Senghor, Nyerere and Nkrumah. *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 47(1), 31–58; Ajl, Max (2021). The Hidden Legacy of Samir Amin: Delinking's Ecological Foundation. *Review of African Political Economy* 48(167), 82–101; Koddenbrock, Kai; Kvangraven, Ingrid H. & Sylla, Ndongo S. (2022). Beyond Financialisation: The Longue Durée of Finance and Production in the Global South. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 46(4), 703–733; Scott, Catherine (2021). The Gender of Dependency Theory: Women as Workers, from Neocolo-

Review of Political Economy on Samir Amin and dependency, released in 2022.

The Dakar Conference as Dependency Theory's Anti-Colonial Praxis

The 1972 global conference on “Strategies of Development – Africa Versus Latin America” in Dakar, Senegal (henceforth, the Dakar Conference) held global significance for dependency theory as a tradition as it was an explicit attempt to bring Latin American and African scholarship together. Unlike previous conferences and seminars in Latin America, this conference could not be dismissed by the emerging IPE scholars in the Global North for being narrowly focused on Latin American development issues as key global questions relevant to IPE were discussed with participants from Latin America, Africa, Europe, and North America. Considering its global lineup of contributions, the debates in Dakar were arguably much less provincial than Global North IPE debates being held at the same time. Our contention is that this conference, which so far has been ignored in intellectual histories of IPE, is a perfect example of the dependency tradition's double commitment; first, to theorizing from the global south; and second, to an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist political praxis.

Theorizing from the South

Key sources of information about the Dakar Conference are the memoirs of scholars such as Ruy Mauro Marini, Theotônio Dos Santos, Vania Bambirra, Andre Gunder Frank, and Samir Amin. Dos Santos, for

nialism in West Africa to the Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism. *Review of African Political Economy* 48(167), 66–81; Zajontz, Tim (2022). Debt, Distress, Dispossession: Towards a Critical Political Economy of Africa's Financial Dependency. *Review of African Political Economy* 49(171), 173–183.

instance, remembered the Dakar conference as a seminar that “put in contact a group of thinkers that continue to this day the debate about the world system”.¹⁹ He also mentions the conference in his 1978 *Imperialismo y Dependencia*, where he states that Samir Amin merged Latin American and African social thought in a productive manner.²⁰ Bambirra mentions the invitation to join the Dakar Conference in her memoirs, but unfortunately, she could not travel because she fell ill with pneumonia.²¹ For Marini, however, the conference was crucial. It gave him the chance to present his most important work, namely the *Dialectics of Dependency*, which he had just finished.²² Frank, in turn, remembers the conference as an attempt by Samir Amin to “introduce dependency theory in Africa”.²³ He also took the opportunity to “[smuggle] some nascent [World Systems] theory in as well”, with Samir Amin’s agreement.²⁴ The 41 participants in the Dakar Conference came from countries such as Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Egypt, Haiti, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo); but also from the UK, the USA, Germany, and France.²⁵ The documents and memoirs about the 1972 Dakar Conference reveal that its main protagonists were scholars from or based on the global periphery, primarily concerned with sharing among themselves their exciting new research ideas and theoretical perspectives. This is the first characteristic of dependency’s anti-colonial

-
- 19 Dos Santos, Theotonio (1994). *Memorial Acadêmico*. Niterói: Universidade Federal Fluminense, 46.
- 20 Dos Santos, Theotonio (2020 [1978]). *Imperialismo y Dependencia*. Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1074.
- 21 Bambirra, Vania (1991). *Memorial Acadêmico*. Universidade de Brasília, 43.
- 22 Marini, Ruy M. (2011). Dialectica da dependencia [1972]. In: Traspadini, Roberto & Stedile, João P. (eds.). *Ruy Mauro Marini – vida e obra*. São Paulo: Expressao Popular.
- 23 Frank, André G. (1991). *El subdesarrollo del desarrollum: Un ensayo autobiográfico*. Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 61.
- 24 Frank, André G. (2000). Immanuel and Me With-out Hyphen. *Journal of World Systems Research* 6(2), 217.
- 25 CLACSO (1972). *Boletín Clacso*. Enero-Feb-Marzo 1972. Ano 3, 14; Bayle, Paolo A. (2015). Connecting Souths. The Construction of Academic Networks between Latin America and Africa. *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 53, 153–170.

perspective. Thinking from the vantage points of particular spaces in the global periphery, relying on knowledge centers in the periphery, but with global ambitions.

