Ethnographies of Power


Published by Wits University Press

Veriava, Ahmed, et al.
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What does it mean to work with radical concepts?

We live in a time in which the forces of capital, imperialism, nationalism, racism and populism continue to connect people and places, yet also profoundly differentiate them. For successive generations of scholars engaging with these processes, extant concepts often seem too abstract or blunt to illuminate lived struggles and the ways they are bound up with race, gender, class, sexuality and other social relations. When a concept outlives its purpose in actual struggles, should it be archived for use when similar struggles might re-emerge? Alternatively, ought concepts to be reviewed and renewed with the regularity of doing the weekly laundry – and would this offer fresh insights into what might appear obvious or staid in both radical analysis and politics?

The idea of collating concepts for radical critique owes a debt to Raymond Williams’ classic, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society ([1975] 2015). Williams begins the book with a story about his return to Oxford University, after serving in the army during the Second World War, when he encountered another veteran. He recounts their shared sense of disconnection with the society they had returned to, as they both felt that people around them did not ‘speak the same language’ as they did. Williams reflects on this turn of phrase, often used between
generations, classes, genders and societies. He introduces *Keywords* not so much as a glossary or dictionary, but rather as an exploration of ‘the problem of vocabulary’ (Williams [1975] 2015, xxvii). Several books have followed this cue, including those that examine South African social life, with its particular preoccupations with segregation and desegregation, among other things (Boonzaier and Sharp 1988; Shepherd and Robins 2008). These texts provide a useful exploration of the social life of words and the profound power of the state in shaping everyday vocabularies.

Another kind of approach considers the multiplicity of theoretical traditions eclipsed by scholars’ single-minded focus on the legacies of the European Enlightenment and its imperial effects. Barbara Cassin et al.’s *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014), for instance, begins with the engaging premise that there is considerable loss in the meanings of philosophical, literary and political concepts across languages and cultures. The Portuguese notion of *saudade*, for instance, is better expressed in the dulcet tones of Cesária Évora than in translation as ‘sadness’ or ‘sorrow’, which hold nothing of the bitter-sweet history of surviving slavery and colonialism in Cape Verde. Many things remain untranslatable, caught between the many differences that persist.

*Ethnographies of Power* takes a different journey to concepts than the above two approaches; it is directed at how scholars use radical concepts in social research in mutual relation to real-world struggles with a view towards expanding social justice. We begin this book with the suggestion that scholars, like all people, engage with the world with their bodies and minds, and attempt to work with concepts that might illuminate how they encounter seemingly unalterable forces that shape their condition. Rather than developing concepts through abstract thought processes, scholars’ labour to create radical concepts must be understood in light of Italian militant Antonio Gramsci’s attention to ‘praxis’, the inseparability of theory and practice. This focus on praxis is central to the critical ethnographic approach that the scholars in this book exemplify. In linked
ways, we propose ethnographies of power as a way to learn from and advance movements for a radically different world.

As is evident in our subtitle, ‘Working Radical Concepts with Gillian Hart’, this book is also inspired by the work of Gillian Hart, who has honed a geographical approach to critical ethnography as a way to generate concepts emerging from intensive and comparative engagement with the experienced world, in solidarity with a range of radical movements. Professor emerita at the University of California, Berkeley, in the United States and distinguished professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, Hart is an internationally recognised key thinker across the fields of human geography, African studies, political economy and development studies. She has also been a powerful and passionate teacher who has shaped several generations of radical scholars and activists from Berkeley to Johannesburg, as well as the world over. This book honours Hart by continuing the praxis of critical ethnography as pedagogy for social change. As you read this book, you will read about how Hart produced and refined concepts through social science research. But you will also see all the contributors to this book demonstrating how they have used particular concepts, transporting them elsewhere and transforming them while putting them to work in new contexts. We intend this to be a living text and invite you to work with these concepts yourself to see how they might be used in the contexts that are important to you.

