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# 'Out in the dark': knowledge, power and IPE in southern Africa\*

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## **Introduction**

*'Words are deeds.'*

– Ludwig Wittgenstein (1984: 46)

**H**ow true is this of academic disciplines, which are constructed through a veritable empire of words – written, reviewed, recited, and reified? Our response to Benjamin Cohen's work departs from an approach that documents disciplinary journeys through its textual manifestations alone. The text and texture of intellectual disciplines, in both subtle and profound ways, are constitutive of their context. In the case of southern Africa, we will argue that political economy as an intellectual project has shaped both the political and physical

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cartography of the region. After briefly engaging with Cohen's work by fingering its silences and divergences, we will undertake a narrative journey into three distinct phases of political economy in southern Africa. In the first phase, we argue that the subversion of politics by economics in the academe resulted in a peculiar rendition of political economy – a political economy of colonialism – in which the nature of state and sovereignty were functionally directed. In the second, the intellectual logics of the Cold War, apartheid South Africa and modernisation theory worked to enforce the hegemony of a racial South Africa within the region. Finally, we argue that while the end of apartheid and the Cold War offered exciting new possibilities for the region, these were swiftly captured by the averred TINA (There Is No Alternative) of neo-liberal economics.

### **The Academic Darwinism of Benjamin Cohen**

Cohen's recent attempts at writing a history of IPE must, at the outset, be seen as an epistemic project that aims to establish a body of ideas and ideologies as *the* corpus of the discipline. In narrating the evolution of IPE as an academic discipline, Cohen's earlier work (2008) defined the *field* by dividing it into two streams: an American and a British school. In response to this taxonomy, Paul Cammack (2011: 149) has suggested that Cohen's account should be seen as a '*construction* of IPE as a field rather than a history of how it was constructed'. He also argues that Cohen has sanitised a particular rendition of the rise of the IPE, calling this its 'history'. Urging great plurality in its history, critics have advanced two distinct lines of argument. Some, for instance, have argued that Cohen is not intellectually inclusive in respect of his taxonomy, and neglects the work of important individuals, thus underestimating the impact of a broad stream of western Marxist scholars who informed the development of IPE. Secondly, other critics argue that, by drawing

on just those two schools, broadly reflecting the geographical location of the authors, Cohen has effectively canonised the field as an Anglo-American discipline.<sup>1</sup>

In his latest book, *Advanced introduction to international political economy* (2014), Cohen acknowledges that the field is 'notoriously diverse', and includes alternative ideas of IPE both within and outside the west. In this 'pluralistic' account of the discipline, he presents the reader with new stories about the heterodox tradition in the United States and the Marxism of continental Europe while leaping across continents to China and Latin America to discover their 'traditions' of *thinking* and *doing* IPE. But he does not do the same for Africa – which, as our title suggests, is out in the proverbial dark.

This omission repeats a well-worn trend that bears repeating here in the foothills: writing about the 'international' invariably ignores Africa. 'Even in the most ambitious and ostensibly all-encompassing narratives' on the political economy of a globalising world, the critical anthropologist James Ferguson (2006: 25) notes, a continent that takes up 20 percent of the land mass of the world, one fourth of its constituent states, and one seventh of its population remains conspicuous by its absence. Unsurprisingly, in Ferguson's opinion, Africa is an 'inconvenient continent'; it does not fit in the deep-seated 'scientific' impulse that modern knowledge systems are compelled to use. The knowledge economy which underpins IPE disaggregates regions in terms of their economic models; the western 'liberal' model versus the East Asian 'developmental state' model versus the Latin American 'dependencia' school (Blyth 2009). But when it comes to Africa, there is no ready model except of course the 'coming anarchy' image, which has persisted since the phrase was first used by the polemicist Robert Kaplan (1994) more than two decades ago. In other words, the imperialism of categories and the resulting cartographies ironically mark Africa as an invisible space

in the economy of knowledge production. As a result, in western international relations (IR), Africa is primarily a consumer of knowledge, and a willing recipient of these models.

