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# Back to Dakar: Decolonizing international political economy through dependency theory

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## ABSTRACT

Whereas the field of International Political Economy (IPE) included a diversity of voices at its outset, histories of the field tend to marginalize certain contributions - particularly those from the Global South. The endeavor to decolonize IPE offers an opportunity to look back at IPE's history, re-discover the marginalized voices, and imagine new possible futures. This article engages with contemporary calls to decolonize IPE and proposes an alternative route to do so by recovering dependency theory. We argue that dependency theory can be conceptualized as a peripheral IPE perspective that was committed to thinking from the Global South and to producing politically engaged scholarship just as the field was being formed. The article elaborates on the key tenets of dependency theory, contrasting it with mainstream IPE, and putting it in dialogue with decolonial approaches. To demonstrate the simultaneous non-Eurocentric, anti-colonial, and policy-oriented potential of dependency theory, we recover a foundational moment that disciplinary histories of IPE have forgotten: the 1972 Dakar conference, organized by Samir Amin, with the participation of leading Latin American and African dependency scholars.


## KEYWORDS

Dependency theory; Eurocentrism; decolonizing IPE; decolonial theory; imperialism; anti-colonialism

## Introduction

The year is 1972. President Nixon's meeting with Mao Zedong would reconfigure Cold War geopolitics and, with time, the global political economy at large. After a 16-month incarceration, Angela Davis was released from jail on the back of an international campaign that raised awareness of structural racism in the US. In Latin America, right-wing capitalist dictatorships were taking power in country after country, in a series of US-supported coups d'états on the quest to prevent the

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rise of a new Cuba. Meanwhile, the open wound of the Vietnam War continued to bleed, and the recent independence of British and French colonies in Africa and Asia seemed to announce the twilight of Western imperialism and the rise of the so-called Third World. Accelerating inflation and heightened union mobilization across the US and Europe were early signs of looming economic and political crises and preannounced the neoliberal offensive of capital against labor that would unfold in the 1980s. Just one year earlier, the American administration closed the “gold window”, setting the whole Bretton Wood System in disarray. In the following year, the first oil shock would drastically change global energy markets, with profound real and financial implications.

The academic field of International Political Economy (IPE) is largely a product of this context. In its mainstream, British and US-American expressions, it tries to make sense of the accelerated dissolution of the international political and economic order built after the Bretton Woods Conference by the victors of World War II. Of course, Political Economy itself has a much longer intellectual history (Roncaglia, 2006; Selwyn, 2015). But its neglect of the “international” (Antunes de Oliveira, 2021a) called for renewed theoretical efforts to grasp the deep interconnections between international economics and international politics (Strange, 1970).

This article attempts to rescue and reclaim a neglected IPE perspective. Emerging in parallel with Global North mainstream IPE, the dependency tradition encountered the same disruptive global conditions and tackled many of the same problems. Echoing and building on contemporary efforts to decolonize IPE (Best et al., 2021; Bhambra, 2021; Baumann 2021; Hobson, 2013a, 2013b; Kvangraven & Kesar, 2022; LeBaron et al., 2021; Mantz 2019), we argue that the dependency tradition offered from the start 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.

In Global North institutions, IPE immediately brings to mind scholars such as Robert Cox, Robert Gilpin, Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane, Charles Kindleberger, Stephen Krasner, and Susan Strange. Students taking “Introduction to IPE”, “IPE 101” or equivalent courses can expect to read at least some of these authors, as well as contemporary debates around their legacies. “Hegemonic stability” and “hegemony” at large are taught with reference to Kindleberger (1973), Cox (1981), and Gilpin (1981). Katzenstein (1976) is the go-to reference for “domestic” sources of IPE. Keohane (1984; Keohane & Nye, 1977) and Krasner (1983), of course, are obligatory references for the study of “interdependence” and the role of “international regimes”. Finally, Strange (1970, 1986) adds the critical account associated with the “British School” to the mixture. According to Benjamin Cohen, arguably the most influential intellectual historian of IPE, this is “IPE’s hall of fame”. Cox, Gilpin, Katzenstein, Keohane, Kindleberger, Krasner, and Strange are nothing less than the “Magnificent Seven” of IPE. “A more diverse group could hardly be imagined” (Cohen, 2008, p.8-9).

We beg to differ. It is not only that this is an all-white group constituted by six men and one woman. The lack of diversity in IPE’s “Magnificent Seven” is an expression of IPE’s Eurocentrism. They are 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. The contribution of rising IPE scholars since the 1990s, such as Robert Bates (1999) and John Ikenberry (2009), has sparked new debates but has hardly helped to decolonize IPE.

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 (Furtado, 1978). Instead of domestic sources of policy decisions, the relevant question is about the role of dominated-dominant classes in reproducing brutal capitalist super-exploitation (Bambirra, 1978). For the Global South, “international regimes” matter because of the foreign imposition of international economic governance norms that constrain trade, fiscal, and monetary policies. In a nutshell, “interdependence” looks much more like “dependence” (Cardoso & Faletto, 1977; Dos Santos, 1970; Marini, 1965, 2011 [1972]). By looking back to 1972 and exploring the legacies of the Dakar Conference and the contribution of the dependency tradition at large, we are contributing to imagining a more diverse future for IPE. As we will show, the dependency tradition can be characterized by a double commitment. First, it aimed to answer some of the same questions as mainstream IPE, but from the vantage point of the Global South. Second, it aimed to make a political, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist interventions in the world.

Much can be gained from such an endeavor, both for the field of IPE more broadly and for dependency scholarship. The former has been characterized by Eurocentrism, inhibiting the field from generating scholarship that fully understands the uneven and combined nature of the global economy, which becomes particularly apparent when theorized from the periphery. Expanding the IPE canon would also provide new avenues for dependency scholarship, which has been severely marginalized both in the Global North and South since the 1980s (Kufakurinani et al., 2017).