*Ethnographies of Power* is not a complete lexicon of radical concepts; it does not tell the reader what to think in order to be radical, nor is it a dictionary of fixed categories – such a thing cannot exist in a changing world. The important thing about all the concepts in this text is that they are inspired by political work in the world, or might be put to work in the service of social change. We ask readers to consider how they might work with these and other concepts in relation to real-world struggles, while considering their uses in other places in our interrelated world. Indeed, we ask you to be open to surprises as you experiment with radical concepts to explain the forces that structure the problems and
situations vital to your own lives. We hope this experimental quality will be useful for students at any level, in formal institutions or in the school of life and struggle, whether in designing and conducting social science research or in trying to explain and transform the reality around them.

**Working concepts for critical ethnography**

This book is organised around a series of working concepts emerging from Hart’s published work. Most, though not all, chapters diagnose and rethink these concepts in three moves, as follows. First, the author takes a concept from Hart’s writings, keeping in mind how she uses this concept in the task of explanation. Second, the author works backwards through the genealogy of this concept in Hart’s work. This operation of ‘working backwards’ helps provide a sense of the praxis that lies behind what appears to be an inert concept to show how theory and practice are intertwined in scholarship more generally. Third, the author looks forward in relation to their own research concerns and contexts. We offer this as one approach to epistemic decolonisation, but readers will find others in the chapters that follow, all of which focus in different ways on the conceptual productivity of critical ethnography.

In other words, we find in Hart’s work a powerful argument that ethnography, when informed by social theory, is also able to generate and revise concepts. Underlying this argument is Karl Marx’s understanding that rather than being composed of elements that are isolatable or independent ‘factors’, the social world is always relational and its elements always exist in dialectical relation to each other (Ollman 1976, 14–16). As David Harvey clarifies, ‘elements, things, structures, and systems do not exist outside of or prior to the processes, flows, and relations that create, sustain, or undermine them’ (1996, 49). Or, to turn to a text important to Hart’s thought, Stuart Hall (2003) argues in a careful reading of Marx’s method that ‘the concrete’ ought never be considered as empirically given, which is the common-sense view
of ethnography as thick description of all that is obvious. Rather, Hall argues, when the world is seen as composed by dialectical forces beyond our perception, our task as critics is to represent any concrete situation by understanding it ‘as the “unity of many determinations”’ (2003, 115). In other words, ethnography without concepts to grasp these determinative forces is left grasping for the complexity of the world without the ability to explain it, let alone propose to change how or for whom it works. Indeed, explanation, in this Marxist tradition, is necessary for coming to terms with the contradictions through which we might discern even minor possibilities for meaningful social change. By refining concepts, in other words, ethnography can become ‘radical’ – by which we do not mean judgemental, but rather that it can explain how reality got to be this way and what might be done to change it.

There is another element that we draw on in this critical ethnographic approach to concepts: all the writers in this book, in one way or another, have been shaped by contemporary human geography and its concern to understand space as not simply an inert backdrop or an empty box in which the world unfolds. Rather, geographers seek to understand social space as a historian understands time, as made, fought for, destroyed, rebuilt and pulled apart in different ways. Key to this active, productive and dialectical understanding of space is the thought of Henri Lefebvre (see, for instance, Lefebvre [1974] 1991).

Drawing on Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space, Hart argues that critical ethnography has to think of space and time in active terms. In this, she was fundamentally influenced by Doreen Massey’s argument that places are always intersections of far-flung spatial processes. Importantly, Massey (1994, 154) adds that the social and spatial relations that make places distinct are not limited to the period being studied, nor are they contained within any particular place, whether the place is a room, a city or an empire. Places always ‘include relations which stretch beyond’ them, linking what appears to be inside the place to that which appears external to it (5). The key point is that the
here-and-now always exists in relation to the elsewhere-and-then, as well as, in our time of anticipation of further pandemics and climate emergencies, in relation to fragile futures. To put it simply, no place is an island. The implication of thinking geographically about both space and time, about spatio-temporal relations, is that critical ethnography can never be mired in localism. Massey’s intervention was a clarion call to avoid this kind of intellectual enclavism; it forces us to be our most internationalist selves. As Hart says regarding the power of critical ethnography attentive to such a relational conception of place: ‘[The] conception of places as nodal points of connection in socially produced space moves us beyond “case studies” to make broader claims: it enables, in other words, a non-positivist understanding of generality. In this conception, particularities or specificities arise through interrelations between objects, events, places, and identities; and it is through clarifying how these relations are produced and changed in practice that close study of a particular part can generate broader claims and understandings’ (Hart 2006a, 995–996; emphasis in original).

