Ethnographies of Power


Published by Wits University Press

Veriava, Ahmed, et al.
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Gillian Hart’s discussions of articulation, translation and populism consistently challenge the schisms between political economy and cultural studies, and Marxism and post-Marxism(s) that have shaped so many debates in social theory since the dying days of the Cold War.¹ In this chapter, we argue that this challenge has been enacted in part through Hart’s engagements with Antonio Gramsci’s writings. In the first instance, Hart’s work has accepted the challenges brought forward against colour- and gender-blind conceptions of Marxism on the terrain of Marxism itself (broadly and globally conceived) and through historical materialist methods (in their most promising, open-ended and dialectical form). In the second instance, Hart has contributed to what one might call an ongoing political turn in critical geography. She has insisted on the importance of politics as an active and transformative force in the production of time–space without elevating politics to an ontology unfazed by inherited, limit-setting forces of history and geography. In both cases, Hart’s strategy to critically engage, recast and develop Gramsci has been an important avenue through which to forge – and put into practice – what she calls ‘Marxist postcolonial geographies’ (Hart 2018).

We write this chapter as co-conspirators, comprising what Hart occasionally refers to as the ‘Gruppo Gramsci’. Naming in this way
foregrounds the collective and collaborative process in our shared discussions and editorial work that resulted in the edited collection *Gramsci: Space, Nature, Politics* (Ekers et al. 2013). Such co-production is particularly evident when it comes to the reconceptualisation of translation, which was partly undertaken through working with Stefan Kipfer. The absence of Hart in authoring this piece means we cannot be entirely faithful to the process that has informed our work together. However, we hope that the collaborative spirit of the Gruppo Gramsci still animates this chapter as we discuss the strong Gramscian influences in Hart’s work and the significance of these influences for broader debates in geography and beyond.

Throughout this chapter, we contemplate Hart’s philological engagement with the Gramscian conceptions of articulation, translation and populism, demonstrating how such an engagement provides a window on the coming together of two shared concerns: the development of a nuanced relational method and the excavation of Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis. After developing Hart’s understanding of articulation, we analyse how she mobilises understandings of translation and populism through grappling with the politics of South Africa. Drawing on these concepts, we conclude by discussing how Hart is furthering and translating her Gramscian approach to understand the virulent forms of right-wing populism in the global North today.

**Articulation**

Although Hart refers to articulation in her earlier writings, *Disabling Globalization* (Hart 2002a) deploys the concept prominently to analyse the shifting relations of ‘race’, class and, to a lesser degree, gender, that temporarily coalesce, or splinter, around particular political economic processes and struggles for hegemony. Articulation, as we discuss in this section, demonstrates most clearly Hart’s Gramscian mode of analysis.

