

**Historical Determinism and
Uneven Urban-Industrial
Development in Apartheid South
Africa: A Geographical Political
Economy Perspective**

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Introduction

Apartheid's Urban-Industrial Segregation Was Systematic and Deliberate

- Apartheid policies engineered spatial and economic separation between racial groups.
- Mechanisms like forced removals, Bantustans, influx control, and industrial decentralization entrenched urban-industrial inequalities.

Bantustans Were Structurally Dependent on the Apartheid Economy

- Despite claims of economic self-sufficiency, territories like Bophuthatswana remained economically peripheral and reliant on the core economy.
- Industrial policies reinforced dependency rather than fostering autonomy.

Apartheid Political Economy of Urban-Industrial Development

Uneven Development as a Spatialized Political-Economic System

- Apartheid's urban-industrial economy was not just about racial segregation but a broader system of racial capitalism.
- The GPE framework highlights how state power and institutional governance entrenched long-term inequalities.

Post-Apartheid Policies Have Not Fully Overcome Spatial and Economic Imbalances

- Place-based policies and private-sector investment have not eradicated uneven development.
- The legacies of apartheid-era spatial and economic policies continue to shape development trajectories.

Key Themes of South Africa's Uneven Urban-Industrial Development

1. Urban Development & Spatial Inequality

- Apartheid-era spatial planning entrenched racial and economic segregation, shaping persistent inequalities (Ballard, 2012; Chari, 2010; Smith, 2022).
- Post-apartheid spatial dynamics continue to reproduce uneven development through new patterns of socio-economic segregation (Ngwane, 2003; Rubin et al., 2020).

2. Industrialisation & Economic Exclusion

- Apartheid-era industrial decentralization and the Minerals-Energy Complex (MEC) reinforced racialized economic structures (Fine & Rustomjee, 2018; Ashman et al., 2011).
- Industrial policies confined Black labour to peripheral zones, creating economic dependency and structural disadvantage (Hart, 2002; Newman, 2020).

3. Interconnection of Urban & Industrial Policies

- Uneven development must be examined holistically, linking urban segregation to industrial decentralization (Bond & Ruiters, 2017).
- Apartheid-era policies spatialised racial capitalism, shaping long-term economic disparities and uneven spatial urban-industrial arrangements in places like Gauteng and Bophuthatswana.

4. Implications for Contemporary Development

- The country's post-WWII economy reveals the complex interplay of race, class, and capitalism within the apartheid system and structural that continue to shape post-apartheid urban-industrial trajectories.
- Understanding and addressing South Africa's persistent spatial and economic disparities requires a more holistic approach.

Problem Statements

1

Economic Dependency & Structural Disadvantages embedded across space

- Industrial policies relocated manufacturing to Bantustans, creating peripheral economic dependency rather than sustainable development.
- These policies entrenched uneven spatial and economic structures.

2

Critiques of Fragmented & Isolated Analyses

- Bond & Ruiters (2017) argue that many studies treat urban and industrial development separately, missing their interconnected nature.
- Smith's (1984, 1990) theory of uneven development highlights how geography and politics are structurally linked.

3

Spatialised Political Economy

- Uneven development must be analysed as a political, economic, and spatial phenomenon.
- Apartheid's policies were not just about racial segregation but also about controlling economic flows and capital accumulation.