With this active understanding of place, Hart refuses the assumption that the ‘concrete studies deal with what is local and particular, and that abstract theory encompasses general (or global) processes that transcend particular places’ (Hart 2006a, 995–996). Practising this is no easy task. Thankfully, we do have examples to think with. Hart’s journey has in many ways been an attempt to respond to this challenge.

**Gillian Hart’s intellectual journey**

Hart’s intellectual work reflects an interdisciplinary and internationalist journey through which she has honed a distinctively radical ethnographic approach to political economy. Along the way, she has picked up concepts, worked with them, put some of them aside, revisited classic texts in light of new concerns, shifted disciplinary gears, refused various orthodoxies, and refined her political commitments in relation to the societies in which she has lived and worked. In this
overview, we journey with this key thinker, following her trail of interconnected insights. Important to Hart’s journey is her dogged determination to demonstrate the analytical and political power of an ethnographic approach to the critique of capitalism in the post-colonial world, grounded in social theory and engaged with broader geographical processes that have sought to scaffold regional hegemonies in apartheid South Africa, Suharto’s New Order Indonesia, Bangladesh under martial law, Malaysia under Mahathir’s tightening second term, post-apartheid South Africa under multiple regimes, and resurgent populist nationalisms across the world today, not least in the spectacularly cynical forms of Trumpism-Bannonism in the United States and Hindutva (Hindu ethno-racial supremacy) in India. Hart’s main concern across these places is how we might understand complex forces that constitute a historical conjuncture, in order to call their stability into question.

In 1971, Hart journeyed from South Africa to Ithaca, New York, to begin postgraduate studies in economics at Cornell University. Intending to work on Nigeria, she was drawn to Bangladesh through the outpouring of Western support for the liberation movement and began studying Bangla. However, rising authoritarianism in Bangladesh forced Hart to think of another potential region and she would not return to Bangladesh until another conjuncture, another political opening at the decade’s end. Through fortuitous events, Hart’s dissertation research turned to Java, to a study of agrarian change in the wake of Green Revolution technologies in rice-growing regions. This was a hot research topic at the time, as scholars sought to understand the effects of capital and technology in the countryside; a polemical way of putting the question was whether the Green Revolution might turn red, advanced by the making of a class-conscious rural proletariat. The concept of agrarian revolution, after all, implied both the technological transformation of agriculture through capitalism and the making of agrarian revolutionary movements across the developing world, with China, Cuba and Vietnam as archetypes. The Marxist
interrogation of ‘the agrarian question’ was in many ways reinvigorated in this intellectual conjuncture, as scholars explored the effects of agrarian capitalism on peasantries, households, labour, poverty, class, gender, food security and agrarian mobilisation.

