

8 | Make ‘Articulation’ Gramscian Again

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If anyone were to undertake to make the mass strike generally, as a form of proletarian action, the object of methodological agitation, and to go house to house canvassing with this ‘idea’ in order to gradually win the working class to it, it would be as idle and profitless and absurd an occupation as it would be to seek to make the idea of the revolution or of the fight at the barricades the object of a special agitation.

— Rosa Luxemburg, ‘The Mass Strike’

This chapter draws on Gillian Hart’s development of the concept of articulation over the past two decades. It argues that she transforms an otherwise Althusserian concept into a Gramscian one. Beyond understandings of articulation as simply ‘joining together’, Hart builds on the work of Stuart Hall to add a second connotation to the concept: ‘giving expression to’. By restoring the key role of meaning making to Marxist analysis, she breaks with deterministic models of politicisation. As an alternative, Hart argues that radicalisation occurs on the terrain of everyday life, meaning that politics are not imputed from some external vantage point, but rather cultivated from what Antonio Gramsci called ‘common sense’ into ‘good sense’. The chapter concludes by setting the concept of articulation to work in the context

of two South African land occupations. How organisers articulated each respective project of occupation shaped how residents mobilised in practice, which, in turn, affected the legal status of each: one occupation was tolerated while the other was evicted. Articulation helps us to understand why.

Making 'critical'

An upsurge in South African working-class militancy in the early 2000s initiated a wave of optimism among leftist observers of the country. After considerable anti-government protests at a pair of United Nations-initiated conferences in 2001 and 2002, the names of high-profile organisations directly confronting the ruling party began to proliferate: the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Landless People's Movement, the Anti-Eviction Campaign, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Unemployed People's Movement and countless others. Academics were eager to link these struggles into a force capable of contesting what they perceived as the African National Congress' (ANC's) neo-liberal drift, and in 2006 they convened a Social Movements Indaba (SMI) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for this purpose. While the conference ended in disaster, with two of the larger delegations walking out altogether, it still represented the moment of peak academic optimism in relation to class struggles on the ground.

Among the first of these confident academic narratives was Ashwin Desai's *We Are the Poors* (2002), an account of squatters' militancy in Durban, which he linked to the anti-government protests at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism. This, he insisted, would be a force capable of challenging the ANC. In *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, Nigel Gibson (2011) romanticised another Durban-based shack-dwellers' movement (Abahlali baseMjondolo) as a Fanonian response to a failed liberation movement, contributing to a ballooning literature making similar arguments about the organisation. A series of widely cited edited volumes released in the years between these two

texts documented the rise of countless additional social movements, considering them both ethnographically and in comparative historical perspective (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006; Beinart and Dawson 2010; Gibson 2006). Beyond the purview of formally constituted social movement organisations, Peter Alexander (2010) described a growing number of protests over access to services and housing as a 'rebellion of the poor', suggesting that these localised protests were likely to coalesce into a force capable of challenging the ruling party. When an alliance failed to materialise, Patrick Bond and Shauna Mottiar (2013, 291) attributed this to the 'lack of ideological and strategic coherence' among residents. John Saul (2012) concurred, blaming the lack of a viable 'counter-hegemonic movement' on a lack of structure.

Just as many sympathetic academics were dismayed after the SMI walkout, seeking to impose a 'correct' model of organising on the participants, critics of service delivery protests lectured those who burned tyres, marched in the streets and faced down rubber bullets, scolding them for pursuing inadequate organisational strategy and selecting inappropriate targets. Reading through some of these critiques at the time, I could not help but recall Fran Piven and Richard Cloward's injunction against this sort of sermonising more than a quarter century earlier. 'People experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting, not as the end product of large and abstract processes,' they point out. 'No small wonder, therefore, that when the poor rebel they so often rebel against the overseer of the poor, or the slumlord, or the middling merchant, and not against the banks or the governing elites to whom the overseer, the slumlord and the merchant also defer. In other words, it is the daily experience of people that shapes their grievances, establishes the measure of their demands, and points out the target of their anger' (Piven and Cloward 1979, 20–21). They are not suggesting that larger movements are not more effective than smaller ones – that much is obvious. The targets of their irritation are those who think movements are fragmented because participants lack proper understanding. These academic Prometheans bring knowledge

from on high to the movements below, their thinking goes, enabling the struggles limited by their own immediacy to become truly politicised.