After this introduction, the article starts with a sympathetic engagement with contemporary calls to decolonize IPE. We then argue that efforts to imagine a decolonized IPE remain vague, lack policy relevance, and often fail to challenge the Eurocentrism embedded in IPE theories and approaches. After that, we turn to the contested relationship between mainstream US-American and British IPE and dependency theory, as well as the more recent decolonial critique of dependency theory. Finally, we expand on the 1972 Dakar Conference as a concrete example of anti-colonial IPE praxis.

## **Decolonizing IPE: blind spots, eurocentrism, and diversity**

The colonial roots of IPE have been called out in recent years. Thus far, the bulk of the critique has come from roughly two conceptual perspectives. The first is concerned with IPE leaving out issues that are crucial for understanding colonialism, racism, and other topics associated with decolonization (Mantz, 2019; Baumann, 2021). We call this the “blind spots” approach, following Best et al. (2021) and LeBaron et al. (2021). This approach attempts to decolonize IPE while retaining its core, bringing in what has been “left out” (Murphy, 2009). The second camp is concerned with IPE theories themselves being Eurocentric. These critics seek to decolonize IPE by challenging fundamental aspects of its core theories (Hobson, 2012, 2013a,

2013b; Phillips, 2005, 2009). Below we unpack both approaches in turn. We argue that although both sides have raised valuable points, the search for ways to decolonize IPE has often ignored original anti-colonial and anti-imperialist contributions.

While anti-colonial scholarship was originally shaped by analysis of and opposition to formal colonialism, in its contemporary form, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist scholarship tends to go a step further to explicitly theorize how colonial, neo-colonial, racialized, or imperial structures are supported and co-constituted by capitalist exploitation (e.g. Dei & Ascharzadeh, 2001; Kvangraven, 2023; Narayan, 2017; Ossome, 2021; Patnaik & Patnaik, 2021; Pradella, 2013; Sen & Marcuzzo, 2018; Tamale, 2020). Some post-colonial and decolonial scholarship may also be anti-colonial and/or anti-imperialist, but the dominant strands within the post-colonial and decolonial traditions tend to prioritize discursive forms of Eurocentrism produced by colonialism and imperialism, rather than taking the material forms of oppression as the starting point (Bhambra, 2014; Sinha & Varma, 2017).

The “blind spots” approach to addressing IPE’s colonial roots has perhaps been the most dominant in recent years, and it has led to a series of interventions discussing the issues that IPE curricula and textbooks leave out. Critics find that in both research and teaching, issues related to decolonization, such as race relations and imperialism, are often relegated to special issues, additional themes, or classes in the final weeks of the term (Dei, 2016; Mantz, 2019). Thus, the solution is to “add on” things missing from the discipline, as well as to consider how specific concepts may need to be replaced, such as the common conceptualization of the international or economism embedded in much of IPE (Mantz, 2019), or the relatively little attention paid to class relations (Selwyn, 2015). This call is often also accompanied by calls for global pluralism—to include more approaches from across the world (Leander, 2009; Phillips, 2009). At its most radical, the blind spots approach can challenge IPE mainstream methodology, which tends to focus on unit-level or atomistic understanding of the social sciences, precluding epistemological and methodological diversity (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2015).

There are particularly two “blind spots” that often come up in relation to decolonizing IPE, namely race and coloniality. First, the absence of race in much of political economy is an old problem pointed out by scholars of the Black Radical Tradition (Du Bois, 1935; Robinson, 1983). In more recent years the relative absence of race specifically in IPE has also been vividly denounced. These criticisms point to a lack of attention to the structural role racism plays in certain institutions and socialization structures (Singh, 2021) and demonstrate how IPE can benefit from research that unpacks race as a colonial ordering system, which can help us better understand the evolution of the global system of oppression and exploitation (Tilley & Shilliam, 2017). Second, drawing on decolonial scholarship, critics in the blind spots camp also argue that IPE accounts of the modern global economic order tend to divorce analyses of economic relations from processes of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery (Mantz, 2019; Bhambra, 2021). The solution, then, lies in “acknowledging the colonial imperial contexts” (Bhambra, 2021, p. 320).

Now let us turn to the second main perspective from which IPE has been criticized, which is for its Eurocentric theoretical foundation. The question of Eurocentrism in IPE is not new, although new vigor has been brought to the debate recently (Hobson, 2013a, 2013b; Ling, 2002; Murphy & Tooze, 1991; Phillips, 2005). What distinguishes this perspective from the blind spots approach, although there

may be overlaps, is that it assumes that challenging Eurocentrism entails challenging the biases at the very core of the discipline and the starting points taken for theorization.

Building on Wallerstein (1997), it is possible to identify five interrelated ways Eurocentrism appears in the social sciences, which are particularly relevant in the context of IPE, namely (1) its historiography, (2) its universalism, (3) its assumptions about (Western) civilization, (4) its Orientalism, and (5) its attempts to impose a theory of progress. First, Eurocentric historiography refers to explanations of European dominance in the world based on specific European historical achievements or cultural traits. This legacy can be found in much of Weberian sociology and historiography. A case in point is David Landes' influential *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (Landes, 1995), which argues that the development of Britain was rooted in its pioneering inventions, hard work, and self-generated change. Hobson's (2004) critique of this historical depiction of British development has become influential in IPE. He shows how the British consciously acquired and assimilated Chinese technologies, and in this sense, Britain was actually a "late developer" (see also Helleiner, 2021)

Second, Eurocentrism as atemporal universalism refers to the crafting of development theories abstracted from European experiences, a practice denounced by many IPE critics (Amin & Palan, 1996; Blaut, 1993; Hobson, 2013a). For these critics, there is a strong tendency in IPE to identify properties and constraints that determine economic and political behavior, without considering the historical context. For instance, Hobson (2013a) challenges Open Economy Politics (Bates, 1999), an important contemporary strand in American IPE, for being based on experiences of Western societies that are universalized and essentialized in a transhistorical manner through categories formalized and quantified through dependent and independent variables.