Neither inconvenience nor invisibility, however, are Cohen's reasons for eliding Africa. Along with Russia, Japan and the Arab world, Cohen does consider the possibility of finding IPE in Africa. 'Certainly', he says, 'in many of these places, one or a few individuals may be seen doing work that is recognisably IPE in nature' (2014: 10). He never tells us who these people are. Writing from the southern tip of Africa, this smacks of the sloppy research which Africans are all too frequently accused of – but, hey, let's remember the company, and call it ignorance. The dedicated work of a generation of writers like Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara, Mike Morris, Dave Kaplan and Duncan Innes are clear examples of IPE. Moreover, a long underground tradition of resistance writing using political economy as a point of entry is found in the work of Neville Alexander, who, despite his recent passing, remains very influential. In addition, Dot Keet, John Saul, Patrick Bond and Hein Marais have critically interrogated the myriad lives of political economy in the southern African region. This body of work does not restrict analysis to state and market, but expands it to include important questions – race, gender, labour and land – which are central to the southern African political economy.<sup>2</sup>

Given the company we keep in this special edition of the journal, we are not keen to pick a fight with Cohen, and will confine ourselves to the last four words in the line quoted above, namely 'recognisably IPE in nature'. These provide a more neutral platform from which to ponder the many silences in conversations about the international. It begins with this question: who recognises the 'recognisably IPE'? Answering this should lead us to broader questions about how IPE's disciplinary content should be decided. However, just as we are entertaining the possibility that these questions can be asked from

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inside the discipline, Cohen's next three lines in the same paragraph conclusively rob us of that right:

However ... [those who write on IPE in Africa] are not included here because their numbers are simply too small to form a genuinely discursive discourse coalition. Beyond the Anglosphere, local versions of the field are mostly at an earlier stage of development. In many countries or regions, the formation of an institutionalised network of scholars has barely even begun (2014: 10).

This suggests that African versions will always be 'local'. This understanding of the discipline implies that there are no epistemological battles to be fought, since the discipline itself follows a kind of academic Darwinism, with the Anglosphere representing the 'international', while all other understandings are 'local' variants 'at an earlier stage of development'. Furthermore, Cohen's belief that a critical mass of scholarship in IPE has not developed in Africa is strikingly at odds with his earlier version of what IPE constitutes. In his *Intellectual history* (2008: 8), Cohen placed the responsibility of stitching the discipline together on his 'Magnificent Seven', comprising the three Roberts (Keohane, Cox and Gilpin); Susan Strange; Charles Kindleberger; Stephen Krasner; and Peter Katzenstein – a small group in anybody's book. Clearly, in Cohen's own analysis of the rise of IPE in the Anglosphere, the ideas of seven individuals seem to represent a critical mass, but the seven African writers (mentioned above) are not sufficient to generate even a sub-branch.

In pointing to these inconsistencies, it is not our intent to mull over what constitutes a critical mass of scholarship, nor indeed to serve up an apologia for African or southern African IPE. We are well aware that some of the work we have cited above may well be described as derivatives of 1970s British IPE. But such a description would, in our

view, be spurious, because in no small sense all intellectual work is derivative; to make the point differently, derivation *makes* disciplines like IPE. Moreover, the politics of location and authenticity in knowledge creation serves no useful purpose, since much of the European knowledge of IR and IPE can be said to come from non-western sources (Hobson 2004). Yet the vital thing is not whether a particular work speaks of a certain intellectual *tradition*, but whether it speaks of a certain human *condition*.

In our view, the work cited above speaks to the very life-blood of southern Africa. Indeed, so strong is the lore of IPE in the region that, for many, its very story cannot be told outside of the disciplinary routines of IPE. Given this, IPE is not a local or provincial story that can be hived off into a corner or bracketed within ‘alternative traditions in IPE’; it is as important a narrative about the ‘international’ in southern Africa as the narratives from the Anglosphere.

Africa is an independent and highly productive site for the knowledge and practice of IPE, and evinces a robust tradition of debate in the field (Amin 1976). In tracing the development of political economy in a region of Africa, we propose to juxtapose the development of political economy as an intellectual project and political economy as a southern African reality. In doing this, we will show how the knowledge of political economy has constructed (and constricted) the political economy of the region. The introduction of Africa into this conversation, through the use of southern Africa, cannot therefore be seen as insertion of Africa as an alternative model or tradition in IPE. By contrast, we argue that any intellectual project of *international political economy* must constantly remain alive to the relationship between knowledge and the power of its production.

## **Pre-history, political economy and power**

The founding year in the 'life-cycle' of IPE as an academic field, according to Cohen (2008: 17), was 1970. Yet, the karmic cycle of IPE, Cohen argues, begins in its prehistory when it was still called 'political economy' in Europe. Beginning with the works of the British administrative reformer William Petty, who coined the term 'Political Oeconomies' in 1671, political economy emerged as a discipline studying the economies of state. Locked in by what Karl Polanyi (1945) defined as the 'double movement', the state and the market in Europe developed in close communion with each other. In studying the development of these two social institutions together and in relation to each other, the nascent discipline of IPE was able to map the trajectory of their importance to society.

From the mid-1860s onwards, as Cohen tells us without furnishing reasons, the discipline sub-divided into two distinct fields of study: politics and economics. However, as the sociologist Randall Collins (1994: 26-30) reminds us, it was not so much of a forking or a sub-division as an appropriation of the idea of political economy by the separate field of economics.