Piven and Cloward insist that importing knowledge from the realm of abstraction is futile; the point is to intervene at the level of everyday life. A voluminous literature in Marxist theory speaks to this question, whether Henri Lefebvre's discussion of revolutionising everyday life (2014) or Gramsci's discussion of cultivating common sense into good sense ([1971] 2016) – though neither theorist is substantively engaged in any of the South African debates cited above. Many would do well though to heed Gramsci's advice from his *Prison Notebooks*: 'It is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making "critical" an already existing activity' (Gramsci [1971] 2016, 330–331). Rosa Luxemburg makes a similar point in the epigraph to this chapter: peddling an 'idea' (akin to Gramsci's 'scientific form of thought') to the masses is an exercise in futility. Instead, critical ideas must be developed organically through real material practices – what Gramsci calls the 'philosophy of praxis'. People are not at war with racism or neo-liberalism as abstract concepts; they are furious with the cop who frisks them every time they walk down their own block and they are annoyed by their university administrators (and maybe even their elected representatives) when their universities get defunded and student fees begin to skyrocket. There is no 'racism in general' (Hart 2002a, 30; cf. Hall 1980, 308) and people 'do not experience monopoly capitalism' (Piven and Cloward 1979, 20).

Intervening at this level of abstraction is strategically useless, as it fails to comprehend how individuals come to understand themselves as 'in struggle' in the first place. Instead, Gramsci's renovation and 'making "critical"' of common sense – of people's beliefs as 'already existing, self-evident truths' (Crehan 2016, x) – requires a rejection of abstract determination in favour of *historical* determination. And for Hart, this means understanding 'how diverse forces come together in particular ways to create a new political terrain' (2002a, 27). In other words,

we cannot understand people's politics as the necessary consequence of certain economic (or even discursive) conditions. Both 'vanguardist' Marxism (Hart 2008, 2014) and 'account[s] of subject formation in which subject effects are automatically secured' (Hart 2008, 687) fail to understand how political subjectivity is actually produced at the nexus of diverse forces and relations. This is not to reject determination altogether, relegating subjectivity to the realm of the purely contingent, but to understand how historical determination proceeds, as opposed to abstract determination (Hart 2002a, 2004).

Towards a relational theory of articulation

Hart's key innovation in this respect has been to revive the concept of articulation, developed in Althusserian circles, though it was subsequently reappropriated by Louis Althusser's critics and developed in a Gramscian direction as a way to understand how political subjects are produced in practice. What is most remarkable in Hart's use is that she successfully excavates the Gramscian traces in these critiques of abstract determination – most notably in the early work of Ernesto Laclau (1977) and in Stuart Hall's (1980) engagement with South African race/class debates – and implores us to use a reconstructed Gramscian concept against Althusser himself.

In her earliest substantial engagement with the concept, her book *Disabling Globalization*, Hart (2002a) draws on Hall's use of the term in 'Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance' (1980), arguing that it has a double meaning: both 'joining together' and 'giving expression to' (cf. Hart 2002b, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2014). In the work of Althusser and his students the term only refers to connectedness. By omitting the simultaneous production of meaning, she argues, we cannot possibly understand processes of politicisation. By recognising meaning and practice as inseparable (Hart 2002b, 818), we can trace how actually existing actors (and groups of actors) are alternatively enabled and constrained by material and discursive contexts. Just as

Gramsci's concept of hegemony elucidates how people understand their own interests in relation to a conjunctural balance of class relations and social forces, 'articulation' places actors in an open space in which meanings, constraints and interests are constantly in flux, articulated and re-articulated in a perpetual process of contestation (see chapter 7 in this volume). We have seen how political subjects do not target neo-liberalism or racism in the abstract; they challenge localised, observable agents. But the very identification of these agents as inimical to one's interests is itself shaped by a set of material constraints and narratives of self-understanding. The contest over these narratives, over the process of meaning making, is the unceasing struggle Gramsci called hegemony. Or as Hall puts it, 'In order to "think" real, concrete historical complexity, we must reconstruct in the mind the determinations which constitute it. Thus, what is multiply determined, diversely unified, in history ... appears in thought, in theory, not as "where we take off from" but as *that which must be produced*' (Hall 1974, 148–149; emphasis in original). Articulation is this process of production.