Hart’s doctoral dissertation sought to respond to large-scale survey research on the impact of Green Revolution technology through intensive ‘village studies’. She sought to work on multiple villages and finally settled on one. She arrived for 19 months of dissertation research in Java in 1975 and worked with the Indonesian Agro-Economic Survey at Bogor Agricultural University, where she engaged with key figures in Indonesian rural sociology and agrarian change, Professor Sajogyo, Sediono Tjondronegoro, Gunawan Wiradi and expatriate Marxist anthropologist Ben White. White’s library was a crucial space for Hart to hone her analytical tools and one where they, like many other agrarian scholars of this time, returned with fresh eyes to the classical agrarian question and to Vladimir Lenin and Alexander Chayanov. Lenin’s late-nineteenth-century argument about the polarisation of agrarian classes had been read as the antinomy of Chayanov’s on the endurance of peasant households, while both arguments had been made on the basis of the same zemstvo (local, self-government bodies in Russia) statistics and with different theoretical frameworks. These agrarian scholars of the 1970s saw class polarisation and household persistence held in tense dialectical relation, a perspective that would be vital to Hart’s study of a village in coastal north-east Java she called Sukodono.

In brief, Hart’s dissertation research shows extreme concentration of land, high rates of waged labour and important differences between smallholder and landless households; the landless earned significantly less and worked long hours in poorly remunerated non-farm work, while smallholders were increasingly indebted to large landholders. In relation to broader debates about rural employment in Java in the 1970s, Hart showed that rather than ‘surplus labour’ being drawn out of agriculture by the benign forces of competitive labour markets, landless labour was being compelled to leave a class-differentiated agrarian
structure in which they, unlike smallholders, were not the beneficiaries of seasonal labour relations (Hart 1978, 1980, 1981). A key insight was that relations of debt and labour were tightly intertwined.

In important articles from this period, Hart reflects on scholarship across South and South East Asia, particularly rice-farming regions subject to technological change, where land, labour and credit relations appeared to ‘interlock’ in ways that concentrated power in some hands while subjecting most people to place-based structures of preference and inequality. Responding to both neoclassical and Marxist political economists, Hart deftly explains ‘exclusionary labour arrangements’ as neither feudal hangovers nor archaisms bound to dissolve with the spread of markets, but rather as institutional reconfigurations within agrarian capitalism (Hart 1986a, 1986b). While economists politely acknowledge the importance of ‘extra-economic’ relations, Hart shows that they do not come to terms with the exercise of power.

On completing her dissertation, Hart decided to leave the tightening authoritarianism of Suharto’s Indonesia to return to Bangladesh in a period of reform, with vibrant space for critique. Returning over multiple research trips between 1979 and 1981, Hart began to see her Indonesian research in comparative terms, to later publish on densely populated rice-growing regions supposedly defined by surplus labour, contending with periodic labour shortages under parallel conditions of landholding inequality, demography, agricultural commercialisation and Green Revolution technology, but under substantially different power relations linking the state to landed elites as well as operating across agrarian classes (Hart 1983, 1984 and particularly 1988). This insight, still percolating in her writing, was key to her first book-length monograph. This multi-scalar attentiveness to comparison would mark Hart’s method for decades to come.

Hart’s first monograph, *Power, Labor, and Livelihood: Processes of Change in Rural Java* (1986c), builds on her critique of the interlocking transactions debate, as well as implicitly on her experience of the very different political conjuncture in Bangladesh, to show how
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specific relations of power, mediated differently by the colonial state and by Suharto’s New Order state, have been central to the fate of the peasantry. Hart pushed well beyond Clifford Geertz’s classic thesis on ‘agricultural involution’ in rice-growing Java, which posited that the agrarian system bequeathed by Dutch colonialism was unproductive and that it created a landscape of generalised poverty. Rather, Hart shows that the New Order state had intensified the role of the state in village life by offering patronage to the dominant landholding class, which in turn strengthened its power vis-à-vis a middle group of small-holders through sharecropping and exclusionary labour arrangements while dominating the landless poor. The state reinforced this social domination over the landless through minimal public works projects. However, Hart notes that the New Order state of the mid-1980s was also reliant on oil wealth that had become increasingly precarious, calling into question the stability of the entire class structure of agrarian inequality.