4

A Call for an Integrated Approach

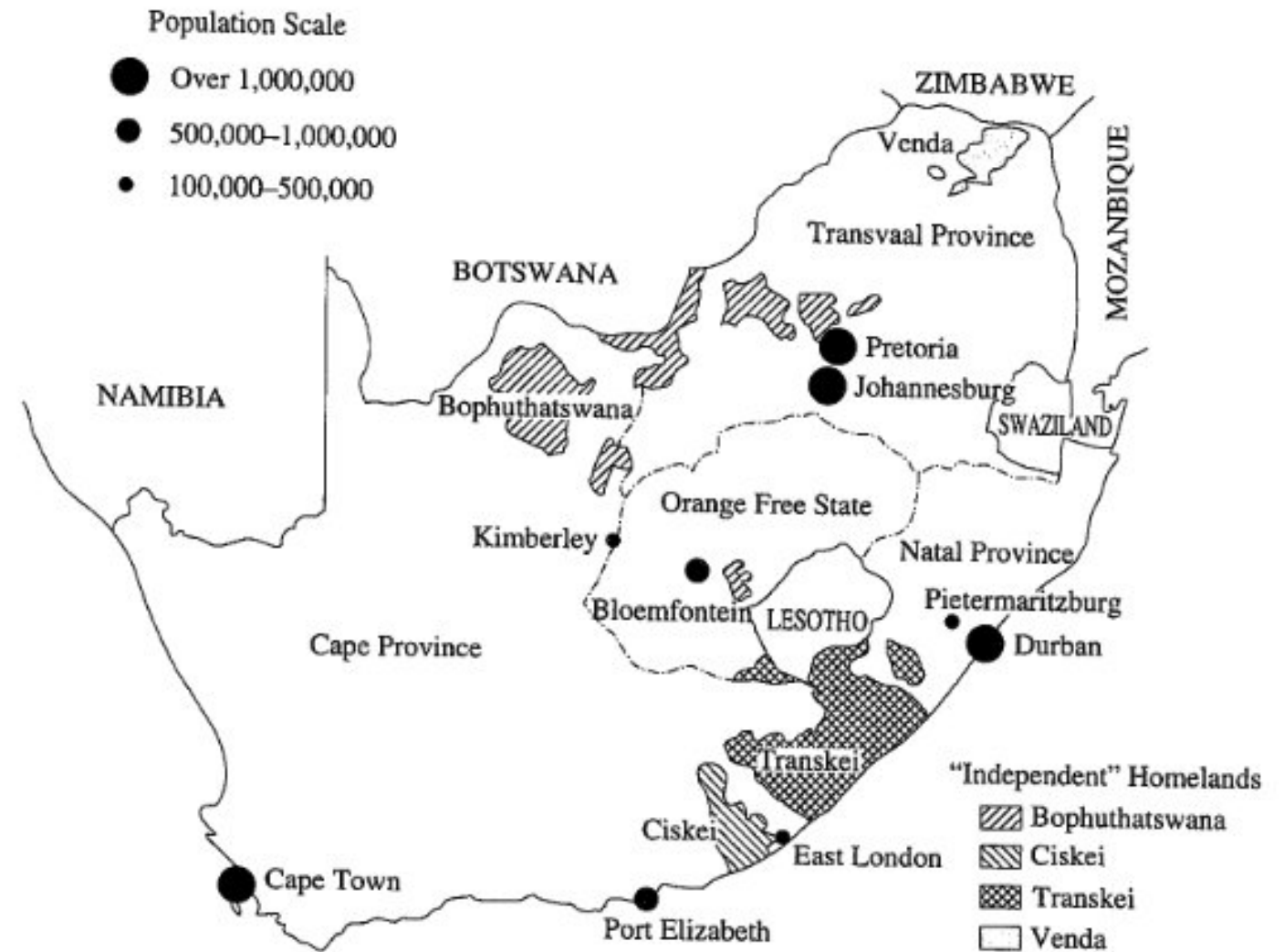
- The paper synthesizes political economy, economic geography, and institutional analysis to examine apartheid's long-term effects.
- Understanding historical inequalities is crucial for addressing contemporary development challenges.

Considering these problems, the concepts of Evolution, Geography, and Political Economy become critical to explain uneven urban-industrial development

The Role of Space in Economic Organisation

- Land use, distribution, and organisation shape economic geography (Jauhiainen, 2006).
- Location serves as a key focal point in the economics of geography, anchoring inquiries into the dynamic relationships between capital and labour.
- Apartheid-era policies deliberately engineered urban and industrial spatial inequalities that persist today.