In her article 'Changing Concepts of Articulation' Hart (2007) fleshes out this formulation and demonstrates why it matters in a South African context. Why have left-wing challenges to the ANC failed to gain any traction since democratisation? The ruling party was able to represent itself as orchestrating a post-apartheid nation-building project, with any contestations to its reign articulated as threatening the nation. The task of the intellectual, Hart insists, is not to simply 'rip away the mask that obfuscates neoliberal class power' (2008, 688), exposing the true nature of the ANC. This sort of 'cynical manipulation from above' (Hart 2007, 94) treats potential political subjects as empty vessels, *tabulae rasae* upon which intellectuals can inscribe a purportedly universal roadmap to their own self-emancipation – precisely what we saw in the opening of this chapter. But these potential subjects already exist in the world. The 'tropes of traditional left activism' can never 'name [the] quotidian significations, singular practices, partially elaborated resentments, and ambivalent engagements with mainstream

organisations and institutions' (Barchiesi 2011, 244) that comprise residents' social locations in the space of everyday life. Hart's account of 'articulation' gives us a vocabulary with which we as analysts, strategists and intellectuals can engage with questions of the apparent immobility of the working class, but without treating them as so many free agents in a game of communist fantasy football.

It is not solely by virtue of their location in some socio-economic space that proletarians revolt. Nor, as we have seen, is it the revelation of this location from on high that catalyses the formation of alliances, blocs and organisations. This is the problem with dismissals of particular racialised, gendered and sexed identities as obstacles to class unity: there is no class beyond that which actually exists in material reality and this classed existence is never experienced in its 'pure' state. In one of his most quoted statements, Hall writes, 'Race is thus, also, the modality in which class is "lived," the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and "fought through"' (1980, 341). It is insufficient for intellectuals to reveal to workers that their racialised identification is 'false' or that it inhibits some inexorable unification of the class. Conjunctural race–class articulations, once internalised, become real, material facts.

In each specific historical context, these articulations take different forms and they may very well be articulated with additional elements: gender, sex, sexuality, nationality and/or nationalism and so forth. The trick, as Hart puts it, is 'understanding politics as *process*' (2002a, 28; emphasis in original), with meaning conceived as inseparable from practical activity. This is the standpoint of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis: it allows us to grasp 'how fragmentary common sense can become coherent through collective practices and processes of transformation, central to which are language and translation' (Hart 2013, 315). People produce meaning in their everyday lives, but they do so within the confines of existing determinations, both material and discursive. It is through these processes of politicisation that people come to understand their own activity in relation to the world.

Articulation allows us to understand people as located in these conjunctural nexuses of various forces and relations, an approach that has two merits. First, it is *non-reductionist* insofar as it rejects the notion that these determinations are eternal or can be conceived of as laws (Hart 2002a, 2002b, 2007). And second, it is *relational* in that it rejects a model in which agents instrumentally impose these determinations from above. Each articulation ‘has constantly to be renewed [and] can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections – re-articulations – being forged’ (Hall 1985, 113–114). Articulation is not simply a way for understanding how various social formations produce political subjects, as if the gradient runs from state or economy to civil society, as in Michel Foucault or Althusser. In its Gramscian formulation, the state is relational, a site of constant contestation over articulations and re-articulations. People can reshape meanings, but not in a vacuum; re-articulations embody a certain agency, but they are simultaneously forged within the confines of historically specific forces and relations.

In the next section, I briefly summarise the Althusserian version of articulation, demonstrating the irony of Althusser’s project. If he intended the concept as an alternative to ‘reflectionist’ Marxism, the old pipeline from base to superstructure,¹ in practice it ends up bolstering an instrumentalist theory of the capitalist state. Drawing on Laclau and Hall, Hart shows how Althusser lacks any viable theory of political subject formation – and therefore of politics. The closest he comes is his discussion of ‘interpellation’, but Hart reveals how he commits precisely the fallacy that was confronted by Luxemburg, Piven and Cloward, Gramsci, Hall, and now Hart; namely that people can simply impose a set of ideologies or rationalities from above onto the passive space of civil society. Rather, this space of civil society is a site of struggle, of a never-settled process of contestation over the production of meaning that is both an effect and a constitutive part of the process of subjects coming to understand themselves as political actors in the first place.

I then examine a concrete site of struggles over re-articulation, focusing on the politics of land occupations in contemporary South Africa. Hart argues that 're-articulating the land question could potentially link together diverse demands' (2014, 20). Access to land, she contends, is currently articulated in terms of individual restitution claims, whereas she suggests one viable strategy would be to 're-articulate them in broader and more collective terms to demand redistributive social change and livelihood guarantees' (20). Rather than making abstract demands for redistribution in general, or else for various actors to unite against some amorphous neo-liberal government, she insists we work through an existing common sense: the demand for access to land articulated as part of a post-apartheid nation-building project. It is a matter of 'think[ing] *with nationalism against nationalism*' (13; emphasis in original), grasping the popular appeal of land redistribution as a nationalist project, but dis-articulating access to land from blanket support for political parties.