Third, Eurocentrism based on assumptions about Western civilization entails critiquing theories that see Europe as the sole driver of history, where capitalism and modernity have been endogenously produced (Anievas & Nişancıoğlu, 2015; Blaut, 1993; Hobson, 2013a; Inayatullah & Blaney, 2015). Hobson (2013a) distinguishes between Eurocentrism that locates the exceptionalism of Europe in terms of either culture and rational institutions (what he calls 'Eurocentric institutionalism') or in terms of genetic or climatic fitness (what he calls 'scientific racism'). Another aspect of this critique pertains to the problematic way that the West and the rest are separated methodologically, rather than understood in relation to each other (Hobson, 2013b; Said, 1978; Shilliam, 2021).

Fourth, IPE theories have been criticized for celebrating the West for being the normative reference point in the global political economy. This critique builds on the postcolonial critiques of Said (1978) and post-development theories (Escobar, 2011; Sachs, 1997), which problematize the racialization of the binary between the West and the Rest. In this binary depiction, the West is presented as rational and modern, whereas the Rest is traditional, uncivilized, and in need of development.

Fifth, Eurocentrism can also be found in IPE's strong reliance on the idea of linear progress. As progress was a basic theme in the European Enlightenment, social sciences with roots in the Enlightenment are also shaped by a theory of progress that is often viewed in a linear and sometimes stagist fashion (Wallerstein, 1997). For example, the institutionalism put forward by Keohane (1984) and Ikenberry's passionate defense of liberalism (Ikenberry, 2020) assume the spread of capitalism

as a public good that will lead to global progress, while ignoring the exploitative and coercive aspects of capitalism that might shatter this narrative.

In addition to the five aspects of Eurocentrism proposed by Wallerstein, there is one expression of Eurocentrism that affects, perhaps, the work of Wallerstein himself. This is the assumption that Global North research institutions are the privileged locus for the creation of social theory, and that other efforts at grasping the dynamics of the global capitalist economy can be summarily ignored, in particular when written in languages other than English. In short, the lack of diversity in mainstream IPE can be itself seen as a form of Eurocentrism, since it comes hand in hand with often hidden assumptions about whose authors constitute the disciplinary canon. Related to this last expression of Eurocentrism is the widespread idea that knowledge is produced in the global North and flows downhill to receivers in the global South (Towns, 2012). This assumption has been recently challenged by research that demonstrates the multi-directionality of the exchange of knowledge (Eaton & Katada, 2022; Fajardo, 2022; Helleiner, 2021; Helleiner & Wang, 2018), although multi-directional flows of ideas are also always unevenly structured by power relations (Thornton, 2018).

This last expression of Eurocentrism affects even authors that are otherwise committed to challenging Eurocentrism in IPE. Hobson (2013b), for instance, does acknowledge that a non-Eurocentric approach to the rise of capitalism could be provided by theories that focus on changes at the global level, but instead of engaging with the wealth of Latin American, Caribbean, or African authors that do exactly that, his quick nod to the dependency tradition is limited to a short mention of the late work of Andre Gunder Frank (1998), exactly the only member of the original dependency group that made most of his career in the Global North. What is more, the North-based Wallerstein is often referred to as the authority on Eurocentrism, rather than Samir Amin, despite Amin's (1988) seminal contribution to the debates with his book *Eurocentrism*. Whereas decolonizing IPE certainly involves addressing blind spots and overcoming the various aspects of Eurocentrism mentioned above, it is our contention that it also requires rewriting, diversifying, and reconsidering the disciplinary canon. On this point, Inayatullah and Blaney raise a question that is particularly important: "How have we remained unaware of or insensitive to the diversity that already exists?" (2015, p. 890). This leads us to dependency theory, a neglected tradition within IPE.

### **Dependency theory: a neglected IPE tradition**

Susan Strange's seminal "International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect" (1970), arguably the founding "manifesto" of the British school of IPE (Cohen, 2008, p.13), reveals a second case of neglect, beyond the one indented by the author. The article starts by taking note of the mismatch between changes in international economics and international politics, thereby anticipating many of the IPE debates that would characterize the 1970s. Among the real effects of these changes, she mentions the problem of "lopsided development" (1970, p. 307). To establish her case that international economics and international relations had been talking over each other and failing to tackle then-contemporary challenges, she proceeds to a critical literature review. At this point, the Global North gaze of the author becomes evident. Not only is Strange exclusively concerned with



how the changes she identifies impact the world from a North-Atlantic perspective, but all the authors she engages with are based in Global North institutions. The dependency literature, then emerging internationally after the publication of the first articles by Marini (1965), Frank (1966), Best (1968), and Dos Santos (1970) in English, is completely ignored. The idea that something could be learned from scholars in the Global South tackling similar problems and also trying to bridge international economics and international politics does not seem to have occurred to Strange, at least at that moment.

As one of the most progressive voices of IPE, and one particularly open to debating Marxist perspectives, Strange's original neglect of the dependency tradition may seem surprising. It reflects, however, the Eurocentric bias and the narrow epistemological limits of IPE at its birth. On the other side of the Atlantic, the situation was not substantially different. At first, the dependency tradition was ignored or summarily discarded as Marxist and unscientific. One eloquent example is Keohane and Nye's classic *Power and Interdependence*, originally published in 1977. Although clearly overlapping with many topics discussed by the dependency tradition, mentions of "international dependency" are relegated to a single footnote in the preface.

Towards the end of the 1970s, however, as the dependency scholarship expanded and became increasingly influential across the Third World, its neglect by mainstream IPE became impossible to sustain. The turning point was a Special Issue of *International Organisation* published in the winter of 1978 (Volume 32, Issue 1). The premier venue of IPE dedicated nothing less than ten original articles to "dependence and dependency" under the editorship of James Caparoso. Many of these articles were sympathetic to the dependency tradition (Hirschman, 1978; Gereffi, 1978; Fagen, 1978), although others struggled to grasp basic dependency concepts (McGowan & Smith, 1978).