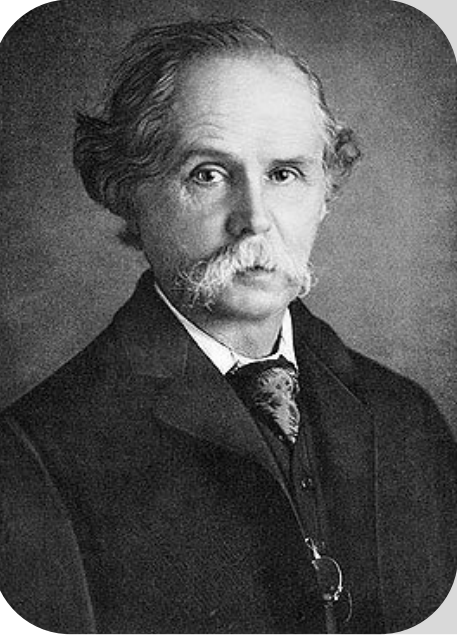
Figure: Provinces and major cities in Apartheid South Africa, 1985



Source: Ogura (1996)

Note: This only shows a subset of the ten Bantustans.

Traditional Approaches to Uneven Development

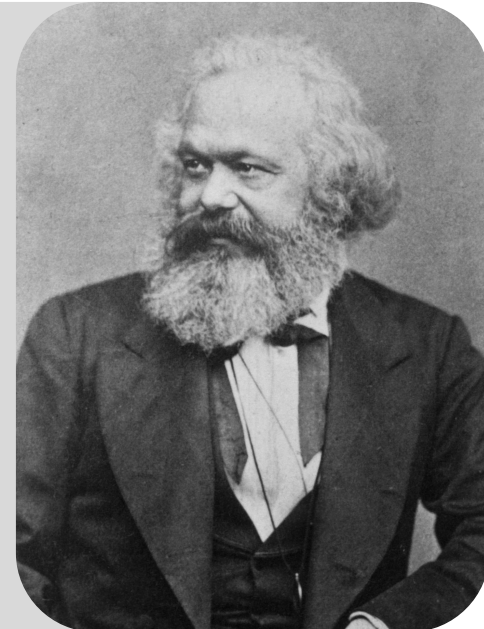


Neo-Classical Perspective:

- Rooted in classical economic theories that emphasize market forces, rational decision-making, and equilibrium mechanisms.
- Disparities in urban-industrial growth arise due to differences in factor endowments, competitive advantages, and the efficiency of markets in allocating resources.

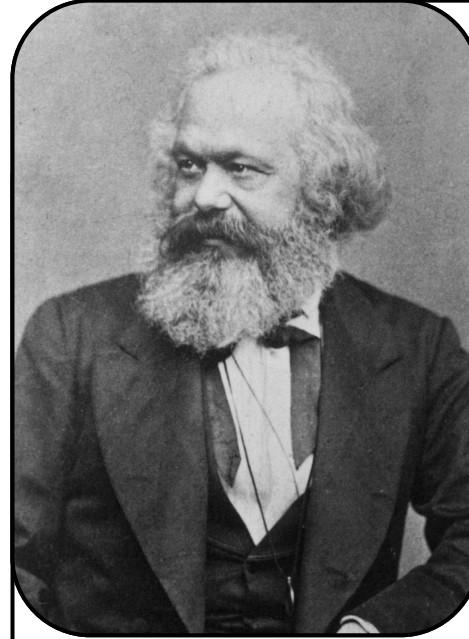
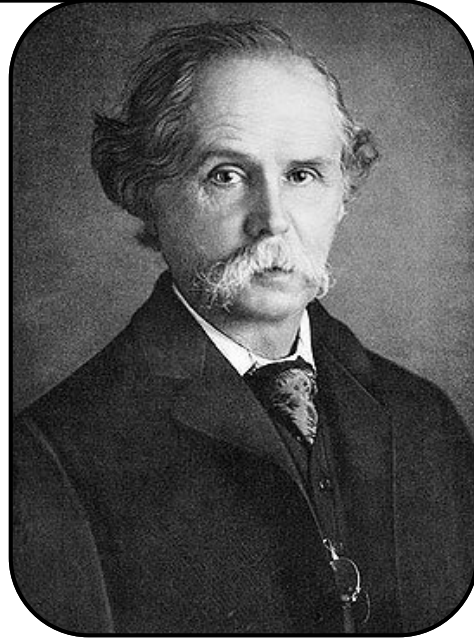
Marxian Perspective:

- Uneven urban-industrial development is an inherent feature of capitalism, driven by class struggle, capital accumulation, and the contradictions of capitalist production.
- Reflects the failure of capitalist urban-industrial development to provide equitable opportunities.



Neither approach fully captures South Africa's uneven urban-industrial development

- Ignorance of historical and structural factors (e.g., colonial legacies, apartheid spatial planning in South Africa).
- Overestimating market efficiency, assuming that market failures (e.g., monopolies, externalities) do not distort development.
- Neglecting political and institutional influences, such as state policies, governance, and socio-political inequalities and underplaying geography.



- Over-emphasizing economic determinism and underestimating local agency in shaping development.
- Assuming a binary core-periphery model, while contemporary development patterns can be more complex and multi-polar.
- Failing to account for technological innovations and entrepreneurial activity, which can drive development independent of capitalist crises.

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding South Africa's Spatial Inequalities in the Context of Uneven Urban-Industrial Development

Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG)

- Explains industrial clustering, regional growth, and firm strategies (Boschma & Frenken, 2018).
- Views economies as complex evolving systems (Martin & Sunley, 2023).

Key Weakness: Lacks engagement with politics, power, and institutional dynamics across space (spatio-temporalities of governance)

Geographical Political Economy (GPE)

- Integrates political economy, institutions, and governance structures (MacKinnon et al., 2009).
- Links spatial inequalities to capital accumulation, state intervention, and historical legacies.
- Draws from global production networks, transition studies, and sociological perspectives.
- Emphasizes the role of power in shaping economic outcomes and value capture outcomes