Questions of the state and of agrarian classes continued in Hart’s work of the subsequent decade, as she shifted, given her language skills in Bahasa, to work in Malaysia in 1987–1988, in the rapidly transforming rice-farming Muda region of northern Malaysia (Hart 1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1992a, 1992b). The 1980s are an important conjuncture in Hart’s work in many respects. She had quickly gained substantial comparative expertise across rice-farming areas in South and South East Asia and co-edited, with Andrew Turton, Ben White, Brian Fegan and Lim Teck Ghee, *Agrarian Transformations: Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia* (Hart et al. 1989), an important collection that linked localised and longitudinal studies of agrarian change in rice-growing regions in Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia to larger political economic forces. Hart’s own chapter in this book deepened her analysis of state patronage in the countryside.

In this period, Hart also found that her analysis of the political mediation of interlocked transactions in land, labour and credit mirrored the insights of fieldwork-based agrarian studies across Asia and Africa.
While she had been engaging with the Marxist critique of the household since her time at Bogor in Java, Hart encountered a different milieu while a professor at Boston University. She was drawn into an important network of Africanist scholars of gender, households and agrarian change, including Sara Berry, Pauline Peters, Jane Guyer and, further afield, geographers Michael Watts and Judith Carney. Parallel inspiration came from innovations in feminist social science from Joan Scott, Dorothy Smith, Henrietta Moore, Diane Wolf and others. Hart’s writing emerging from this moment shows a determination to critique the economics of households on its own terms, with this feminist work in mind (Hart 1992b, 1995c, 1997a), but her writings from Malaysia activate the politics of gender in her research in new ways, as she attends to rural women’s labour, migration and militancy in the wake of the gendered politics of the patronage relations she had long studied (Hart 1991, 2007).

In the late 1980s, Hart credits her graduate students in a seminar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for leading her to Massey’s critiques of the ‘localities debate’ in British economic geography, through which Massey had arrived at an understanding of the politics of place that paralleled the work that scholars of agrarian Asia, Africa and Latin America had been engaged in. Hart also began looking critically at a phenomenon that would sweep across specific parts of agrarian Asia, and which was being seen quite differently from varied theoretical and political perspectives, and this was the process of agrarian diversification and rural industrialisation, which had taken surprising paths in Taiwan and post-Maoist China. This led her to a critical perspective with respect to the rural–urban interface and back to the agrarian question for its broader implications for regional change. But by this time, her research focus was shifting again, this time back to her native South Africa (Hart 1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b, 1997b; Hart and Todes 1997).

Something else was happening in the late 1980s following clandestine interactions between elements of South African capital and
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state with some from the African National Congress (ANC) at a time of political and economic stalemate brought on by economic sanctions pressured by the global Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), unstoppable labour and community struggles in the country, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union as imagined patron of a socialist South Africa. Multiple forces came together in the unbanning of liberation movement organisations in early 1990. Hart had been engaged in political work aligned with the AAM in Boston. At this conjuncture, she returned to South Africa, rebuilding connections with activists and scholars in Johannesburg, Durban, Grahamstown and Cape Town, including her childhood friend, Sheila Weinberg. In 1991, she moved to the University of California, Berkeley, where she hosted South African scholars and activists including Vishnu Padayachee, Ari Sitas and Astrid von Kotze. She developed close relationships with many South Africans and began to focus her intellectual and political life in Durban in the early 1990s.

There is much to say about Hart’s subsequent three decades of work in South Africa, on which we will be succinct. From the early 1990s through the early 2000s, Durban and specific pockets at the University of Durban-Westville and the University of Natal, Durban (later amalgamated with the Pietermaritzburg campus into the University of KwaZulu-Natal), had forged connections between social science and movements for social justice in post-apartheid times. Hart built relationships with activists, ranging from lifelong members of the ANC to members of the social movements emerging outside of the Tripartite Alliance of the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Hart became involved with Padayachee and other Durban-based colleagues in setting up an important coursework master’s programme at what was then the University of Durban-Westville, and subsequently with David Szanton in training doctoral students in linking social theory and social research in writing a dissertation proposal or prospectus. Hart had also begun long-term research in rural KwaZulu-Natal in a complex project that drew significantly on her Asian expertise and on
the ways in which the lessons of agrarian transition and industrialisation were being misconstrued in the confluence of neo-liberalism and democratic transition in South Africa in the late 1990s (Hart 1998a, 1998b, 2002c).