This brief IPE opening to dependency theory was limited in that it did not give any space to Latin American or African scholars, much less to radical voices outside established academic circles who started presenting dependency arguments in broader intellectual debates (Galeano, 1973; Rodney, 1972). Ignoring the lively debates between *dependentistas*, much of the mainstream IPE engagement with dependency theory soon crystallized in stereotypical form. Dependency was then oversimplified as the crude thesis that economic growth in the global periphery was totally impossible because of international constraints. Brutally reduced to an argument that has never been claimed by any of the original dependency writers, and devoid of their sociological, political, and historical insights, dependency could be discarded as a Marxist relic, supposedly disproved by History itself. As summarized by Krasner:

The spectacular economic progress of the newly industrializing countries of South East Asia has been a devastating blow to dependency theory; the most important elaboration of Marxist ideas in the area of international political economy (...). If social scientists in Latin America are more concerned about free trade and market access than exploitation, it will be hard for their colleagues in North America and Europe to sustain any viable research program for dependency theory. (Krasner, 1994, p.15; for similar arguments, see Gilpin, 1987; Katzenstein et al., 1998).

With some important exceptions, including the late work of Susan Strange, who, in the pages of the first volume of RIPE, rebutted Krasner's argument and proposed new ways to interpret the category of "dependency" (Strange, 1994, p.215),



the relationship between mainstream IPE and the dependency tradition has evolved from indifference and disdain to superficial attack, tempered by a very short period of intellectual opening, albeit limited by the unwillingness to actually include *dependentistas* in the conversation.

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 from the global periphery. Indeed, dependency theory was - and is - a vibrant, rich, and diverse tradition, despite the consumption of dependency theory in the Global North generally making it into “a straw man easy to destroy” (Cardoso, 1977, p. 15). Contrary to how its history is often told, dependency theory is not a singular theory, it is not all Marxist, and it does not claim capitalist development in the periphery is wholly impossible. So, what is it then?

As with any body of scholarship, the definition of dependency theory is highly contested. Indeed, there were serious disagreements within the tradition, which is, for example, well-illustrated by the 1981 special issue of *Latin American Perspectives* (Chilcote, 1981). In that issue, structuralists, classical Marxists, and neo-Marxists engaged in a fruitful debate about the implications of their theoretical, conceptual, and methodological differences. Perhaps because of the lack of unity among dependency theorists, there have not been many attempts at defining the tradition at large. The most influential definition of dependency may be that of Dos Santos (1970, p. 231), who sees dependence as “a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another.” 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. Similarly, Cardoso (1977) argued that while many social scientists might see that there is “interdependence” in the world economy, dependency theorists pointed to the highly unequal power relationship underlying this interdependence. Indeed, dependency theorists saw the global economy as consisting of mutually interlinked social formations, which satisfies Hobson’s (2013a) call for what non-Eurocentric theories in IPE must do. Of course, dependency theorists were writing long before this introspection began in IPE.

What is more, although dependency theory is known for exploring the global structures of production, many dependency scholars were also concerned with the political economy of domestic structures of production, taking the global structures as a given (Madariaga & Palestini, 2021). 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 IPE (Reis & Antunes de Oliveira, 2021; Tussie & Chagas-Bastos, 2022) or as a research program (Kvangraven, 2021), rather than a formalized theory. For *dependentistas*, theorizing the varied aspects and expressions of dependency proved as generative as debates about “interdependence”, “hegemony”, or “international regimes” in mainstream IPE. 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.

Rather than taking the Global North as a benchmark for analysis, dependency theory starts with the particularity of the periphery, theorizes about the persistence

of uneven development, explores how colonialism historically shaped the global economy and the internal structures of dependent societies, and highlights the constraints countries in the periphery face (Kvangraven, 2021). While dependency theory is often associated with Latin America, strands of dependency theory emerged across the world, including in Africa and the Caribbean (Amin, 1974; Best, 1968; Girvan, 2005; Pantin, 2009; Rodney, 1972). 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.

A case in point is Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism* (Amin, 1988). This seminal contribution to the debates about Eurocentric, imperialist, and racist distortions in contemporary social theory has been largely neglected in the contemporary debates about IPE's Eurocentrism. Amin argued that the view of capitalism as having evolved as a rational process founded on endogenous European characteristics of rationality and triumph amounts to Eurocentric ideology that has served to support imperialism. What's more, he unpacked the imperialist and racist foundations of the development of capitalism in Europe to demonstrate that countries in the periphery following the same path as countries in the center would be a logical impossibility. By reconnecting capitalist development with international structures of exploitation, Amin empties the idea—still present to this day in mainstream development discourses—that the development strategies followed by today's rich countries can and should be adopted by countries in the periphery.

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 CODESRIA and the World Social Forum (Kvangraven, 2020). Marini was regarded as a source of intellectual inspiration for revolutionary movements in Brazil and beyond (Traspadini & Stedile, 2011). What is more, 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.

## The decolonial critiques of dependency theory

Our claim that dependency theory offers an alternative way to decolonize IPE may sound surprising or even disingenuous to contemporary postcolonial and decolonial scholars. After all, the dependency tradition remained fundamentally concerned with “development” debates, thereby arguably remaining attached to the *long-durée* of modernity in Latin America (Grosfoguel, 2000, p. 363). Furthermore, classic works of dependency theory pay scant attention to racialized and gendered forms of oppression, not rarely subordinating all forms of social struggle to the class struggle (Antunes de Oliveira, 2021b). These objections constitute what we call the decolonial

critique of dependency theory. Many Latin American and African decolonial authors cut their teeth as dependency theorists or in close dialogue with dependency theory (Dussel, 1973, Grosfoguel, 1992; Kufakurinani, 2017; Quijano, 1968). Similar critiques of dependency could be made from a postcolonial perspective (Kapoor, 2002), although postcolonial theory arguably has a distinctive genealogy in literary and South Asian historical studies (Bhambra, 2014; Chakrabarty, 2009; Said, 1978) and normally aims its critical arsenal at other strains of peripheral Marxism. Nonetheless, across the social sciences, dependency theory is often considered fundamentally outdated, having been superseded by the decolonial, post-colonial and post-development turns.