The battles over what constituted the field would be fought on a wider ideological canvas, especially in Europe. An emphasis on economics as the driving variable in political economy had begun with Adam Smith in Britain (Thornton 2014: xi). By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the battle for hegemony between the *laissez-faire* political economists and the *mercantilists* was finally settled in favour of the former in Britain, the academic home of political economy and some of the most famous political economists – Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus and John Stuart Mill. This was called the Golden Age of British imperialism: it was underpinned by a philosophy of economic control that was

considered more important than the philosophy which underpinned political control. The business of the state was, in the words of Lord Palmerston, ‘to open and secure the roads for the merchant’ (quoted in Robinson, Gallagher and Denny 1968: 4). *Laissez-faire* economics was explicitly a British imperial project which was elevated to a universalistic philosophy in which individual-centric notions of the social were prioritised over community-centred ones. The newly developed neo-classical or marginalist economics created by William Levon, Francis Edgeworth and Alfred Marshall in England pushed for a methodological leap that further exacerbated the divide of economics from politics: their work turned economics towards a technical and mathematical science. *Principles of Economics* (which was also the name of Alfred Marshall’s book in 1890) secured economics as a separate academic discipline, and all but silenced the principles of politics by elevating the economic to a higher status.

The disciplinary predominance of economics was so strong that university positions in England from the mid-1860s were open only to pro-*laissez faire* academics (Collins 1994: 28). The knock-on effect of this further damaged the study of politics; as a result, discussions about the politics of the state were pushed towards law departments, where the state *qua* state was deemed to be a constitutional rather than a social actor (Wallerstein *et al* 1996: 19). This restructuring of disciplinary categories fed directly into how the political economy of distant places was shaped and reshaped in the heart of colonialism.

### ***Constructing the region***

At the time when the rift between economics and politics sharpened, first diamonds and then gold were discovered in southern Africa – events that would change the region forever. The promotion of industrial modernity, through mining, introduced two institutions of



social organisation that had hitherto been largely absent from the region's politics: the state and the market. Until then, the region had an agrarian political economy, and the forms of social organisation ranged from *manqué* Westphalian-type states to British colonies to fairly decentralised indigenous political formations. These were marked by their instability and constant formation and re-formation by migration, a tendency that was canonised through the historical lore of 'trekking' (on this, see Etherington 2001). But, with the coming of mining capital, social and political heterogeneity became a prisoner to the conformity and disciplining that is essential to modernity. However, even though replication is the essence of modernity, its mimicry has invariably manifested itself in bastardised forms in colonial settings. Expectedly, this mimicry in southern Africa reflected its own idiosyncrasies.

The infusion of a modern economy in southern Africa was neither natural, nor – unsurprisingly – did it generate an internal regional market. Instead, the ambitions of capital were primarily focused on the extractive sector for which the market was located in Europe. As a result, there was no need to create an internal market, and the cost of labour could be kept to a minimum. Consequently, the impact of economic activity remained, in Ferguson's helpful phrase (2006: 36), 'socially thin'. Given that much of the labour would be performed by Africans, the relations of production were structured around the optic of race, rather than, as in Europe, class. The function of any political authority, as a result, was primarily twofold: to maintain racial distinction, and to drive Africans towards serving mining capital. So, and this is not exceptional in the colonial setting, the development and nature of political authority were fuelled by the logic of profit.

The subordination of politics to economics was visible in all forms of rule in the region. The region's *primus inter pares* state, South Africa, was a compromise among settler colonialists to secure

political power. This allowed British capital, with trickle-down for their Afrikaner compatriots, to maintain their economic accumulation while satiating the political aspirations of Afrikaner nationalism. Centres of African power – dismissively called ‘territories’ – were either incorporated into South Africa, or retained as British protectorates (their formal designation for half a century) in the form of modern-day Lesotho and Swaziland. Still others, Botswana and what is now Zimbabwe, were simply leased out to capital and fell prey to the ambitions of imperial adventurers like Cecil John Rhodes. This layered form of regional sovereignty was compatible with the growing idea of economic maximalism that, in the immediate setting, succeeded principally in destroying ‘the reproduction of the capacity of independent reproduction of African peoples in the region’ (Niemann 2001: 70).