Hart’s Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa (2002a), with its powerful cover image by Trevor Makho ba depicting apartheid forced removals, pulls together a complex set of comparisons in a powerful argument about the dilemmas of post-apartheid capitalism. At the heart of the book is a comparison of two formerly white towns with their black township hinterlands, a comparison that allows Hart to explore divergent trajectories of agrarian change, racialised dispossession, industrialisation and political mobilisation during and after apartheid. The decades of Hart’s departure had seen a deepening of the controversial apartheid policy of industrial decentralisation to attract capital to the borderlands between white areas and the dense quasi-rural black townships. The state had offered subsidies to Taiwanese capital to locate here; in the 1990s, these subsidies ended, some labour-intensive industries went into precipitous decline and work politics became increasingly despotic, citing the influx of cheap Chinese commodities and putatively high local wages. The Ladysmith–Newcastle comparison is one aspect of this study, but the other is shaped by Chinese connections and comparisons. A chapter on the history of industrialisation in East Asia shows that it was premised on land reform and supports to the social wage, which had been fundamentally dismantled through the long history of dispossession in South Africa.

Hart extended this argument in multiple papers (Hart 2002c, 2004c, 2006a, 2006b; Hart and Sitas 2004), while also writing a series of pieces on development theory and practice, neo-liberalism, critical ethnography and pedagogy (Hart 2001, 2002b, 2004a, 2006a, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010). She also returned to Indonesia and wrote important pieces with Nancy Peluso and others (Afiff et al. 2005; Hart 2004b; Hart and Peluso 2005). An important paper returns to Hart’s preoccupation since her Boston years: the way in which Stuart Hall had effectively reshaped
the race–class debate on apartheid capitalism (Hart 2007). Another piece reflects on Massey’s influence on her thought (Hart 2018a). An important collaboration with Michael Ekers, Stefan Kipfer and Alex Loftus (Ekers et al. 2013) on the geographical significance of Gramsci’s thought led to the edited *Gramsci: Space, Nature, Politics*, with chapters by Hart on translation and populism, in which Hart also uses Gramsci’s notion of passive revolution to think comparatively about South Africa and India.

Hart’s book *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* (2013) picks up on some of the threads of *Disabling Globalization*, notably the comparative lens of Ladysmith and Newcastle and their township peripheries, at a moment after the political effervescence in post-apartheid Durban that she had been a part of. The cover image by Blessing Ngobeni, in contrast to the 2002 book, shows artistically the distance that two decades from the democratic transition has meant. Makhoba’s realist portrayal of apartheid-era forced removals represents certainties about politics in *Disabling Globalization* that have entirely evaporated in Ngobeni’s rich and troubled mosaic on the cover of *Rethinking the South African Crisis*. After the end of a rising tide of civic activism, Hart argues that we ought to consider formations of popular anger that persist, often directed at local government and in relation to the commodification of municipal service provision of water, electricity and housing. Carefully working from within her ethnographic context, Hart shows that popular politics ought to be understood as part of the crisis provoked by the unravelling of the hegemonic project of the ruling Alliance. Fundamental to understanding how this crisis plays out is a complex political-economic analysis of nationalism as simultaneously a process of ‘de-nationalisation’ that has produced capital flight, currency volatility, a narrowing industrial base and deepening inequality, as well as ‘re-nationalisation’ in various rounds of remaking populist government. Hart shows why we must take these dialectics of nationalism seriously, as they refract through local government struggles over a racialised landscape of inequality.
As Hart’s interlocutors in Durban had begun to disperse, she began to spend increasing amounts of time in the 2010s in Johannesburg, eventually moving her South African home to the city of her birth. A number of her key interventions in this period were in dynamic public seminars at the University of the Witwatersrand and through debate and discussion with her rich network of friends and comrades across academia and popular movements.