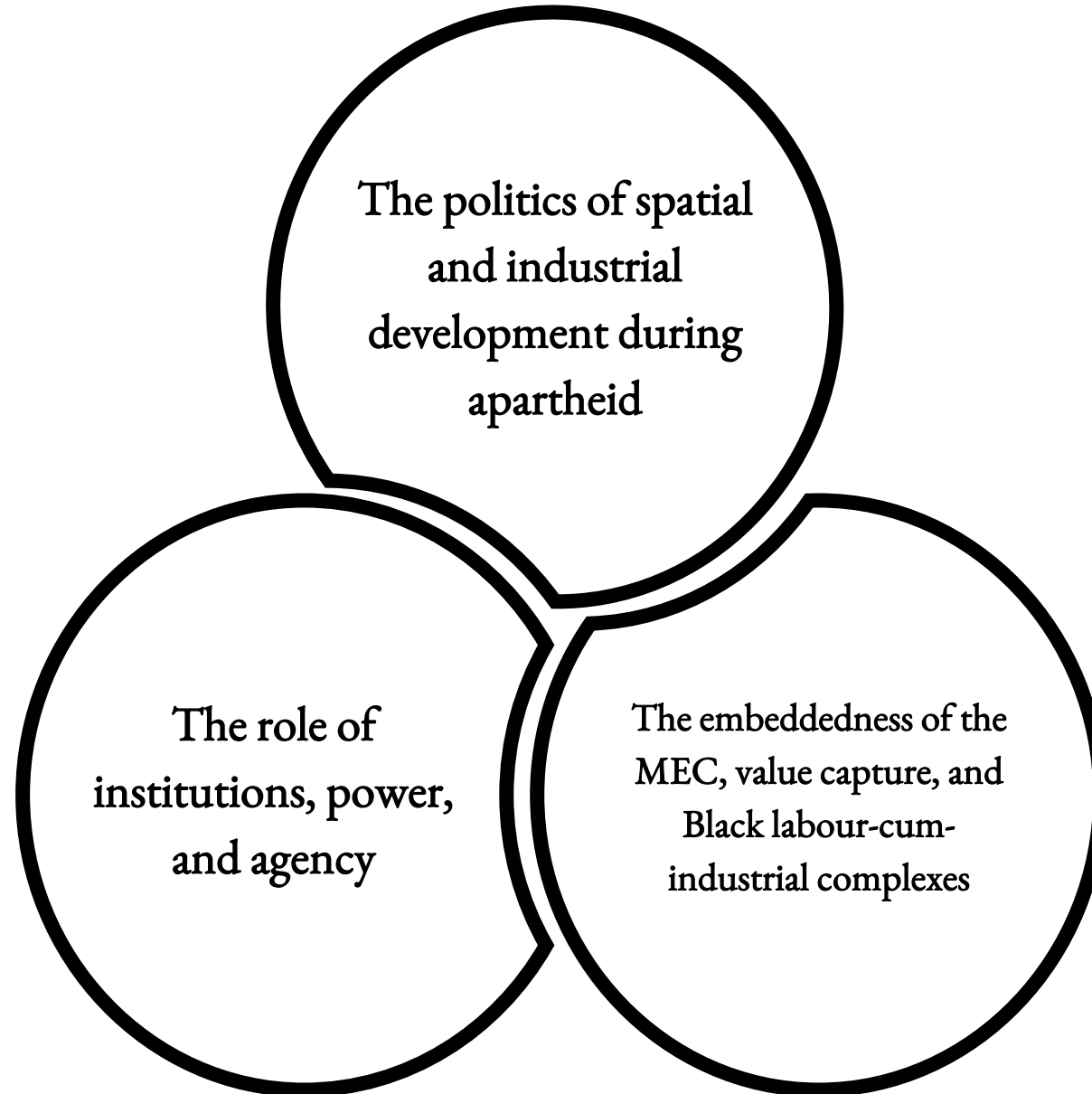
Why GPE?

Geographical Political Economy (GPE)