The result was that sovereignty and statehood in southern Africa were not only foundationally racist and exclusive; its distribution was also made functional to the economic motive. The relationship between politics and economics was underpinned by *laissez faire* minimalism – the minimalist intervention of political authority, set against the maximisation of profits in the imperial market. Unsurprisingly, political authority routinised the practice of coercion and extraversion in all markets, but particularly in labour. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whites in South Africa extracted a slew of new taxes and tributes aimed at making agriculture unsustainable in the territories, and creating a centrifugal displacement of Africans into mining centres located on South Africa’s Witwatersrand. This new form of migration was opposite to the mobility patterns that had marked the region’s earlier life. The mid-19th century had witnessed a diffused displacement of people and communities expanding through migration: the Mfecane and the Great Trek are the exemplars of this moment. But by the end of the 19th century, the direction had changed: the pull was inwards where the migrant trails connected the

region's periphery to the mining centres, initially located in the city which became Johannesburg, but later in an area ironically called 'the Free State'. It was through this authorised – no, enforced – centrifugal movement of men towards the machinery which aided extraction that southern Africa as a spatial construct began to emerge.

Let us pause to capture the points that have built this conceptual platform. In the early 20th century, southern Africa had two major features: first, it was a single economic region characterised by an uneven race-based distribution of income, and the migration of people. Second, the nature of the political authority in the region was determined by its subservience to economics. Moreover, a decided hierarchy of political authority followed the region's economic structure. In this, South Africa was 'first among unequals' (Vale 2003), and this unevenness in both wealth and power meant that the South African state became the lever for controlling the regional economy in quasi-imperial fashion.

This platform enables us to return to the intellectual history of IPE. As we have pointed out, the disciplinary bifurcation in the 19th century turned on the subversion of politics by economics. The prevailing economic logic – especially *laissez faire* – became the dominant political preoccupation towards which all forms of authority, but especially state power, were meant to be directed. Moreover, *laissez faire* economics became the dominant mode for transforming societal relations throughout southern Africa. In the academy, however, the study of politics – and of authority – were restricted to questions of law and constitutions from which effectively the base impulses of social relations were excluded. To use a famous image from Foucault, the capillaries of power were subverted by the legalistic notions that ordered social life; the form that this ordering took was the state.

As we have already established, the colonial state in southern Africa mimicked the European state. More often than not, it took its sovereign form from the West, while its everyday dynamic was rooted in the messy politics of the local. As Charles Tilly (1985) has argued, the formation of the European state was underpinned by the project of internal pacification. This was achieved by creation of a domestic market, and an effective apparatus that secured the internal from external threat. Although important, the domestic functions of policing were subservient to the military function of preserving state sovereignty. In sharp contrast, the colonial state in southern Africa was formed to provide land and labour resources for a market that existed externally. By serving external interests, the local state was not the protector from, but the purveyor of, internal violence. Put differently, if the European state aimed to make internal violence an exception, the colonial state in southern Africa was about making internal violence an everyday reality. This regime of control was enforced through the uprooting of indigenous people, the mass dislocation of people, the whips and *sjamboks* of forced labour, the wars fought against Africans as well as the Boers, all of which was subservient to the dream of Cecil John Rhodes of painting the map between the Cape and Cairo in the imperial colour. The violence of the state in southern Africa was couched in terms of the more palatable political idea of liberalism, whose academic manifestation was to be found in the London-based journal *Round Table*.

In writing off the everyday violence of political authority through invocations of the ‘liberal spirit’ (Hoernlé 1939), and by deeming it integral to the progressive spirit of imperialism, intellectual authorisation of the separation of politics and economics fashioned a peculiar political economy of colonialism (Marks and Trapido 1979; Dubow 1997).<sup>3</sup>

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, understandings of southern Africa and its constituent states remained enmeshed with South Africa – the

only 'independent' state in the region, the economic centre of its political economy, and therefore its definitional centre. Unsurprisingly, the terms 'South' and 'southern' were often used interchangeably by Jan Smuts (1870-1950), South Africa's most important pre-apartheid politician. Even the nationalism of the oppressed majority in South Africa remained ambivalent about what separated the state for which they were fighting from the place known as southern Africa. In part, this was because African nationalism was, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, a 'nationalism' of economic migrants, as was so graphically evident in the Freedom Charter of 1955.<sup>4</sup> Nationalism that had tales of regional mobility at the centre of its appeal could not easily reconcile with a nationalism that championed the set boundaries of the state.<sup>5</sup>

### **Region, regimes and rationality**

According to Cohen, the establishment of IPE as an intellectual project began around 1970 and its natal moment was the publication of Susan Strange's widely discussed article 'International economics and international relations: a case of mutual neglect' (1970). In this, she called for an end to the 'dialogue of the deaf' – a phrase which Cohen repeats (2014: 5). In Cohen's view, the article became a manifesto for (re)integrating international economics and international politics. The call itself had been prompted by a number of developments in the international arena, namely the seeming end both of the Bretton Woods system and American economic hegemony, the success of the European integration project, the ensuing détente between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the rise of new economic powers like Japan and Germany – to mention but a few.