Contrary to the generally superficial engagement by mainstream US-American IPE scholars mentioned earlier, the decolonial critique touches on some fundamental limitations of the first generation of dependency theory. Our counter-critique recognizes some of the points raised by decolonial scholars. These limitations are only now being overcome by a new generation of dependency scholars (Antunes de Oliveira, 2021b, 2022; Félix, 2019; Kvangraven, 2021, Chilcote & Vasconcelos, 2022; Madariaga & Palestini, 2021), who are generally more sensitive to intersectional forms of exploitation. Nevertheless, we also highlight some strengths that the first generation of dependency scholarship had, strengths that have been largely lost by the decolonial turn. In particular, we claim that the decolonial scholarship remains too detached from political economy debates, being therefore incapable of disputing policy space with mainstream economic and political ideologies as *dependentistas* once did.

Ramón Grosfoguel (1997, 2000, 2007) offers perhaps the most complete take on Latin American development ideas from a decolonial perspective. His historical reconstruction of Latin American debates about development avoids common mistakes among Global North critics, such as confusing the dependency scholarship with the developmentalist work of Raul Prebisch, or, alternatively, conflating dependency with orthodox Marxism *tout court*. Instead, according to Grosfoguel, “the dependency school waged a political and theoretical struggle on three fronts: against the neo-developmental ideology of Cepal, against the orthodox Marxism of the Latin American Communist parties, and against the modernization theory of U.S. academicians” (1997, p. 497).

According to Grosfoguel, this line of inquiry ran into its own contradictions in the 1980s. Unable to pose a challenge to the rise of neoliberalism in Latin America in the aftermath of the debt crisis, the dependency tradition receded, and part of the former radical left returned to developmentalism. This was “partly due to one of the major weaknesses of the *dependentista* approach, namely, their solution for eliminating dependency was still caught in the categories of developmentalist ideology.” As Grosfoguel goes on to explain, “dependency questions were trapped in the problematics of modernity: what are the obstacles to national development and how to achieve autonomous national development” (1997, p. 533). Grosfoguel attempts to answer this problem through a shift to a higher level of abstraction, namely the world-system. This move was politically justified by a pessimistic take on the possibility of radical change in peripheral societies due to the global nature of capitalism: “to break with, or transform, the whole system from the nation-state level is completely beyond their range of possibilities. Therefore, a global problem cannot have a national or local solution; a global problem requires a global solution” (1997, p. 533).

This position is later reframed and expanded (Grosfoguel, 2000, 2007), incorporating a more explicit decolonial stance, sometimes in a tense juxtaposition with the author's Wallersteinian framework. Developmentalism then appears as only one of the conceptual limitations of the dependency tradition, side by side with the "denial of coevalness", and the "concealment of the coloniality of power" (2002, p. 371). This transition builds on the evolution of the work of some first-generation dependency writers, particularly Anibal Quijano and Enrique Dussel, as well as the renewed focus on epistemological debates in Latin American studies from the 1990s (Escobar, 2011; Mignolo, 2012; Moraña et al., 2008). Meanwhile, decolonial scholarship in Africa took a different route, expanding some categories to counter alleged economic determinism and take account of epistemic dependencies, drawing on the work of Ngũgĩ-wa Thiong'o, Frantz Fanon, among others (Kufakurinani, 2017). A case in point is Amílcar Cabral (1979), who denounces Portuguese imperialism from a combined economic, cultural, and anti-racist perspective. Indeed, the African decolonial literature remained closer to dependency theory, given its emphasis on 'de-imperialisation' and its affinity with Marxism and Samir Amin (Kufakurinani, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Nkenkana, 2015).

Although it may take different forms according to the author and the specific field, the decolonial critique accurately identifies an important contradiction at the heart of dependency studies. The very problem of ever-renewed underdevelopment that animated the first generation of dependency scholars presupposes a binarism between development and underdeveloped. Instead, as claimed by Dussel (2008, p. 343):

The simplistic dualisms of center-periphery, development-underdevelopment, dependence-liberation, and exploiters-exploited, all levels of gender, class, race that function in the bipolarity dominator-dominated, civilization-barbarism, universal principles-incertitude, totality-exteriority, should be overcome, if they are used in a superficial or reductive manner.

As Dussel insists, this does not mean abandoning the perspective that there are real relations of exploitation and domination. Instead, we should embrace "positions of greater complexity". Hence, "class struggle will never be overcome, but it is not the only struggle; it is one among many others (those of women, environmentalists, ethnic minorities, dependent nations, and so on) ..." (2014, p. 343). Among these "positions of greater complexity" is Quijano's concept of "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2000), which reconnects dependency with racialized forms of domination. As explained by Maldonado-Torres with reference to Quijano's work, "dependency is not external to the regions in question, but rather results from organic constitutions of peripheral societies affected as they are by the coloniality of power" (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p.13).

Decolonial authors certainly show a much deeper knowledge of the dependency tradition than mainstream, English-speaking IPE scholars. Still, their take on the varied contribution of dependency theory continues to be somewhat based on unfair stereotypes and exaggerated distinctions. To mention just one example, Vania Bambirra's concept of "dominated-dominant" ruling classes (1978) and her pioneering writings about the condition of women in Latin America hardly fit into any black-and-white, binary picture of dependency theory. Considering the wealth of historical, sociological, political, and economic contributions of the dependency tradition, including heated controversies among *dependentistas* themselves, the

decolonial critique of the 1990s can be seen as an extension of the dependency debates of the 1970s and 1980s. This is particularly true in relation to Dussel and Quijano, both of whom engage critically with dependency theory but largely remain part of the dependency tradition.

Taking these continuities into account, cruder decolonial rejections of dependency theory should be at least partly understood as products of the academic scene in the US in the 1990s and early 2000s, when anything resembling Marxism tended to be dismissed as belonging to the past. For a depoliticized neoliberal audience, the decolonial scholarship emerged as a more abstract and less consequential critique of US imperialism than dependency theory. While dependency debates faded away from sociology, economics, and politics departments, decolonial debates took over literature and cultural studies centers.