It is Stuart Hall’s work that Hart engages with most directly in her development of articulation (Hart 2002a, 2002b, 2007, 2013a):
she credits her attention to both materiality and meaning to Hall’s writings, particularly his ‘Race Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance’ (1980) and ‘On Postmodernism and Articulation’ ([1986] 1996b). In doing so, she follows Hall (1980), who established an intellectual pathway for avoiding the pitfalls of previous readings of articulation, in particular Louis Althusser’s (1977) structuralist understanding and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s (1985) ‘post-Marxist’ iteration. The concept of articulation was first deployed by Althusser in *For Marx* (1977) and, in his writings with Étienne Balibar, in *Reading Capital*. Althusser et al. (1970) theorise that the articulation of different modes of production, superstructures, understood as political-legal institutions and relations, and forms of knowledge produce particular conjunctures and social formations. Articulation, in their work, refers to the joining together of different structures, but each structure (mode of production, superstructure) is relatively autonomous from others, meaning they cannot be collapsed into one another. However, as Hall (1980) suggests, processes of articulation are not arbitrary: certain structures are ‘dominant’ and play more of a determining role than others – Althusser’s ‘determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production’ (1977, 111). Althusser et al. (1970) were not alone in deploying a structuralist reading of articulation. A number of people in the 1970s and 1980s sought to understand the coexistence and relationship of multiple modes of production (see, for example, De Janvry 1981; Goodman and Redclift 1981; Hindess and Hirst 1975). For Hart, South African debates, and Harold Wolpe’s contribution to these debates, are of great relevance. Wolpe (1975, 1980) argues that in the context of South Africa, the capitalist mode of production was conjoined to a mode of production based on subsistence agriculture. The persistence of subsistence production was not a pre-colonial hangover that would be slowly eroded by the spread of capitalist social relations. Rather, self-provisioning and petty commodity production had the effect of producing an artificially cheap labour force, as capital was not responsible for the costs of reproducing workers. Apartheid rule
actively maintained the articulation of non-capitalist and capitalist
modes of production through deeply racialised policies, practices and
forms of legitimation.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Laclau (1977) and Hall (1980)
would take this work forward by developing an understanding of
articulation that departed from the structuralism of Althusser and the
discursive rendering of the concept that would later come from Laclau
and Mouffe (1985), emphasising indeterminacy and the production of
subjects through discourses. In contrast to his later work, Laclau (1977)
stresses that while the class content of nationalist and populist senti-
ments and movements is not uniform and can vary, this content needs
to be specified in any analysis of such sentiments. For this purpose, he
suggests that nationalism and populism are best understood as being
contingently articulated with class relations through hegemonic proj-
ects in particular historical contexts. Hall (1980) further develops the
concept of articulation to steer a path between an economistic and a
sociological/voluntarist understanding of the relationship between
race and class. Hall leans heavily on Althusser and Gramsci, argu-
ing the articulation involves ‘both “joining up” (as in the limbs of the
body, or an anatomical structure) and “giving expression to”’ (1980,
328: see also [1986] 1996a). Hall builds on this approach, and departs
from Althusser, to argue that ‘one must start, then, from the concrete
historical “work” which racism accomplishes under specific historical
condition – as a set of economic, political and ideological practices, of a
distinctive kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social
formation’ (1980, 338).

Hart’s grounding in Gramsci is very much connected to a series
between the late 1970s and mid-1980s. In these texts he was working on
a Gramscian terrain, but was also crucially engaging with debates on
race and class in South Africa, most specifically in his well-known 1980
essay ‘Race Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance’. While
still working with Althusser, Hall mobilised Gramsci to offer critiques
of the French thinker in order to develop a Gramscian understanding of racialised capitalism and apartheid rule, which is precisely why Hall is so important for Hart.

For Hart, articulation is a concept that allows her to account for how different relations of class, race, nationalism and populism become linked to different political economic and hegemonic projects. For instance, on a number of occasions she has discussed the changing articulation of race within the African National Congress (ANC) (as an institutionalised historic bloc) as the party tries to maintain its hegemony in the light of the racialised inequalities defining South Africa (Hart 2002a, 2007, 2013b). For instance, she discusses how Nelson Mandela relied on an ideology of the post-racial Rainbow Nation to secure the support of a multiracial coalition in the post-apartheid years. From there, she tracks how Thabo Mbeki re-articulated the relationship of race and accumulation in the 1990s by championing the African Renaissance, which resonated with many black South Africans’ experiences of struggle against apartheid rule and racism. More specifically, Hart argues that ‘Mbeki’s pro-African, anti-poverty stance in international forums reinscri[ed] national strategies to align “the people” with the power bloc’ (2002a, 32), even as the ANC globalised the economy and pushed through neo-liberal reforms. As we will see in our discussion of populism, such work begins to foreground Hart’s more recent work in *Rethinking the South African Crisis* (2013b) on the simultaneous process of de- and re-nationalisation.

Hart’s attention to the changing articulation of political economic processes with relations of race, class and nationalism stems from a continual insistence that an analysis of hegemony in post-apartheid South Africa must be, in Gramsci’s words, ‘earthly’ (1971, 465) and rooted in concrete and spatial histories and experiences (Hart 2013b). The appeal of articulation as a mode of analysis for Hart is precisely in the historicist impulse behind the concept. The ways in which material and meaningful relations cohere, or unravel, is always a historical question rooted in political struggles and political economic transformation.
While Hart (2002a, 2007) is critical of Althusser’s argument that the economy plays a determining role in the last instance, some of which remains latent in Wolpe, she is also deeply critical of the evisceration of any type of determination in Laclau and Mouffe’s work. Building again on Gramsci (1971), Hart highlights how different articulations are historically determined. She writes: ‘Rejecting economism emphatically does not mean neglecting the powerful role of economic forces and relations, but rather recognizing that economic practices and struggles over material resources and labor are always and inseparably bound up with culturally constructed meanings, definitions and identities, and with the exercise of power, all as part of historical processes’ (Hart 2002a, 27; emphasis in original).