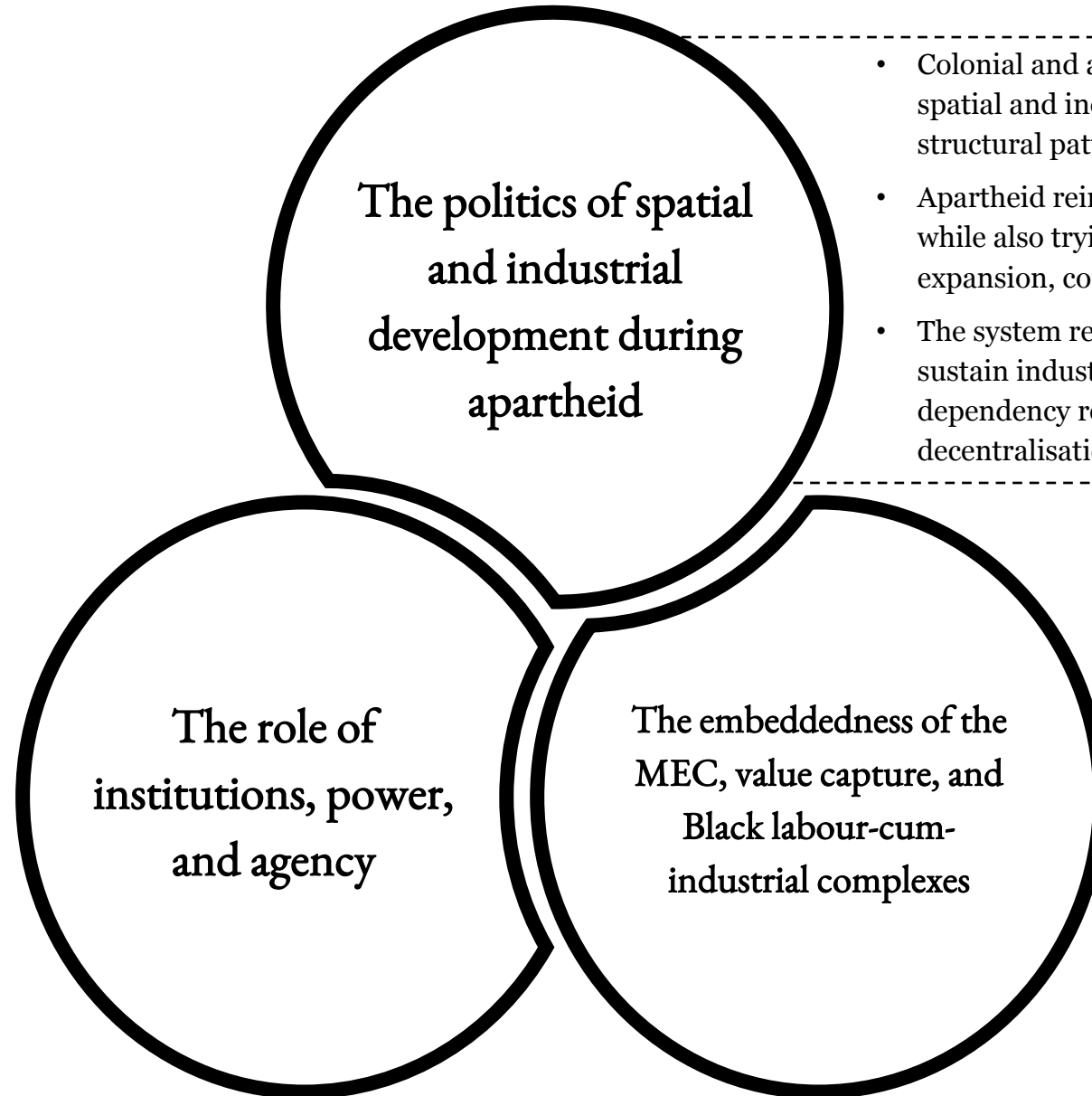
- Addresses power, agency, and institutional constraints in economic development.
- Able to explain structural and complex inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa.
- Bridges gaps between EEG and Marxist geography by integrating politics, class, and spatial economics.
- Provides a holistic approach to understanding urban-industrial path dependencies.

The GPE framework offers holistic, multidimensional, and powerful lens with which to unpack apartheid's political economy and the prevailing power dynamics, institutional arrangements, and the interplay of space and socio-political structures that characterised the uneven development across the South African spatial economy.

The Geographical Political Economy of Uneven Development in Apartheid South Africa



The Geographical Political Economy of Uneven Development in Apartheid South Africa



- Colonial and apartheid policies shaped South Africa's spatial and industrial development, creating enduring structural patterns.
- Apartheid reinforced racial segregation for social control while also trying to promote capitalist urban-industrial expansion, contradicting its own policies.
- The system relied on controlling migrant labour to sustain industrial growth, reinforcing dominance-dependency relationships and necessitating decentralisation.

The Geographical Political Economy of Uneven Development in Apartheid South Africa