The Althusserian legacy

One reason it remains so challenging to define 'articulation' straightforwardly is that its referents have shifted dramatically since its inception. Initially a phonetic term for the physical production of speech sounds, it made its way into the structuralist canon by way of Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, coming to describe the way that seemingly disparate elements possessed underlying homologous structures. As such, they were articulated – joined – into a larger system, structured like a language on the model of Saussurean linguistics. Drawing on this structuralist lineage, Althusser deployed the concept to get away from the reductive theorisations of capitalism that continued to permeate the official Marxism of his contemporaries. Certainly less mechanical Marxisms proliferated from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, from Antonio Labriola through Henri Lefebvre, but these were largely formulated on the margins of the party. For Althusser, by contrast, the goal was to remake the Marxism of the French Communist Party.

For Althusser and his students, multiple economic systems could be articulated into a single social formation, allowing for more contextually nuanced research on actually existing capitalist economies (Althusser et al. [1965] 2015). In some of his other work, he used the term to bypass another variant of reductionist Marxism: an assumed channel from base to superstructure (Althusser [1965] 1969). Each mode of production was comprised of various ‘levels’, all articulated into a single system. These levels – political, cultural and countless others – were not to be read off an all-powerful economic base, but were, along with the economic level, to be considered as part of a complex, mutually determinative system. The relative autonomy ascribed to these levels would allow us to make sense, say, of a situation in which the proletariat is not particularly hot-blooded despite ‘ripe’ economic conditions. His student Nicos Poulantzas ([1970] 1974) put this model to work when he explained the rise of European fascism not as the Great Depression automatically generating its own political reactions, but as a response to a crisis in bourgeois politics at the time – an unthinkable origin story in the old reflectionist idiom.

Fast-forward a few decades and Hart is making similar claims to Althusser, setting ‘articulation’ to work as the central concept in developing any ‘non-reductionist’ Marxism (Hart 2002a, 2002b, 2007). Yet it is *against* Althusser that she develops the concept. How did an erstwhile critic of economism become its most notorious proponent in retrospect? Today, rather than remembering Althusserian accounts of articulated social formations for the challenge they posed to reductive Marxism, we tend to assimilate them to the reflectionist epistemology of the Second International. Largely, this is attributable to the insufficient attention Althusser paid to politics, relative autonomy notwithstanding.² If by ‘politics’ we mean the question of how subjects find themselves already engaged in struggle against antagonistic forces, Althusser ([1971] 2001) developed an account that inexplicably divorced the processes through which political subjects are made – what he called ‘interpellation’ – from any location in socio-economic space (his ‘social

formation'). Despite his earlier writings, this brief account of subject formation relies on the most abstract determination possible: ideology, part of a larger system of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), hails or 'interpellates' individuals as subjects, subjecting them to capitalist domination in the process. As in the case of left intellectuals attempting to manipulate empty proletarian vessels, Althusser's ISAs subjectivate agents who previously lacked any subjectivity whatsoever.³ These are not historically determined actors who are confronted with ideologies while located at the nexus of competing and intersecting forces and relations, but rather interchangeable individuals on the model of liberal political theory, or more aptly here, Lacanian psychoanalysis.

For Althusser, articulation remains in the base but fails to make its way into the superstructure. We are left without any idea as to how the subjectivating capacities of the state are related (or connected) to socio-economic context. Articulation in all of this means that these various levels are linked together as a complex totality, governed in the last instance by what Althusser called the dominant structure: capitalist relations of production. It was a way of eating his cake and having it too: on the one hand, contingency was not written out of the story, as levels were relatively autonomous; on the other hand, the narrative was manifestly structuralist, with an ultimate 'cause' located in the base. This is not a problem because we are enjoined to cling to 'the last instance' like some Marxist rosary; the problem is that the forging of political subjectivity is enacted – or interpellated – 'upon' abstract individuals instead of people with everyday lives in the modern world. They are conceived as if they were blank canvases.

Hart's entire project is to overthrow the residual top-down construction of the interpellation model, instead opting for an account of 'complex back-and-forth processes of contestation and acquiescence through which multiple, interconnected arenas in state and civil society have been remaking one another' (Hart 2008, 684). The point is not to understand locally specific articulations as '*products*' but instead as '*constitutive processes* through which political subjects are made'

(Hart 2002a, 298; emphasis in original). In its materialist iteration, we see these limits at work in Althusser's writings of the mid-1960s, with social formations producing their own ideologies. And at its idealist pole, we can identify limits in Althusser's slightly later model of interpellation in which an ideological apparatus tied to the state 'creates' subjects *de novo*.