Processes of determination require our attention, Hart argues (how else would we know how hegemony is constructed, maintained and contested?) but determining processes must be seen as distributed throughout the entire fabric of historical and geographical conjunctures. Here, Hart echoes Gramsci’s ‘new concept of immanence’ (Gramsci 1971, 400), which the latter uses to understand how political movements, the economy and culture represent preparatory and determining moments for one another.

We now want to highlight two ways in which Hart develops understandings of articulation. The first key contribution is her attention to the contradictions created as various relations are historically and geographically conjoined. Insofar as historically determined articulations bring together particular relations and processes that remain relatively autonomous from one another, there is always the potential, if not the likelihood, for what is articulated – the ‘differentiated unity’ that both Marx ([1858] 1973) and Hall (1977) discuss – to unravel or for certain processes to come into conflict with one another. For instance, in ‘Changing Concepts of Articulation’, an article accounting for the popular appeal of Jacob Zuma, Hart reflects on the ‘double-edged character of articulations of nationalism as liberation’ (2007, 97). She stresses ‘how they are key elements of the post-colonial hegemonic project, while at
the same time deeply vulnerable to charges of betrayal’ (97). Hart argues that fostering nationalist sentiments alongside advancing regressive neo-liberal policies created the space for the emergence of Zuma and forms of populism that we discuss in more detail below. In making this argument, she enrols Gramsci, specifically his argument that hegemony is never complete or seamless, but rather is defined by contradictions and struggle. However, Hart’s attention to the ‘double-edged character’ of articulation, worked through the politics of South Africa, represents one of the key ways in which she advances this concept from earlier uses.

The second key contribution made by Hart to debates on articulation is the importance of language. In *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, she picks up on a growing interest in the role of language within Gramsci’s writing and analysis (Hart 2013b). Insofar as articulation as a concept is bound up with meaning and expression, engaging with Gramsci’s understanding of language allows for greater theoretical and analytical precision in terms of processes of meaning making and subject formation. Language, for Gramsci, is crucial in the struggle over hegemony: language is the bearer of various ideologies and spatial histories (consider linguistic differences between the city and country, as Gramsci does) and thus is one of the vehicles through which meaning is established through processes of articulation. Hart points to the role of language in linking together popular forms of nationalism with the rise of Zuma in South Africa. She explains that Zuma’s ‘signature song and dance “Awuleth’ Umshini Wami” (Bring Me My Machine Gun) … evoked the pain and euphoria of the struggle years, constituting “a discursive site enabling publics to participate in national debates” (Gunner 2009, 28)’ (Hart 2013b, 316). Hart’s attention to cultural politics, language and articulation is crucial as there is a risk of leaving this terrain to those such as Laclau and Mouffe, who miss the importance of language in Gramsci’s writings, all the while charging him with economism. Despite her indebtedness to Hall, Hart stresses how he also overlooks Gramsci’s linguistic engagements: in his turn
to Michel Foucault and post-structuralist approaches, it seems curious that Hall was not more attentive to the language question in Gramsci and in his own understandings of articulation. Hart’s contribution to these debates is focused on the role of language in processes of articulation. She suggests that this results in a more subtle understanding of subject formation that occurs not only through processes of interpellation, which entails the making of subjects through ideologies that result in an identification with those same ideas, pieces of language, messages and philosophies. While not discounting these, Hart points to the importance of lived experiences that ground subject formation, which are always understood and narrated through the social character and meaning of languages.

It is evident that Hart takes forward the concept of articulation in a double sense: first, through using the concept to dissect particular political conjunctures from Mandela through to Zuma and the historical blocs they represent and, second, by asking how the analysis of particular political moments compels a refinement and translation of articulation itself as a concept. Such a refinement informs her analysis of the contradictory, double-edged and linguistic dimensions of articulation. As we will now show, Hart’s development of the concept of articulation is of direct consequence for her engagement with the question of translation.