These changes challenged the state-centrism of realism and, as a way of thinking that reacts to real world developments, IR was called

upon to respond. Scholars countered by arguing that, alongside the state, the market was the other dominant reality in the world of the international. So, while anarchy forced states to seek power, the market forced them to seek profit. IR, in a famous formulation of the time, was not only about the life and death issues of statecraft, but also about the bread and butter issues of economics (Keohane and Nye 1977). Given this move, and the intellectual *ennui* that attended realism in the 1970s, states and markets had become the most important disciplinary preoccupation.

Following the emphasis on the market, and the eagerness of IPE scholars to temper their interest in the state, the European integration project – especially with the admission of the United Kingdom – was the focus of much enthusiasm. The theoretical evolution of David Mitrany’s functionalism into Ernst Hass’s neo-functionalism, inspired by what seemed like an emerging European ‘security community’ (Deutsch *et al* 1957), encouraged theorists to look beyond states as the only motors governing the idea of the ‘international’.

In southern Africa, where states had just begun to take shape, something quite different was taking place: liberation from colonialism had taken a decidedly national turn. Although arbitrarily drawn up during the 1885 Berlin Conference, the importance of Africa’s borders had been reasserted. Theory in the field once again seemed to be at the other end of practice when it came to the ‘dark continent’.

The independence of Ghana in 1957 set off a chain reaction across sub-Saharan Africa, reaching southern Africa in 1961. In that year Tanzania became the first state in the region after South Africa to gain independence: Malawi, Zambia, and the three High Commission Territories – Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland – followed in quick succession. In 1965, the Rhodesian unilateral

declaration of independence established another settler colonial state like South Africa in the region. But it was increasingly clear that the days of minority and colonial rule in the region were numbered. The Lisbon Coup of April 1974 brought down the Portugal colonial regimes in southern Africa, leading to the independence of Angola and Mozambique a year later. Apartheid South Africa carried out its own form of decolonisation by inserting a new category of fictive 'independent' states (culled from previously common territory) into the regional lexicon in the late 1970s and 1980s. In all, southern Africa witnessed multiple modernities of statehood, and the relationship of each with its domestic, regional and international sphere was different: one thing was clear, however, namely that boundary-making in the name of politics was the central feature of regional life.

If this regional matrix suggested anything, it was that conceptually – if not quite politically – the region was up for grabs. Invariably, the theoretical battles for cartographic black-boxing were driven by specific ideological agendas. *Dependencia* scholars declared the new states in the region only nominally independent and lacking any sense of agency against the core state, South Africa (see Vale 1983). Interestingly, critical models like these shared their analytical conclusions, even if their moral persuasions were contrasting, with those emanating from the other side of the Cold War divide.

### ***Region as ideology***

In 1968, relying on the tenuous economic and infrastructural linkages of region, the young American scholar Larry W Bowman argued that southern Africa was a 'sub-ordinate state system' that operated 'quite independently of the dominant world power blocs' (Bowman 1968). Such a regional framing was consistent with the positivist area-study model of post-World War Two social science imagination, engineered to serve the epistemic needs of a resurgent

United States. While no one could deny that these linkages connected a certain regional space to South Africa, Bowman's reasoning served a narrow political purpose. His thesis was based on two central premises: the first, that South Africa was the economic hegemon in the region; and the second, leading from the first, that the political interaction among the constituent states in southern Africa was increasing, despite objections to South Africa's and Rhodesia's racist policies. In the neo-functional tenor fashionable at the time, Bowman argued that the linkages in the region would lead to a greater political understanding among the political actors in southern Africa, notwithstanding the racist character of its hegemon. Bowman's idea became the foundational ground for the creation and recreation of regional models that imagined South Africa 'as the focal point for the creation of a combination of regional states based principally upon economic considerations' (Grundy 1982: 153; also see Vale 1983).

This imaginary was an assuring sign for an American intellectual-military complex caught in the trap of Cold War thinking. A region whose aspirations for independence claimed to be inspired by communism could be controlled through its capitalist (though racially offensive) core. The intellectual, economic, and military capital of the west was invested in making this version of southern Africa a reality.

In the early 1970s, the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) – then the country's premier foreign policy think-tank – organised successive conferences on the seemingly neutral issue of 'development' in southern Africa,<sup>6</sup> funded by the who's who of South African capital, and the Boston-based Foundation for Foreign Affairs (FFA). The latter was an American think-tank which had been founded to advocate American isolation and, with time, morphed into a conservative think-tank (Doenecke 1980/81). It also funded the journal *Modern Age*, described as the



'principal quarterly of the intellectual Right' (Nash 1976: 145). Conservative thinking at the time hinged its political capital on the W W Rostow-inspired theory of modernisation (1960), which quickly became the darling of American political science. Calling modernisation 'a special kind of hope', the leading political scientist David Apter famously pronounced that 'the struggle to modernise is what has given meaning to our generation' (quoted in Worrall 1974: 113). The participants in the two successive Johannesburg conferences were animated by the possibilities of such South Africa-led modernisation in southern Africa.