At this point, the one fundamental difference between dependency and decolonial perspectives comes to the forefront. Whereas dependency scholars actively participated in national-level political economy debates and often resorted to arguably nationalist concepts, this kind of political intervention is neglected or directly questioned by decolonial scholars (Grosfoguel, 1997, p. 533). As Blaney (1996) points out, the mobilization of “sovereignty” by dependency theorists as a form of questioning global hierarchies sometimes came at a price. This is because “while the principle of sovereignty may be invoked to authorize very strong claims of autonomy and difference, these strong claims are equally crucial to constituting and legitimating inequality within international society” (Blaney, 1996, p.470).

It is not impossible to reconcile the endeavor of disputing state-level policy debates and mobilizing forms of peripheral nationalism against imperialism with a critical stance vis-à-vis the limitations of modern nation-states and the problematic rhetoric of sovereignty, however. In fact, *dependentistas* were hardly narrow-minded nationalists. With the notable exception of Cardoso and his collaborators (Cardoso & Faletto, 1977; for a contemporary critique, see Antunes de Oliveira, 2022), *dependentistas* never believed in purely national solutions to the challenges of peripheral capitalism. Marini, Bamber, Dos Santos, Frank, and Amin had absolute clarity about the global character of capitalism. Nevertheless, this did not prevent them from engaging in national-level disputes, always perceived as instrumental in their theoretical and political struggle against US imperialism and global capitalism at large. Marini’s (1978) critique of Cardoso’s “neo-developmentalism”, for instance, is a great example of the thin line the best dependency scholarship threaded between national-level development debates and a deeper commitment to international anti-capitalist struggles, often overlapping with calls for Latin American integration or Pan-Africanism.

It is possible to trace, therefore, a conceptual distinction between the anti-colonial perspective of dependency theory and contemporary decolonial perspectives. Whereas the first sees national political economy debates as fundamental arenas of resistance and political contestation, the second privileges cultural and epistemological forms of resistance to Western modernity. This distinction explains why, despite having largely displaced older forms of dependency theory, particularly in the Global North, decolonial authors remain unable to mount any politically consequential challenge to neoliberal and (neo)developmentalist policies in Latin America. The abandonment of the perspective of intervening in national political economy debates left the field open for the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and 1990s and the neo-developmental turn of the early 2000s. This distinction

between anti-colonial and decolonial perspectives needs not to be reified, however. It is perfectly possible to engage in political economy debates while remaining critical of Western modernity and ultimately seeking to overcome it. This finally leads us back to Dakar.

### **The Dakar conference as dependency theory's anti-colonial praxis**

Dependency theory has diverse and contested roots, but there is little doubt that the 1970s was the tradition's heyday (Antunes de Oliveira, 2021b; Fajardo, 2022; Kay, 2020). While Latin American scholars were explicitly theorizing about mechanisms and situations of dependence in hubs in Chile, Cuba, Mexico, and Brazil, African scholars were organizing around radical anti-colonial and anti-imperialist scholarship in hubs in Tanzania, Uganda, and Senegal. There were multiple conferences on dependency theory and radical political economy organized in that decade, from the 1972 conference in Santiago, Chile on the "transition to socialism" and the 1975 Latin American Congress of Sociology in San José, Costa Rica, to the 1974 Sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and the 1972 global conference on "Strategies of Development—Africa Versus Latin America" in Dakar, Senegal (henceforth, the Dakar Conference). This was also a period of Third World activism and diplomacy across the globe. The Bandung Conference, also known as the Asian-African Conference, which took place in April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, created a strong international momentum for anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles (Pham & Shilliam, 2016). Bandung was an important step towards the eventual creation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961 and the New International Economic Order (NIEO)—formally declared in the UN in 1974—which was a set of proposals advocated by developing countries to end economic colonialism and dependency.

We focus on the conference in Dakar in 1972 here because of its global significance for dependency theory as a tradition, as it was an explicit attempt to bring Latin American and African scholarship together, with participation also from the Global North. 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 this global lineup of contributions, the debates in Dakar were arguably much less provincial than Global North IPE debates being held at the same time.

The Dakar conference of 1972 was convened by Samir Amin himself. Our contention is that this conference, which has been so far ignored in intellectual histories of IPE, is a perfect example of the dependency tradition's double commitment; first, to theorizing from the global periphery (in contrast to mainstream British and US-American IPE); and second, to an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist political praxis (in contrast to the primarily epistemological endeavor of later decolonial authors). The conference brought together major intellectuals and activists from across the world to discuss pressing challenges of the periphery. Its legacies survived in dependency debates, and, we claim, should be revisited to inspire new ways to imagine an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist future for IPE.



Reconstructing the Dakar Conference is like trying to solve a puzzle with missing pieces. Most of the participants have already died, there are no recordings, and the conference proceedings were never fully published. Here we do not have the ambition to present a full account of the conference in all its details. We hope that our attempt to revisit the Dakar Conference may inspire other scholars to do the same, shedding light on particular debates and helping to paint a more complete picture in the future. In what follows, we will build on scattered clues and historical documents to substantiate our argument about the South-centered character of the conference and the political relevance of dependency theory. We will then reflect on the legacies of the Dakar Conference by briefly looking at the further careers of Samir Amin and Ruy Mauro Marini.

### ***Theorizing from the South***

Key sources of information about the Dakar Conference are the memoirs of scholars such as Ruy Mauro Marini (1990), Theotônio Dos Santos (1994), Vania Bambirra (1991), Andre Gunder Frank (1991), and Samir Amin (2006). The unpublished research self-reports produced by Brazilian scholars to reclaim their academic positions after the end of the dictatorship in Brazil are very rich documents about the origins of dependency theory that only now are starting to be systematically analyzed (Wasserman, 2022). Dos Santos, for 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” (Dos Santos, 1994, p.46). 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 (Dos Santos, 2020 [1978], p. 1074). Bambirra mentions the invitation to join the Dakar Conference in her memoirs, but unfortunately, she could not travel because she fell ill with pneumonia (Bambirra, 1991, p.43). 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. According to Marini (1990):

The international propagation of *Dialéctica de la dependencia* has happened, partially, because I presented the text as a paper at the Afro-Latin American Conference, which gathered in Dakar, in September of 1972, thanks to the initiative of the Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) a UN organization directed by Samir Amin, who studied both continents, as well as Europe.