**Situating ‘translation’**

Rooted in her ongoing investigations of how different social relations cohere or become fractured in particular conjunctures, translation (as a concept and practice) has been at the core of Hart’s work for many years, particularly since 2013. As developed by Hart, translation focuses attention on how concrete political analysis, tied to social theory, might be rethought and challenged, based on the emergence of distinct historical and geographical conjunctures. As with articulation, Hart’s engagements with Gramsci are emblematic of such an approach. Thus,
the Sardinian’s writings cannot simply be invoked to understand the turbulent politics of South Africa without simultaneously asking what his work enables and forecloses within this very different context. Texts and theories become a material and political force precisely when they are brought to bear and challenged by the earthly world they are supposed to account for.

If intimations of a practice of translation can be found in a number of Hart’s essays, her most explicit engagements with a specifically Gramscian conception appear in her work on the languages of populism in South Africa in *Rethinking the South African Crisis* (Hart 2013b) and in ‘Translating Gramsci in the Current Conjuncture’ (Kipfer and Hart 2013). Both texts need to be read alongside the growing body of scholarship that now stresses the importance of linguistics to Gramsci’s writings (see, for example, Ives 2004; Ives and Lacorte 2010). Pushed to its extreme, some, such as Franco Lo Piparo ([1979] 2010), claim that the roots to Gramsci’s key concepts are found not in Marxism, but in his linguistic studies in Turin, hence Lo Piparo’s provocative – and problematic – claim that the distinctiveness of Gramsci’s conception of hegemony is to be found within ‘the linguistic roots of Gramsci’s non-Marxism’, the title of his piece. Such a binary choice between a Marxist Gramsci or a linguistic Gramsci is clearly a false one and Hart instead deploys translation as a concept that can be understood linguistically while simultaneously drawing on and deepening Gramsci’s specific reading of Marx and Marxism.

Quoting Peter Ives (2004), Kipfer and Hart (2013) stress that the etymological roots of translation imply both transmission and betrayal. Thus, ‘for Gramsci translation is not just a matter of transmission but of transformation that may well be “traitorous” to the original (con)text’ (Kipfer and Hart 2013, 327). Building on this practice of transmission/transformation, they first develop their own distinctive reading of Gramsci’s writings on translation by emphasising the active role of politics in transforming a range of social relations, in particular through the moment of hegemony in which a range of different social forces come
to be articulated. By developing a careful reading of the relations of force, Gramsci moves against economistic interpretations of social change: translation enables an analysis that simultaneously works across multiple temporalities and spatialities. Having established this claim, Kipfer and Hart then make the suggestion that translation might be allied to relational comparison, an approach in which comparisons utilise a relational and not bounded understanding of space (see chapter 3 in this volume). Translation might then be viewed as a framework for better understanding the de- and re-contextualisation of theory as it travels.

Building on this jointly political and linguistic reading of translation, Kipfer and Hart put the concept to work as part of a larger critique of the speculative left’s (Bosteels 2011) abstract declarative readings of ‘the political’, or ‘proper’, ‘real’ politics (Kipfer and Hart 2013, 324). Contrasting Gramsci’s conception of ‘politics as translation’ (323) to such speculative leftism enables Kipfer and Hart to put Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis to work in the current conjuncture. ‘Philosophy of praxis’ refers to Gramsci’s critical reconstruction of theory and philosophy on the basis of a critique rooted in, and emerging from, everyday working-class practice and conceptions of the world. A crucial reference point for Kipfer and Hart’s development of Gramsci’s concept of translation is Peter Thomas’s wide-ranging analysis of the philosophy of praxis in The Gramscian Moment (2009b). More specifically, in an article titled ‘Gramsci and the Political’, Thomas (2009a) counters metaphysical and transcendental readings of politics through the twin concepts of translation and translatability. Gramsci’s development of these twin concepts can be viewed as a response to Lenin’s call for a translation of the Bolshevik Revolution into the languages of the West, a task that relates to Hart’s own method of relational comparison, as we argue later. Of course, as Thomas is acutely aware, translation and translatability are also adapted from Gramsci’s linguistic studies and his patient attention to ‘the always unfinished and therefore transformable nature of relations of communication between social practices’ (Thomas 2009a, 29).
While noting Thomas’s careful attention to the question of translation in relation to questions of the political, Kipfer and Hart (2013) nevertheless note his failure to pay sufficient attention to the broad range of relations of force (in particular, processes relating to gender, sexuality, race and nationalism) and, instead, they seek to conceptualise translation as a decidedly spatio-historical concept, working across different geographical contexts. At one level, the concept of translation provides analytical and political leverage for understanding broad conjunctures – in Hart’s own work, an analysis of populism and nationalism in South Africa and beyond. At another (connected) level, translation can be used within an analysis of la persona (the person) and can thereby provide a useful way into deepening Gramsci’s distinctive approach to the question of human subjectivity. Applying translation in this manner implies a denaturalising move, whereby a concept of translation can be used to open up the multiple relations of force out of which different classed, raced and gendered persons are produced. In Hart’s words, ‘what Gramsci – and in related ways Vološinov and Bakhtin – contribute to this conception of the person is a theory of language as productive of meaning, as well as inseparable from practice and from the constitution of the self in relation to others’ (2013a, 313). This shaping of the person can simultaneously be understood as a socio-ecological process in which the person is shaped out of a multiplicity of internal relations with human and non-human others (Ekers and Loftus 2013; Loftus 2013).