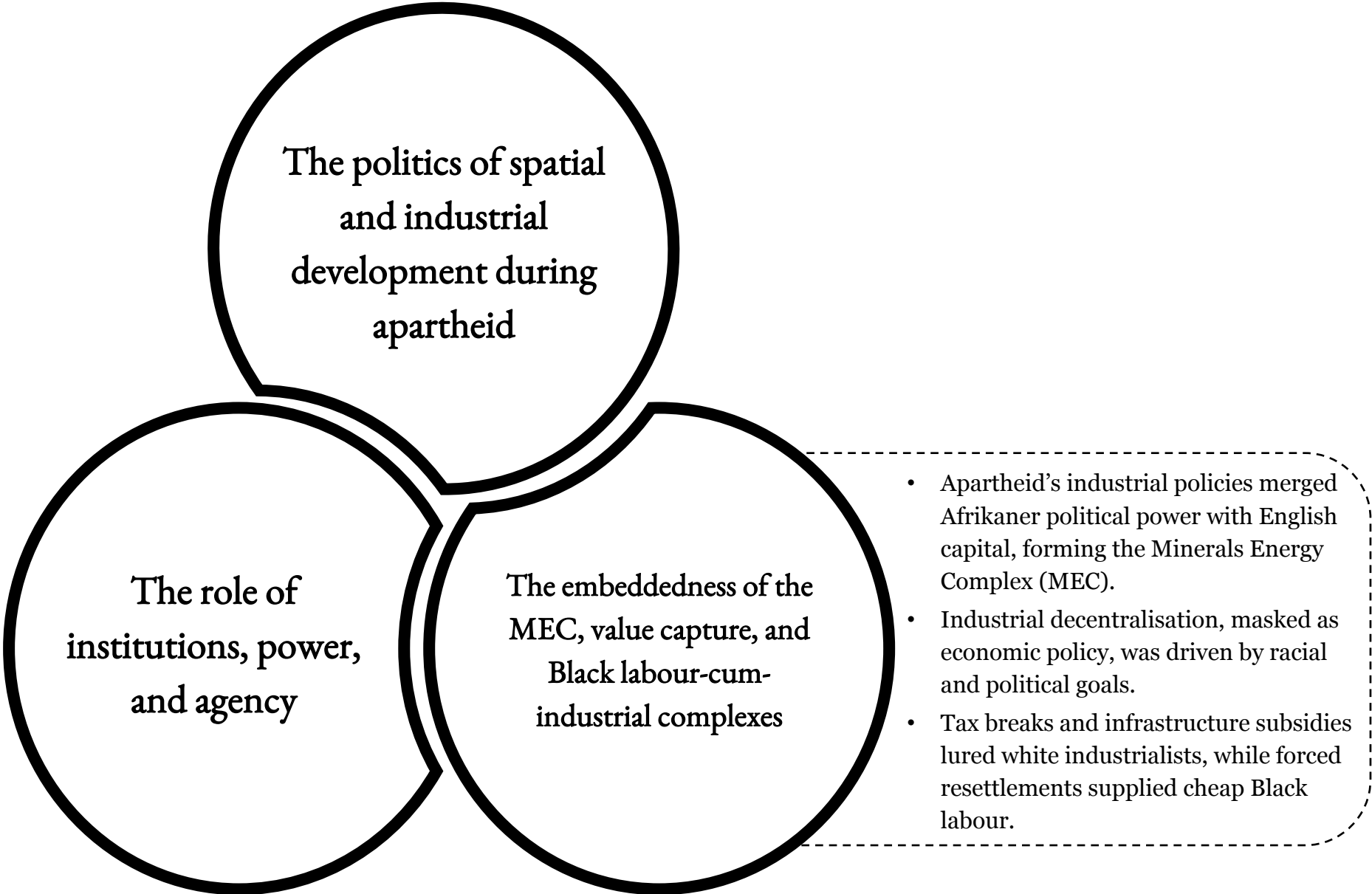
The politics of spatial
and industrial
development during
apartheid

The role of
institutions, power,
and agency

The embeddedness of the
MEC, value capture, and
Black labour-cum-
industrial complexes

- Apartheid's Bantustan policy institutionalised segregation by creating ten ethnically distinct Homelands, reinforcing territorial and economic divisions.
- The TBVC states were granted nominal independence but remained politically and economically dependent on the apartheid system.
- Industrial decentralisation policies aimed at attracting white industrialists to Bantustans, exploiting artificially cheap Black labour.