An abiding concern that has in effect been foisted on Hart’s trajectory at every turn in her journey is that she has consistently followed in the tracks of authoritarian power. Sometimes she has evaded moments of repression and at other times she has been witness to moments of political awakening. This realisation has perhaps brought her to a comparative study of nationalism and populism, looking outward from her work on South Africa in the 2010s to the Bharatiya Janata Party under Modi in India and to Trumpism-Bannonism in the United States (Hart 2015, 2019, 2020a, 2020b), as well to rethinking what she calls ‘relational comparison’ or ‘conjunctural comparison’, as her work has in a sense always involved comparative insights (Hart 2015, 2018b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). We look forward to Hart’s current book project on these themes as it will undoubtedly inspire other people to walk alongside her to engage with the turbulent 2020s, as the Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbates crises of racial capitalism across the world in different ways.

Hart’s journeys are instructive in many ways: for a dogged commitment to engaging with political-economic and intellectual conjunctures, for a fearless will to take on orthodoxies based on faulty analysis, for engagement with militants spanning a wide section of the left, for a curiosity about what constitutes the detail of popular struggle in particular places and a desire to contribute to these, for an attentiveness to comparative lessons with a similar openness and rigour, and, not least, for a commitment to working with concepts as powerful weapons with which we might yet expose the contradictions sown by authoritarian power everywhere.
The structure of this book

As noted above, Hart’s ongoing refinement of concepts has occurred in conjunction with some significant moves: from economics to geography, South East Asia to South Africa and Boston to Berkeley. In organising the chapters in this volume, we follow a broadly chronological timeline to reflect the progression of Hart’s thought, beginning with concepts forged while she worked in South East Asia and moving to those developed when her research moved to South Africa. Inseparable from Hart’s scholarship is her commitment to undergraduate teaching, including a large course on what she calls Big-D theories of Development and little-d processes of capitalist development, and her passionate engagement in her teaching and writing with the work of Gramsci.

In chapter 1, Bridget Kenny elucidates the concept of gendered labour, returning the reader to Hart’s early work on South East Asia. In the 1980s, Hart and other feminist scholars offered a groundbreaking critique of ‘malestream’ social science by insisting that the household is a contested gendered domain. Hart also revealed how gender and class relations were formed through a relational understanding of space through reading Lefebvre and Massey. Kenny uses these approaches to critique labour politics in South Africa and how it has downplayed the multiply determined reasons for why and when people act politically and collectively in specific sites. Kenny’s research, which traces gendered meanings and practices in retail worker politics in Johannesburg over nearly a century, develops a rich spatial analysis to explore shifts in the political subject ‘workers’.

In chapter 2, Sharad Chari brings into relation two apparently unrelated concepts: interlocking transactions and racial capitalism. With deep roots in the South African left, the concept of racial capitalism has attained something of a revival in recent years, buoyed by the passing of Cedric Robinson and unrelenting evidence of brutal and systemic anti-black racism. Chari returns to Hart’s agrarian studies research in South and South
East Asia, where she intervened in debates about interlocking or interlinked land, labour and credit relations by arguing that situated forms of social power and exclusion were at the heart of uneven geographies of agrarian capitalism. Chari argues that Hart’s response mirrors what is now called racial capitalism and that while Robinson focuses on the enduring power of racial consciousness, there is a reason he did not engage with the agrarian studies debates. Divergent theoretical routes took Robinson to an argument about racial consciousness, while Hart, like Hall, focuses on the micro-foundations of political economic relations. By reading Hart in relation to racial capitalism debates, Chari argues that Hart’s response to the interlinkage debate might contribute to a more granular and materialist analysis of geographies of racial capitalism.