If such a reading of translation can be found explicitly and implicitly within Gramsci’s writings, it also pushes him up against the limits of his own approach and thereby requires moving with and beyond him. Translation here is necessarily an act of interpretation as well as a traitorous act that transforms the original text: it is both an actualisation and a redirection of Gramsci – a translation – ‘in a properly postcolonial, explicitly feminist, theoretically spatialised, and antiproductivist fashion’ (Kipfer and Hart 2013, 331). Indeed, deploying Gramsci alongside the work of Frantz Fanon, Henri Lefebvre and Himani Bannerji, as
Kipfer and Hart (2013) seek to do, has implications for political practice: rethinking translation in this manner therefore enables one to better make sense of the possibilities for concrete political mobilisation in comparatively very distinct contexts. In so doing, an open-ended dialogue between a Gramscian conception of translation (as articulated by Kipfer and Hart 2013) and Hart's own method of relational comparison becomes possible. In this regard, it is perhaps no surprise that Kipfer and Hart's chapter sits between Hart's first development of relational comparison in 'Changing Concepts of Articulation' (2007) – based as it was on her more detailed analysis of relationally understood South African conditions in Disabling Globalization (2002a) – and her more recent revisiting of relational comparison in 'Relational Comparison Revisited' (2018). One of the characteristic features of the latter work is a much deeper engagement with dialectical method. Although Gramsci plays a relatively small role in the open-ended and non-teleological understanding of dialectics that Hart deploys, it is clear how her reading of Gramsci animates the relational understanding within this article. Relational comparison and translation need to be rethought in relation to one another as well as in relation to dialectical method.

For Hart, translation and articulation emerge as concepts that express the spatio-historical character of her work and allow her to navigate a careful path that avoids post-Marxist, economistic and speculative approaches, all of which treat the relationship between socio-economic, cultural and political forces in reductive or one-sided ways. As we discuss in the following section, the conjoined political and linguistic aspects of translation as a practice and concept help to further expand understandings of populism.

**Populism**

Populism is one of the most notoriously ambiguous terms in political analysis. This ambiguity is constitutive of the concept itself, which, in various formulations, alerts us to political claims that muddy the
waters, parading vague notions of the people and their enemies while also blurring class lines in political programmes and policy strategies. Debates on the matter have raised a number of key questions: Is populism an ideology, a form or technique of political intervention, or a particular regime of state action? Can one identify different types of populism – top-down and bottom-up forms, right-wing and left-wing versions? Are claims to the people expressive of the social forces invoked, or do they rather constitute those social forces in the first place? Is populism a sign of socio-economic underdevelopment and an indication of political immaturity or is it, instead, a vital element in socialist strategy, in peripheralised or imperial zones, or both?