Welding the region together in a singular and linear modernisation narrative, the conferences sought to provide a model for southern African development. While defining southern Africa 'as a region based to a large extent on economic ties between the various countries, such as intra-regional trade and labour movements', the first conference, which focused on the theme of 'Accelerated Development', identified the neo-functional model of spiralled up integration as embodied in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as the most widely accepted model for the region (Brand 1972: 674-675).

Drawing inspiration from this early thinking, a successive generation of scholars and policy-makers advanced theories and models that imagined southern Africa variously as a 'co-prosperity sphere', a 'common market', and later a 'constellation of states' (reported in Grundy 1982: 153). None of these models were fully fleshed out, but each stemmed from an understanding that South African economic power was so preponderant in the region that other regional actors would be compelled to join South Africa-centred regional mechanisms (Geldenhuis 1981). Driven by apartheid South Africa's apprehension about the liberation aspirations of black Africa, the underlying assumption for apartheid policy-makers was that

... the economic might of South Africa ... can be used to assure the necessary gradual or evolutionary equality to a managed change, and to defer and dissipate revolutionary verve by a modulated distribution of the rewards of economic growth. And because of South Africa's central role in the process, trickle-down enriches South Africa, stabilises the region, and rewards black leaders who play ball (Grundy 1982: 157-158).

In short, regional integration became South Africa's cure-all for its domestic and regional woes. It was 'constructed, enlarged and ... tenaciously defended because it enable[d] to enrich itself at the expense of its regional neighbours' (Grundy 1982: 159).

The elevation of this economic rationality to a principle of political certainty was increasingly problematic for others in the region. This quickly became clear when their apartheid-centered efforts at regional integration, even under the eaves of modernisation theory, were spurned by black Africa.

As we have argued above, there was no common story of the path to statehood in southern Africa. As a result, all the states – whether nominally independent or not – connected differently to the idea of region. For instance, while the faux-independent states made by apartheid had no agency when it came to decisions about regional arrangements, other states in the region – like Zambia or Malawi – could exercise greater discretion in deciding about their role in the region even if they were, as the Mozambican president Samora Michael remarked, 'chained to the dungeons of apartheid' (quoted in Grundy 1982: 167). Independent Malawi, under the presidency of the controversial Hastings Banda, aligned itself with the apartheid state, while Zambia, under the redoubtable Kenneth Kaunda, was drawn in the opposite direction. For Kaunda, the moral question of human rights and majority rule in southern Africa were as important

as economic ties – he would, of course, play a high price for this ideal. In 1980, in a somewhat heroic effort, the fully independent states of the region joined forces in a loose multilateral set of arrangements which enjoyed the moniker 'Frontline' (Grundy 1982). Their idea was to jointly protect their individual and collective sovereignty from the war – increasingly known as regional destabilisation – that the apartheid state was waging against them. By choosing to imagine the region without its economic hegemon, this politics of resistance gave voice to a non-racial, non-exploitative, and non-hegemonic form of regionalism.

The other problem with the intellectual flattening of the region through the modernisation discourse was that it completely neglected the peculiar sociology of the state in southern Africa. Migration, as Vale (2003) has argued elsewhere, has been the central constitutive factor of state formation in southern Africa. Unlike the West, where borders and boundaries sanitise the state and give it security, the security of the state in southern Africa is fundamentally tethered to patterns of migration; boundaries in southern Africa are often more fictitious than real. Ironically, however, the more apartheid South Africa tried to imagine the region in benign terms in the 1960s and 1970s, the more oppressive its state machinery became internally. The inversion of the security paradigm – where internal becomes the external, and the external internal – was destined to implode sooner than later. This was increasingly illustrated during 'destabilisation', when apartheid's security forces ransacked the region with an impunity only previously enjoyed by America in Latin America.

Even in the midst of destabilisation, the economy through which South Africa could cripple the region was sustained by migratory regional labour. Consequently, neither political nor economic models could comfortably address the paradox of the Westphalian state in southern Africa. Furthermore, in what remains a testimony to

the intellectual betrayal of alternative possibilities in southern Africa, there were other, more fertile, people-centred rather than sovereignty-defined, ideas of the region which were conveniently sidelined by state or market-driven projects and the state-patrolled security enjoyed by capital (for more on this, see Vale 2001: 135-160).