Political Relevance

The second key characteristic of dependency – the political commitment to participating in policy-relevant debates, disputing the space with mainstream economic, political, and sociological perspectives – appears clearly in Samir Amin’s Concept Note about the Dakar Conference.²⁶ The Concept Note highlights the shortcomings of “pure economics” and builds on the “growing consciousness of the necessity of treating the problem of development from the historical, social, political, as well as economic angles if we want to trace the roots of underdevelopment and tackle them with a more scientific approach”.²⁷ Another example of this political commitment can be deduced from the content of the papers presented in Dakar. A quick look at the topics covered in the conference reveals its breadth and relevance. Reginald Green talked about the challenges of building self-reliant socialism in Tanzania. Frank presented two papers, one historical contribution about the role of Latin America and Africa in world history, and a second more policy-oriented paper, considering the consequences of the international division of labor on the dynamics of internal markets of dependent countries. Brian van Arkadie and Oscar Braun touched on a topic that became increasingly important in dependency scholarship, namely international trade and foreign investments. Rodolfo Stavenhagen presented his research about agrarian structures in Africa and Latin America. Finally, Samir Amin, Ruy Mauro Marini, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso presented what later became influential theoretical papers about the very concept of

26 United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) (1971). Conference on Strategies of Development – Africa Versus Latin America. *IDEP/ET/CS/2347-3*. Dakar, Senegal, 1.

27 Ibid.

dependency and the limitations of capital accumulation in the global periphery. What is particularly interesting in the context of the Dakar Conference's commitment to interdisciplinarity is that many of the topics discussed were explicitly daring to dispute the fields of economics and political economy at a moment when the mainstream was starting to become increasingly narrow.

In addition to its scholarly contribution to interdisciplinary development debates, the Dakar Conference arguably fulfilled an international political role. Many of those present at or involved with the Dakar Conference had also been practically involved in anti-colonial institution-building. The Dakar Conference can be seen, therefore, as an intellectual counterpart to the diplomatic efforts by so-called Third World countries to challenge the world order centered on economic institutions and international regimes dominated by so-called First World countries, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The Legacies of Dakar and Its Enduring Relevance

After the Dakar Conference, Amin was to go on to make major contributions to both exposing weaknesses in contemporary approaches to political economy and presenting a coherent alternative way of understanding the development of capitalism and its effects on the periphery, in particular through his seminal *Unequal Development* and *Eurocentrism*.²⁸ Ruy Mauro Marini is perhaps better known in the Global North for his theses on sub-imperialism,²⁹ which are particularly relevant today, in the context of the rise of emerging powers whose economic structures are deeply intertwined with US imperialism and the global capitalist economy at large. Other participants in the conference also went on to make major contributions to scholarship, policy, and political activism in a variety of ways. Several of the African participants took

28 Amin (1976), op. cit.; Amin (1988), op. cit.

29 Marini, Ruy M. (1972). Brazilian Subimperialism. *Monthly Review* 23(9), 14–24.

positions in academia or government. Frank continued to expand his research to world history and was instrumental in the development of world systems analysis. Stavenhagen went on to work on internal colonialism, taking racial inequalities as an important element.³⁰ What's more, the conference brought dependency theory to Germany, as Dieter Senghaas edited a book with several of the papers presented in Dakar translated into German.³¹ For Senghaas, the relative ignorance in the Global North about dependency theory was a result of what he called "scientific imperialism".³²

Our argument here is not that the Dakar Conference was a mythical and flawless moment of Global South scholarship, nor that all the papers presented in Dakar remain directly relevant to contemporary IPE debates. It is important to recognize the limits to the connections fostered through peripheral collaborations as well. The most obvious one is the clear gender imbalance in the conference, as Vania Bam-birra, the only woman invited (that we know of) could not actually attend. Furthermore, even within the Global South, there are some problematic intellectual hierarchies, with a much stronger appreciation of Latin American scholarship among African scholars than the other way around. Our call, therefore, is not for an uncritical or dogmatic repetition of either the Dakar Conference or the dependency theory canon. Instead, we value specific aspects of dependency theory reflected in the Dakar Conference, which can also be found in other anti-colonial and anti-imperialist scholarship that has been equally marginalized by IPE. In particular, the protagonism of Global South scholars, the deep interdisciplinarity of the debates, and the recognition of the necessity of approaching development "from historical, social, political, as well

30 Stavenhagen, Rodolfo (1965). Classes, Colonialism, and Acculturation. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 1(6), 53–77.

31 Senghaas, Dieter (1974). *Peripherer Kapitalismus Analysen über Abhängigkeit und Unterentwicklung herausgegeben*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

32 Ruvitso, Clara I. (2020). From the South to the North: The Circulation of Latin American Dependency Theories in the Federal Republic of Germany. *Current Sociology* 68(1), 22–40.

as economic angles”³³ remain inspiring. So is the recognition that the specific political-economy problems faced by the global periphery call for original theorization, which in turn can have systemic implications for global capitalism at large. For that reason, the road to building a truly global, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist IPE passes through Dakar.

33 IDEP (1971), op. cit., 1.