In her engagement with the topic in *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, Hart warns against two extreme views on populism: the view of those on the left who spontaneously allow their ‘distaste … towards nationalism and populism’ to ‘authorize neglect and dismissal’ of these phenomena (2013a, 317) and the perspective of those, most famously Laclau and Mouffe, who elevate populism to a veritable political ontology, thus emancipating the political form of populism from its complexly articulated but real social content. To develop her point, Hart offers twin theoretical manoeuvres that build upon her previous engagements with the problematic of articulation and, in turn, develop the problematic of translation as a practice of recasting theoretical insights in and through analyses and engagements situated in novel contexts. In the first, she mobilises the younger historical-materialist Laclau (1977) against his more recent post-Marxist self (2005) to insist on the importance of placing the populisms of both dominant and subaltern forces in their multiply determined historical–geographical contexts. In the second, she draws on Gramsci, Fanon, Hall and South African sociologist Ari Sitas to nudge the residually Althusserian emphasis on populism as interpellation-from-above (in Laclau 1977) towards a properly dialectical conception of populism as a relation between dominant strategies and popular traditions, or, with Gramsci, between normative and spontaneous forms of grammar (Hart 2013a, 310–312).
The initial point of these theoretical moves was to illuminate political developments in South Africa since 2000: attempts by Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema (who was expelled from the ANC and formed the Economic Freedom Fighters party) to recast the post-apartheid conception of the South African nation consolidated by the ANC regime under Mandela. After having properly adjusted Laclau’s approach, Hart lets the Argentinian disembark in South Africa to help us to understand the populist moves by Zuma and Malema. As she puts it: ‘I draw on a revised version of Laclau’s theory of bourgeois populism to argue that Mbeki sought to neutralise the revolutionary potential of popular antagonisms; Zuma sought to develop them but contain them within limits – which is always a dangerous experiment, as Laclau pointed out; and that Malema sought to capture and amplify the revolutionary potential of popular antagonisms, generating a dynamic that, the SACP [South African Communist Party] maintains, has tended towards fascism’ (2013b, 197).

Hart’s point here is to say that the danger of populism cannot be read off its constitutive addiction to establishing an antagonistic relationship between the people and the power bloc. This danger needs to be evaluated with respect to the capacity of populist forces (here: capital-sponsored factions in the ANC leadership) to grow by joining up, in particular conjunctures and in a dialectical fashion with ‘popular antagonisms in the arenas of everyday life’ and, in the process, blurring the distinction between ‘left’ and ‘right’ populisms (Hart 2013b, 197).

For Hart, the sequence running from Mbeki to Zuma and Malema attests to the ‘unravelling of ANC hegemony’ (2013b, 189). Brutally illustrated as well as intensified by the 2012 Marikana massacre of striking miners, in which Cyril Ramaphosa, the former union organiser and freedom fighter and now ANC leader, was directly implicated as a director of mining company Lonmin, this unravelling denotes a shrinking capacity of dominant fractions to recompose ruling blocs and thus manage the fault lines of post-apartheid racial capitalism. Hart spatialises our sense of these multiple fault lines, arguing that we can understand them as results
of a twin process of de- and re-nationalisation (2013b). De-nationalisation describes how South African multinational capital escaped the constraints of apartheid South Africa, the strategies of state restructuring and ruling-class recomposition that made globalisation possible, as well as the harsh class and racialised polarisations that follow from both (Hart 2015, 48). Re-nationalisation captures the ways in which Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s view of South Africa as the Rainbow Nation was supplanted through a combination of ‘xenophobic violence’ and ‘popular vigilantism’ that threatens to build ‘fortress South Africa’ (49). In Hart’s reading, populism is thus not a simple national reaction to global forces. It embodies, shapes and recasts globalising and nationalising processes in their tension-ridden relationships.