From Amin’s memoirs we learn that, beyond Marini, the conference also included rising stars of dependency theory such as Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Pablo González Casanova, Aníbal Quijano, and Gérard Pierre-Charles (Amin, 2006, p.204). Frank, in turn, remembers the conference as an attempt by Samir Amin to “introduce dependency theory in Africa” (Frank, 1991, p.61). He also took the opportunity to “[smuggle in] some nascent [World Systems] theory in as well,” with Samir Amin’s agreement (Frank, 2000, p. 217).

Based on a short note in the 15<sup>th</sup> CLACSO Bulletin (CLACSO, 1972), Paola Adriana Bayle (2015) identified at least 41 participants in the Dakar Conference. They 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 (see Appendix 1). Indeed, the Dakar



Conference demonstrates the possibility for collaboration, the exchange of ideas, and the development of alliances across disciplinary and geographical boundaries. Although it included Global North scholars, the conference's focus on Global South-centric scholarship is particularly inspiring.

In contrast with the Dakar Conference, the ways in which Global South-centric scholarship and scholars from the Global South are incorporated into mainstream IPE institutions have always been limited and patchy. Few scholars taking anti-colonial and anti-imperialist starting points in their work publish in top IPE journals and there is little space for this scholarship at IPE flagship conferences, which are mostly located in Global North knowledge centers. The situation is worse for anti-colonial scholars based in the Global South. Rather than form partnerships with knowledge centers in the Global South and engage with dependency theory and other anti-colonial and anti-imperialist scholarship, IPE institutions that aim to 'decolonize' tend to focus on integrating feminist, decolonial, and postcolonial perspectives into mainstream scholarship in the Global North (see for example ISA TFGS, 2018, p. 6). 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 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 Amin's Concept Note about the Dakar Conference (IDEP, 1971). It can also be deduced from the content of the papers presented in Dakar. 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" (IDEP, 1971, p.1). Accordingly, the conference had six main topics, namely 1) economic development theory; 2) the economic structure of developing countries (structural heterogeneity, modes of production, ownership structure of export sector, social formations, economic surplus extraction); 3) the role of the tertiary sector as a means and mode of integration in the world market; 4) the concept of dis-articulation of society and its forms (including the role of import substitution industrialization, with local and foreign capital); 5) over-population, reserve army, and marginality in developing countries; and 6) development strategy in the context of global dependency, including concerns with economic integration and the role of multinational corporations.

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. This is likely no accident, given that the conference took place in a time when the mainstream was starting to become increasingly narrow, squeezing out heterodox views of the

economy (Lee, 2009). The field of economics has narrowed much further since then, forcing many heterodox economists to turn to IPE, economic geography, and other related fields where there is still some theoretical openness to approaches beyond rational choice and marginalism. Our call to decolonize IPE through an expansion of the canon and the rewriting of the discipline's history is therefore also highly relevant for the economics field (see Kvangraven & Kesar, 2022 for some reflections on how the decolonization of economics is, conversely, relevant for IPE).

We identified nine papers presented at the Dakar Conference (see Appendix 2). There were probably more. Although we do not have the space here to explore any of them in closer detail, a quick look at the topics covered reveals both the breadth and the political relevance of the conference. 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 dependency and the limitations of capital accumulation in the global periphery.

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. For example, Dos Santos became the co-founder of the Association of Third World Economists, whose first congress took place in Algiers in 1976 under the auspices of NAM, where Samir Amin was also present (Kay, 2020). The Dakar Conference can be seen, therefore, as an intellectual counterpart to the diplomatic efforts by then-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 IMF, the World Bank, and the GATT. Some of the key ideas presented in Dakar would eventually re-appear in the increasingly demanding and combative international discourse of Third World leaders at the UNCTAD, the UN General Assembly, and the GATT.

### ***The legacies of Dakar and its enduring relevance***

The multiple intellectual and political legacies of the Dakar Conference are still to be fully mapped. Here we will only touch on some of the most relevant and enduring contributions to the intellectual development of dependency theory, looking at the careers and broader contributions of two of its key participants: Samir Amin and Ruy Mauro Marini. To this day, the very original work of both scholars is still to be fully recognized by mainstream IPE.

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* (Amin, 1976) and *Eurocentrism* (Amin, 1988). Many of Amin's publications can be considered extensions or further elaborations of each of these two books (Mamdani, 2018).

Underlying these important contributions, and his scholarship since, is his method of inquiry, which was centered on thinking structurally, temporally, politically, and creatively (Kvangraven et al., 2021). Indeed, in terms of thinking structurally, Amin's defiance of both methodological individualism and methodological nationalism to focus on global structures of exploitation became important for the dependency tradition, and this remains relevant for IPE at large. In terms of thinking temporally, it was important for Amin to take a *longue durée* approach to issues of political economy. In terms of thinking politically, this is indeed the essence of dependency theory—always tying academic work to political struggles. Finally, Amin's capacity to think creatively is crucial, as he expanded Marxist categories to theorize from the vantage point of the periphery.

Ruy Mauro Marini is perhaps better known in the Global North for his theses on sub-imperialism (Marini, 1972; Valencia, 2017), 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. His work on sub-imperialism, however, comes hand in hand with an extremely original contribution to Marxist economic theory. The core of Marini's theory was systematized for the first time in the *Dialectics of Dependency*, the paper he presented in Dakar, and later published in Spanish, French, German, Italian, Dutch, and Portuguese. 50 years later, the text is finally available in English (Marini, 2022 [1972]). In a nutshell, Marini argues that different levels of exploitation of labor are crucial for the constitution and functioning of global hierarchies. In the global periphery, labor is often paid below its value, a phenomenon Marini calls "super-exploitation". Half a century after Marini presented this seminal concept in Dakar, one can now argue that the super-exploitation of certain (often gendered and racialized) groups of people is not a transient feature of dependent capitalism, but a fundamental aspect of the global economy that has been largely ignored by Eurocentric political economy accounts, including mainstream IPE.