In chapter 3, Mark Hunter also returns to Hart’s work in South East Asia to illuminate key roots of the concept of relational comparison. This term, which has animated debates on method within and beyond geography, is most fully developed in Hart’s book *Disabling Globalization* (2002a), which centres on two distinct locations in South Africa, Newcastle and Ladysmith. Hunter’s chapter describes Hart’s situated practices of method-making in a context where the discipline of geography has an ambivalent relationship to discussions on method. His own study of three areas of Durban, connected by children’s movement for schooling, uses an approach with broad affinities to the relational comparison method to show how race and class have been remade during and after apartheid.

In chapter 4, Jennifer A. Devine explores multiple trajectories of globalisation. Hart developed this concept in part to challenge what she called the impact model of globalisation, which sees globalisation as an inexorable force from the global to the local. By showing multiple socio-spatial trajectories at work in South Africa, Hart developed an important critique of the post-apartheid government’s embrace of neo-liberal thought. In the second part of her chapter, Devine charts multiple trajectories in northern Guatemala to challenge popular policy and media discourses that define the Maya Biosphere Reserve as an ‘ungovernable’ place.
In chapter 5, Ahmed Veriava brings to life Hart’s critique of linear models of political and economic change by focusing on discussions in the 2000s by President Thabo Mbeki on the ‘second economy’. Instead of choosing a concept that Hart uses, Veriava shows how her intellectual engagement allowed her to adopt a critical relationship to the second economy. Veriava argues that the development and deployment of the concept – used by Mbeki to explain the persistence of poverty in South Africa – tells us a lot about how neo-liberal governmentality articulates with nationalism.

In chapter 6, Jennifer Greenburg shows how the concept of D/development simultaneously foregrounds the Development project of interventions in the so-called Third World while refusing teleological accounts of economic development. The chapter reveals the theoretical influence of Gramsci, Polanyi and Lefebvre on the concept and demonstrates how Greenburg’s use of D/development enabled her to illuminate key aspects of the rise of for-profit D/development military contracting in the period leading up to and following 9/11.

In chapter 7, Michael Ekers, Stefan Kipfer and Alex Loftus give attention to – and show connections between – Hart’s use of the concepts of articulation, translation and populism. Co-editors and co-authors with Hart of Gramsci: Space, Nature, Politics (Ekers et al. 2013), they show how the Italian Marxist influenced Hart’s political analysis of distinct historical and geographical conjunctures. They argue that her Gramscian perspective innovatively bridges political economy and cultural studies, refusing the position that these two are irreconcilable.

In chapter 8, Zachary Levenson advances a particular focus on articulation to bring attention to how political subjectivity is forged in capitalist societies. In South Africa, land dispossession by white settlers fuelled the fire of anti-apartheid activities, but after 1994, when the country became a democracy, contestations over land did not diminish. Levenson demonstrates the political salience of Hart’s Gramscian understanding of articulation through analysis of how even though people involved in two land occupations in Cape Town encountered
similar material conditions, the divergent ways in which they articulated their demands were of profound importance to the outcome of their struggles. The discerning reader will note that the concept of articulation recurs in multiple chapters. One reason is that Hart appears to have settled on this concept as key to her method. However, our deeper argument is that each use – or articulation – of the concept is borne through struggles in which the concept is mobilised to enable different kinds of political work.

In chapter 9, Melanie Samson engages with the concept of nationalism, which became central to Hart’s work in the 2010s, greatly shaping her book Rethinking the South African Crisis (2013). Samson traces how Hart’s attention to nationalism developed in relation to not only the populism of Jacob Zuma, who succeeded Mbeki as president of South Africa, but also to Trumpism in the United States and the Hindu nationalism of Modi in India. In her ethnographic work, Samson shows how everyday nationalism plays out among reclaimers of reusable and recyclable materials at a Soweto landfill. In grounding nationalism, Samson is able to understand the struggles over value at the landfill and to illuminate broader processes at work. As with all the chapters in this book, Samson’s careful study demonstrates the power of critical ethnography to generate non-positivist generalisations and to develop concepts valuable for understanding and transforming current realities.

REFERENCES