As we will see, Hart’s insistence on the ongoing (if shifting) centrality of the national question highlights the limitations of all approaches to neo-liberalism and globalisation that treat nationalism as a passive force. Of course, in the (post-)colonial South, the salience of this question is of a particular kind, related as it is to the role of national liberation struggles in shaping the ‘passive revolutions’ that are part of many post-independence regimes. As variegated as it is, the weight of national liberation in post-colonial formations underscores the need to run Laclau and Gramsci through another stretching exercise supervised by Fanon. For Hart, Fanon’s two-sided approach to the national question retains much promise in South Africa, where some on the left either ignore the national question or treat it as a formula, as a liberal-democratic stepping stone in the gradual development of socialism (Hart 2013b, 212–215). Fanon, she reminds us, not only warns of the pitfalls of national consciousness, the danger that national liberation might yield a false form of decolonisation. In what is effectively his ‘answer’ to Gramsci’s national-popular outlook, Fanon also insists that a dynamic, internationally oriented national culture infused by ongoing popular efforts for emancipation and self-determination remains crucial in the struggle against narrow, neocolonial and bourgeois nationalisms (221–228).
The significance of Hart’s contribution can be seen clearly in comparative intellectual context. Her insistence on bringing Gramsci and Laclau to South Africa, in part through Fanon, helps us see the difference between her approach and those who have analysed the African state by keeping Gramsci apart from Fanon, such as Jean-François Bayart ([1989] 2006). His work on the state in Africa represents a rich source for those interested in translating Gramsci’s conception of passive revolution to the global South (Brooks and Loftus 2016). In fact, Bayart’s main suggestion, that dependency be understood as an ongoing political practice, a recurrent project to fortify ruling blocs by economic, social and institutional ‘extraversion’, may help to specify how to study various aspects of ‘de-nationalisation’ also in the radicalised form of extraversion that is structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa ([1989] 2006, xii). However, Bayart’s decision to dispatch Fanon as a simplistic proponent of a post-colonial tabula rasa, rather than one of the most insightful analysts of the national question in (post-)colonial situations, is costly (56). Beyond the political stakes involved – Bayart’s remark sideswipes the problematic of liberation by putting analytical complexity on a pedestal sanctioned by Gramsci – this dismissal makes it difficult to grasp the links between the comparative meanings of the national question leading up to independence, post-colonial strategies of extraversion (de-nationalisation) and subsequent reformulations of the national (re-nationalisation).

Hart’s research on populism and nationalism not only asserts but also demonstrates the possibility of putting a Fanon-inflected Gramsci to work for relational comparisons across the South, beyond Africa (2015). Her more recent move to relate her work on South Africa to Indian debates on passive revolution underscores the difference between a subtle historical materialism shaped by Gramsci, Laclau and Fanon and what one might call the civilisational turn in subaltern studies (and, perhaps more broadly speaking, post- and decolonial theory). One Indian exponent of this turn discussed by Hart (2015), Partha Chatterjee (2004), has delinked seemingly Gramscian terms
(civil and political society) from Gramsci’s conception of the state while reinventing a dated view of Gramsci as a Western Marxist preoccupied with supposedly just Euro-American problems: hegemony, civil society and consent. In partial contrast to his earlier work on passive revolution (Chatterjee 1986), as well as other historical materialist analyses of the Indian situation (Ahmad 1996, 2016; Bannerji 2010; Vanaik 2017), Chatterjee’s more recent work (2004) is not only silent on the empirical comparability of Italy and India, as well as other places like Turkey and Pakistan (Mallick 2017; Riley and Desai 2007; Tuğal 2009, 2016). Supplanting Gramsci’s (and Fanon’s) relational method with dualist categories and a culturalist penchant, it also hides what is essential to Hart: the manifold relationships between far right populism (in this case, the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP] and Hindu fundamentalism), the national question, social struggle and the multi-scalar contradictions of real-existing capitalism.

**Conclusion: Hart in the imperial core**

What lessons does Hart’s work hold for those of us working in and on the imperial North? Her efforts to develop a relational approach to comparative and international political economy do, of course, speak to politically engaged debates in the global South (in and beyond her native South Africa), as well as ongoing intellectual controversies in development studies. However, many of Hart’s analyses also intervene in debates that are situated within and centrally deal with developments in the global North. Shaped increasingly by a Fanon-inflected Marxian and Gramscian method, Hart has made it difficult for thoughtful researchers to, for example, treat neo-liberalism without attending to nationalism (2008), study accumulation (by dispossession or otherwise) without reference to racial capitalism (2006), and pursue urban questions while forgetting (the) land question(s) (2018). Clearly, Hart’s contributions do more than put Euro-American research in place; they redirect it in part on the basis of insights from the global South.
As we have shown, she does this always by paying close attention to the complex articulation of multiple economic, social, cultural and political forces that shape particular conjunctures and that thus provide the dynamic, contradictory and living historical material that practices of translation must confront and transform.