After the Dakar Conference, Marini returned to Chile where he was in exile from Brazil, just to find himself forced into exile again after the 1973 coup. He then took a position at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg and helped to lead the international opposition to Pinochet's administration. Returning to Latin America, Marini joined the National University of Mexico (UNAM), where he influenced a generation of critical Latin American scholars and activists, including Vania Bambirra (his former collaborator and PhD student), and João Pedro Stédile, one of the leaders of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil (Stédile 2002).

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 positions in academia or government. Frank continued to expand his research to world history and was instrumental in the development of World System Analysis. Stavenhagen went on to work on internal colonialism, taking racial inequalities as an important element (Stavenhagen, 1965). What's more, the conference brought dependency theory to Germany, as Senghaas (1974) edited a book with several of the papers presented in Dakar translated into German,

including those of Amin, Cardoso, Braun, Stavenhagen, Frank, and Marini. For Senghaas (1974) the relative ignorance in the Global North about dependency theory was a result of what he called ‘scientific imperialism,’ which is exactly what he attempted to counteract with his book (Ruvituso, 2020). In fact, the endeavor of challenging scientific imperialism is a perfect summary of the multifaced legacy of the Dakar Conference and a source of inspiration for scholars seeking to decolonize IPE today.

Just like the Dakar Conference has been summarily ignored in the Global North and erased from the history of IPE, some of its most fruitful legacies have also been structurally ignored by IPE mainstream scholarship, with a few notable exceptions. An IPE that is more theoretically open and relevant for the study of global inequalities from the vantage point of the periphery needs to correct this structural ignorance by reassessing its institutional history and revisiting the enduring contributions of dependency scholars.

### **Conclusion: dependency theory and contemporary IPE debates**

The year is 2023. The world is once again in crisis. The neoliberal optimism of the 1990s gave way to increasing geopolitical competition and growing economic uncertainty. In the aftermath of supply chain disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy price shock triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and years of unprecedented loose monetary policies following the 2007-2008 financial crisis in the core, inflation is once again on the rise around the world. Climate change becomes increasingly a global emergency. In Europe and the US, the dissatisfaction with the erosion of welfare states, structural shifts in labor relations, and the rising cost of living is still to find progressive forms of political expression. Across the periphery, governments are bracing themselves for the impact of rising Fed rates, higher energy and food prices, and weaker demand from China.

Some of the most relevant contemporary IPE debates are vaguely reminiscent of those of fifty years ago. But the state of IPE scholarship today is very different. The mainstream, which still largely draws directly from the work of Cox, Gilpin, Katzenstein, Keohane, Kindleberger, Krasner, and Strange, as well as their students and followers, has been strongly questioned since the creation of more critical outlets such as the *Review of International Political Economy*. Two veterans of the Dakar Conference, Gunder Frank and Samir Amin, directly contributed to pluralizing the field in the 1990s, joining RIPE’s advisory council and writing insightful pieces for its first issues (Amin, 1996; Frank, 1994). Today, among the most relevant attempts to renew IPE are varied calls to decolonize it, either through the addition of new and neglected topics (Best et al., 2021; Baumann, 2021; LeBaron et al., 2021; Mantz, 2019; Murphy, 2009) or by rethinking the core Eurocentric biases of mainstream IPE perspectives (Hobson, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Phillips, 2005, 2009).

This article is a contribution to contemporary endeavors to decolonize IPE. Instead of the “blind-spots” or the anti-Eurocentrism approaches, we propose an alternative method to decolonize IPE, through a critical recovery of what has been left behind. As Clift et al. (2022, p. 353) note, disciplinary “forgetfulness” enables particular intellectual moves and suppresses certain types of scholarship. As we have shown, dependency theory should have been part of the nascent field of IPE at its inception. During the 1970s, the Global North mainstream of IPE oscillated

between ignoring dependency theory and misrepresenting it. “Remembering” the Dakar Conference and some of its enduring legacies is thus important not only as an exercise of intellectual history. Recovering the importance of dependency theory as a neglected strand of IPE contributes to the decolonization of the field itself. As dependency theory developed more or less in parallel with mainstream IPE from the 1970s onwards, including the contribution of *dependentistas* in a serious manner means reconfiguring the entire scope and history of the field. This involves more than simply incorporating dependency scholars into the existing IPE canon (Deciancio & Quiliconi, 2020), but actually challenging the very history of IPE and its foundation.

In addition to remembering the Dakar Conference, this article is also part of a growing contemporary literature that reclaims and reassesses dependency theory (Antunes de Oliveira, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Chilcote & Vasconcelos, 2022; Féliz, 2019; Kufakurinani et al., 2017; Kvangraven et al., 2021; Madariaga & Palestini, 2021). In our own reading, dependency theory is a critical political economy tradition characterized by a double commitment. First, theorizing from a peripheral perspective; second, producing political scholarship, aiming at real-world interventions. Our core concern in this article is to place dependency theory in relation to other IPE perspectives and in dialogue with contemporary calls to decolonize IPE. Although recognizing the contribution of the decolonial literature, including some aspects of the decolonial critique to dependency theory, we suggest that contemporary post- and decolonial authors have something important to learn from the Dakar Conference and the dependency tradition at large; namely, the value of clearly political and policy-relevant scholarship that is unafraid of challenging the material inequalities produced by the status quo.

Our argument here is not that the Dakar Conference was a mythical and flawless moment of Global South scholarship, nor that all the papers there presented remain directly relevant to contemporary IPE debates. It is important to recognize the limits to the connections fostered through peripheral collaborations as well, which repeat some of the same shortcomings of mainstream IPE of the 1970s. The most obvious one is the clear gender imbalance in the conference, as Vania Bambirra, 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 as economic angles” (IDEP, 1971, p.1) 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.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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