The regional models that emerged from the South African mainstream academia had distilled critical societal narratives of race from discussions on political economy. Following the introduction of modernisation theory, the question of race in South Africa was subsumed within the larger scheme of capitalist modernisation. Chained to ideas of ethnic development, the various races were considered to be climbing up the development ladder at their own pace. The linear trajectory was fully developed in the idea of a regional ‘constellation of states’, with white South Africa at the centre, and black states forming the periphery. Understood in this way, apartheid was not a racist but a benign modernisation project that allowed each race to develop on its own, at its own speed. The mainstream liberal critiques, while disagreeing with apartheid’s understanding of race, also invested their faith in the power of capital. Michael O’Dowd, a businessman and intellectual, advanced a thesis along the lines of Rostow: capitalism and apartheid, he argued, were essentially in opposition to each other, and the ‘free market’ would erode the basis of apartheid. This view, promoted by the formation of a think-tank called the Free Market Foundation, was widely accepted in liberal circles (O’Dowd 1977). While critiquing liberal ideas, a number of Marxist scholars (most of them in exile, including Rob Davies, Dan O’Meara, Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe), argued that racial domination in South Africa was intrinsic to the development of the capitalist economy (see Helliker and Vale 2013: 26). Their criticism was also partly directed at the Soviet-inspired communism of the South African Communist Party which, they held, emphasised race over class (Nash 1999).

The 1970s saw the emergence of a new generation of young radicals who drew their interpretation of Marxism from a wide range of sources such as Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukacs, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral and Julius Nyerere (Moss 2014). The 'generation of the 1970s', as Andrew Nash (1999: 66) calls them, came out of a vibrant student political and intellectual life within South Africa's universities.<sup>7</sup> This encouraged a dialectical engagement between the racial character and class character of the South African state which was to include movements of all shades and questions – class, race, gender and ethnicity: taken together, these came to frame an organic critique of the capitalist character of the South African state. The United Democratic Front, which emerged in the 1980s as a grass roots movement, grew out of the marriage between this critical social theory and emerging political practice (Helliker and Vale 2012: 335), and undermined the relationship between capital and the state by exposing their divorce from the society as a whole.

What does this long journey tell us about the place of political economy in southern Africa? While IPE pushed IR to look beyond states in international relations, its intellectual ramifications in southern Africa were manifested in South Africa's efforts to create a regional model based on economic rationality, and present itself as a benign and legitimate hegemon. Theoretically, such analyses of southern Africa were off the mark for two reasons. First, by placing the dynamics of the market at the centre of analysis, IPE took the focus away from the state. This was just at the moment when new states were emerging in southern Africa, and the challenge for IR scholarship was to explore ways to bring the state 'back in'. Second, while IPE took the focus away from states, it nevertheless agreed with the state-as-black-box understanding of realism. But, in southern Africa, as every IR scholar should know, the real choices of states were informed by domestic social struggles around race. Consequently, intellectual narratives became part of these social

struggles. The dominant narrative of IPE was appropriated by a South African mainstream intellectual class to advance a narrative of regionalism that sought to perpetuate South African racial hegemony. Here, we have also briefly noted the alternative narratives of political economy that identified themselves with the social struggles being fought against the apartheid state.

### **Futures past, past futures: what do we make of IPE in Southern Africa?**

The end of apartheid momentarily lightened the gloom in southern African skies. This said, the political transition following apartheid was a historic moment when the region could be wrested, not just from the *securocrats* of apartheid but also from the *knowledgeocrats* who had colonised imaginations of regional political economy. But the promise of a bright new future soon degenerated into a re-run of the region's unhappy past (Vale 2003). The security paradigm within which the political economy of the region had been constructed during the apartheid years found new 'others' to resurrect old discourses, as racial tropes were replaced by ones centred on the nation – especially on the idea of South Africa's exceptionalism. The old economy of the racial division of labour was replaced by a new economy of a nationality-driven division of labour in which citizenship and subjecthood were determined by the passport, rather than the colour of skin. This complaint may sound unreasonable in the stable national spaces of Europe, but in southern Africa, where migration is central to the very constitution of both regional and national spaces, such practices help to sustain old exclusionary trends.