To understand how Hart brings the South to bear on the North, her recent take on President Donald Trump’s populism in ‘Why Did it Take so Long?’ is instructive (2020), particularly when compared to Nancy Fraser’s parallel analysis in ‘From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump – and Beyond’ (2017). Fraser sees Trump as a symptom of the crisis of ‘progressive neoliberalism’, that fusion of neo-liberal distribution and meritocratic recognition embodied by the Clinton–Obama lineage, which, according to Fraser, defeated the ‘reactionary neoliberalism’ of Ronald Reagan and the Bushes. For her, the 2016 election campaign, which was dominated by ‘reactionary populism’ (Trump) and ‘progressive populism’ (Bernie Sanders), showed that progressive neo-liberalism has exhausted itself. In this context, the alternative to Trump (who, in Fraser’s view, has already jettisoned populism to return to an increasingly morbid form of reactionary neo-liberalism) can only come from a different political project. Her preference: a new alliance that manages to detach popular constituencies from their conservative commitments or elite leadership strata in order to challenge finance capital. How? Fraser proposes a ‘progressive populism’, capable of linking an anti-neo-liberal politics of redistribution to a material, class-inflected politics of gender, sexuality and anti-racism.

Broadly speaking, Hart’s work shares Fraser’s interest in a Gramscian analysis of Trump as well as Fraser’s refusal to separate class from race and gender in counter-strategies. However, Hart’s approach allows us to distinguish the weaknesses in Fraser’s approach. Recasting her earlier critique of ‘impact models’ of globalisation (2002a) and mobilising her analysis of bourgeois populism in South Africa and India, Hart underscores that the phenomenon of Trump (and
his one-time ally Steve Bannon) makes it impossible to uphold the idea that globalism and nationalism are external to each other. As in South Africa and India, the tensions between de- and re-nationalisation run straight through Trump and the broader universe of the (far) right in the United States, in an open-ended and unpredictable way, through a dizzying dance of factional conflicts, tactical shifts and interpersonal transformations that barely registers in Fraser’s more schematic discussion. Hart’s fine-grained analysis allows us to see not only how Trump defeated ‘progressive neo-liberalism’. It also highlights the complex ways in which Trump and Bannon have taken up, redirected and challenged their reactionary populist predecessors (notably Reagan, Bush and Buchanan), who, rather than defeated for good by the Clinton–Obama lineage, had alternated with the latter to shape politics in the United States since the 1980s, and this similar to the ways in which Thatcherism and the BJP have historically interacted with New Labour and Congress in the United Kingdom and India (see Hall 2011; Vanaik 2017).

While Fraser (2017) opens her article with the claim that Trump is part of a global political crisis of hegemony but never develops this claim through her otherwise nationally focused analysis, Hart’s rendering of Trump is consistently preoccupied with the national–global relation. She is clear about the qualitative specificities of de- and re-nationalisation in the United States. While the range of re-nationalisations suggested or promoted by Trump (and Bannon) is part of a sequence of (typically, but not exclusively neo-liberal) authoritarian populist projects, de-nationalisation has been very distinct from what is associated with the unravelling of both Nehruvian development – economic planning, secularism, non-alignment with the United States or the Soviet Union – and apartheid (Hart 2020). Why? Because, following Peter Gowan’s (1999) analysis, the ‘Dollar Wall Street regime’ that emerged in response to the crisis of the Bretton Woods system was built on the backs of the Southern debt crisis of the 1980s while also extending working-class
consumerism through subsequent rounds of credit expansion, at least until the collapse of mortgage-backed debt in 2008. The long-muted contradictions Trump and Bannon inherit, express and intensify are thus significantly imperial in scope and character.

Hart’s emphasis on the imperial dimensions of American politics helps to answer her main question: Why did it take so long for a pair like Trump and Bannon to break through in Washington? Her answer raises an additional question for Fraser: How will ‘progressive populism’ deal with empire? Certainly, this second question concerns anyone who is interested in strategies against the far right that take the national question seriously, even those who do not share Fraser’s easy embrace of the language of populism. In the imperial core, responses to right-populism or neo-fascism cannot appropriate the national the same way as they might in the (post-)colonial periphery, semi-peripheral or sub-imperial contexts, or re-peripheralised edges of the core like Greece. In the core, national political and economic projects are never just national; they build upon imperial or settler colonial divisions of labour unless these are questioned. And even where the national question can be articulated without catering to ethnicised nationalism (which is not always possible), it cannot draw at will from the most promising strands in the history of national liberation against imperial rule, colonial or otherwise. This is another reason why in the metropole in particular, ‘national popular’ left strategies inspired by Gramsci and Fanon must proceed with special care, in organic relationship with internationalist horizons and practices (Sotiris 2017).

**NOTE**

REFERENCES