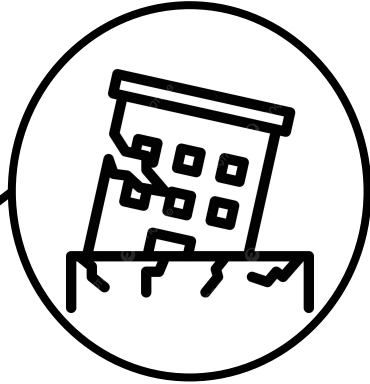
The Geographical Political Economy of Uneven Development in Apartheid South Africa



The outcomes of the geographical political economy of apartheid South Africa

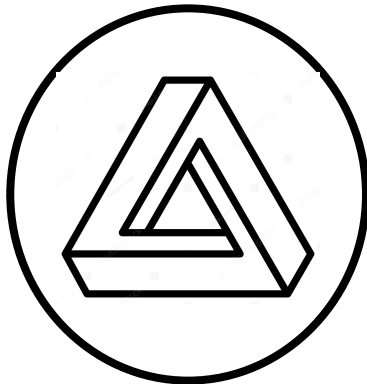
The case of Bophuthatswana

Urban-industrial underdevelopment in Bophuthatswana



- Bophuthatswana's economy thrived due to platinum reserves and a strong tourism sector (De Clercq, 1991), bolstered by Chief Lucas Mangope's perceived political stability.
- However, structural constraints—limited technological progress, weak capital investment, and a reliance on small service-based businesses—hindered sustained growth (Leistner, 1977).
- Wealth distribution remained highly uneven, while financial mismanagement, corruption, and biased urban development fueled anti-government resentment and repression (De Clercq, 1991).
- Geographic, institutional, and political limitations exacerbated uneven development and poor living standards, particularly amid rapid population growth (Smit, 1977).

Paradoxical development during Bophuthatswana's 'independence'



- Bophuthatswana's development legacy, while derived from apartheid's paradoxical development approach, was also entrenched through its dependency with the apartheid spatial and urban economy.
- Became an arena for the realisation of a neo-colonial solution in which the white government could maintain its positions of power, privilege, and dominance (Cleary & van der Merwe, n.d.).
- Politico-economic dependence on apartheid South Africa was furthered by significant contestation around its nation-building narrative, marred by corruption, geographic fragmentation, and differences between the bureaucratic and civil fractions of the petty bourgeoisie.

Conclusions

1

Apartheid's Multidimensional Segregation and Its Lasting Impact

Apartheid's segregation policies affected South Africa's political, economic, and spatial landscapes, producing uneven urban-industrial development with long-term consequences, particularly in Bantustan areas, which were systematically deprived of the necessary resources for self-sustained growth.

2

Interwoven Urban and Industrial Development Processes

The paper reframes South Africa's uneven development by recognising urban and industrial development as interconnected rather than separate. Apartheid's GPE was driven by racial and class-based nationalism, white capital accumulation, and spatial displacement strategies, fostering stark inequalities.

3

Failure of Industrial Decentralization Policies

Despite multiple incentive packages aimed at decentralizing industry away from urban cores like the PWV complex, these policies failed to take widespread effect. Instead, the apartheid geographical political economy sustained a skewed spatial and industrial order, deepening dependency relationships.

4

Paradox of Apartheid's urban-industrial Segregation objectives

While apartheid sought to separate urban and industrial spaces, it paradoxically strengthened the economic linkages between Bophuthatswana's industrial townships and apartheid South Africa, creating a neo-colonial dependency that undermined Bophuthatswana's supposed independence.

5

Implications for Post-Apartheid Urban-Industrial Policy

A multifaceted GPE approach is useful to understanding the legacy of apartheid's urban-industrial development and understanding Gauteng's ongoing spatial and industrial disparities. Policies must account for these complexities in attempts to integrate core and peripheral areas.

Thank you for your time

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