Incapable of making any imaginative leaps, the political economists in the South African think-tank industry, such as those at SAIIA (founded in 1934) and the Brenthurst Foundation (established in

2004), took up the task of serving the old wine in a new bottle. Concerns for new forms of theoretical thinking about political power and its relationship with economics had been declared wasteful in the 'new world order'. After all, in the post-Cold War world, we had all been declared 'liberals', permanently disempowered from registering any contrapuntal notes. All forms of critique located outside of the liberal paradigm were irrelevant and, following Fukuyama's famous 1989 dictum about history, 'dead'. In South Africa's academia, this provoked two kinds of shifts and divisions. First, political economy was distanced from social theory, and pulled directly into public policy. The end of apartheid had coincided with the Washington Consensus and the unofficial proclamations of 'it's the economy, stupid!' With unbridled neo-liberalism becoming the political mantra of the 1990s, the spaces for discussions about different economic trajectories were pulled under by the weight and urgency of the notion that 'public policy' could solve all ills. Second, the foreign-funded think-tank industry produced 'policy papers' consistent with neo-liberal principles that were readily absorbed by a government increasingly obsessed with the imperative of transformation. The theory-inclined academia, in contrast, could only produce pieces that were rich in argument but thin in policy. Consequently, the discursive power of think-tanks to mould policies and practices far outweighed that on offer by the universities who were themselves under pressure to transform. Within the universities, the study of political economy – once a thriving industry – was eroded by the search for relevance. This double dislocation of political economy resulted in an obliteration of a once vibrant intellectual project.

Undeniably, political economy as an idea in southern Africa persists in critical corners. Scholars from university-based institutes in South Africa such as the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG), the Society, Work and Development Institute

(SWOP) and the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) continue to critique mainstream political economy thinking in the country and the region. Elsewhere in the region, alternative conceptions of political economy are kept alive by through institutions such as the Africa Institute for Agrarian Studies in Zimbabwe. Ironically, though, the notion seems to enjoy a more vibrant life amongst market-centred intellectuals who continue to champion the idea that South Africa is exceptional, and that it should continue to dominate the region. In a brazen form both of political ambition and intellectual hegemony, these claims are largely made by business intellectuals located in the right-wing think-tank community (Vale and Carter 2008).

To end, we must return to the beginning, in order to make two vital points. First, disciplines live and breathe outside of the words that inscribe them; as a result, intellectual histories that remain confined to unearthing a documentary trail must necessarily fall short. Second, we must remain alive to the cartographic circumcision of disciplines. The burden is not on the political economy in ‘Russia, Japan, the Arab world or Africa’ to find its narrators: the search for knowledge – let alone truth – operates the other way around. If we begin with the assumption that IPE is absent from vast spaces on the globe, we may as well stop calling it ‘international’. Benjamin Cohen’s efforts at writing a history of the discipline must be applauded. But our enthusiasm must be tempered with the certain knowledge that his account is only one in the multiverse of IPE.

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## Notes

**1.** Some of these criticisms are summarised in Cohen (2014). For others, see Shields et al (2011).



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- 2.** For an illustrative sample of these writings, see Davies et al (1976), Davies (1979), O'Meara (1983), Innes (1984), Alexander (2013), Keet (2006), Saul (2001), Bond (1999) and Marais (2011). For feminist writings on political economy, See Tsitaka and Amanor-Wilks (2009).
- 3.** A group of Imperial devotees, derisively named 'Milner's Kindergarten', by the brilliant-but-eccentric lawyer and politician William Marriot, was in the forefront of providing the intellectual support to fashioning a state and its peculiar political economy in southern Africa. For some of the writings of this group and its associates in South Africa, see Fortnightly Club Papers (1906-1908) and *The State* (1909-1912).
- 4.** The Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955, encapsulated an alternative vision of society in apartheid South Africa. The result of wide public participation, it became the magna carta of the struggle for a non-racial democracy in South Africa.
- 5.** See for instance, the writings of the Africanist nationalist intellectual Anton Lembede (1996).
- 6.** The two conferences, entitled 'Accelerated Development in Southern Africa' and 'Strategy for Development', were organised in 1972 and 1974.
- 7.** Student organisations such as the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) brought to the fore a group of young radicals in the 1970s. Glen Moss (2014) names, among others, Steve Biko, Neville Curtis, Eddie Webster, Steven Friedman and himself as part of this new wave.

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## **Abstract**

### **'Out in the dark': knowledge, power and IPE in Southern Africa**

Benjamin Cohen's disciplinary history of international political economy (IPE) begins with the premise that Africa has had little to contribute to this

global discipline. Differing from this view, we argue that disciplinary histories such as Cohen's elide the relationship between the discipline and its field. It is only through the juxtaposition of knowledge, power and politics that we can arrive at a fuller historical understanding of the *international* political economy. We further argue that political economy as an intellectual project has been central to the creation of the political economy of southern Africa. In a historical narrative of this idea in this region, we demonstrate that states and markets have remained prisoners of their mainstream intellectual manifestations, although subversive lives of political economy persist in some critical corners.

**Keywords:** International Political Economy – Southern Africa – Intellectual History – Regimes – Ideology