We find something similar in both Foucault ([1978–1979] 2010) and his British interpreters (for example, Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996; Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991; Rose 1999), akin to what Hart (2001, 2002a, 2004, 2006b, 2009, 2018) has consistently called the 'impact model': the superimposition of generalised forces from above onto localised sites. These forces appear monolithic, inexorable and, above all, active, whereas those who are subjected are represented as passive containers to be filled with ideological content from above. Foucauldian accounts of neo-liberalism-as-governmentality reproduce this impact model, providing an 'account of subject formation in which subject effects are automatically secured' (Hart 2008, 687). Subjects are passive, only becoming subjects insofar as they are interpellated from above – though in Foucault's case it is not by ideologies or an ideological state apparatus, but by governmental rationalities. There is no space in this formulation for interpellated subjects to contest, transform and re-articulate the content of ideologies, rationalities or discourses. But Hall's critique of Althusser could just as easily be applied to Foucault: rationalities 'remain contradictory structures, which can function both as the vehicles for the imposition of dominant ideologies, and as the elementary forms for the cultures of resistance' (Hall 1980, 342).

It is in this sense that Hart calls articulations 'double-edged' (2014, 200). The South African government may very well invoke the consolidation of post-apartheid democracy 'as a disciplinary weapon against social movements' (198), framing them as threatening this project; but these same movements can work within the confines of existing articulations, claiming that the state's hegemonic project *fails* to uphold the articulation of nationalism to liberation. Or, as Ari Sitas (1990, 263, 273) explains in his critique of interpellation in a South African context,

prevailing 'social views and visions' – common sense in Gramscian terms – are not solely the end product of some interpellation 'from above'. A given identity or self-understanding – 'Zulu-ness' in Sitas' case – 'must be viewed as a negotiated identity between ordinary people's attempts to create effective and reciprocal social bonds (or functioning cultural formations) out of their social and material conditions of life and political ideologies that seek to mobilise them in non-class ways' (Hart 2014, 266). Identities are not simply imputed from on high, but are the constantly fluctuating products of complex processes of negotiation and re-articulation. To reiterate, ideologies and rationalities do not encounter individuals as empty vessels, imprinting them with some pre-given image. Rather, they encounter people who already have a well-developed common sense and they function to re-articulate existing components of articulations to new elements, often introduced from the outside. We might think here of Jacob Zuma's suturing of an empty black nationalism to limited black embourgeoisement, without substantial gains for most black South Africans; or we could think of Donald Trump's re-articulation of post-crisis popular resentment to a programme of deregulation he has reinscribed as transgressive. The point is that interpellations and governmental rationalities do not make subjects *de novo*, but form them out of existing materials, re-articulating elements of their common sense to be sure, but never hoisting pre-formed ideologies upon them ready-to-hand.

Struggles over the production of meaning

Althusser's articulations are social formations, with multiple socio-economic systems bound together into conjunctural combinations, including ideological, political and cultural 'levels'. Interpellation in his subsequent writing is a concept designed to capture how ideology (as part of a social formation) functions in relation to capitalist relations of production, as well as an attempt to explain the formation of political subjectivity in a capitalist context. Hart's critique of both

Althusser and Foucault is rooted in the way that these processes of subjectification proceed without regard to subject effects – that is, the extent to which these top-down processes encounter individuals who already have a conception of the world and their place in it. The nail in the coffin of interpellation, she insists, is its ‘incapacity in relation to the philosophy of praxis’: it does not deal with pre-existing common sense and how people’s social views and visions only ‘become coherent through collective practices’ (Hart 2013, 314–315). By turning to Gramsci, Hart can conceive of the formation of political subjectivity as ‘a cultural battle to transform the popular “mentality”’ (Gramsci [1971] 2016, 348) in which articulation is a struggle over the production of meaning.

Yet, as Hart is quick to point out, meaning can never be divorced from material conditions, ripped from its class context. This was the error of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), whose book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is consistently in Hart’s crosshairs. In that book and Laclau’s later work (for example, 2005), articulation is deployed in direct contrast to the alleged determinism of Marxist accounts of classed politics. As Laclau and Mouffe argue in the first third of their book, a purportedly revolutionary proletariat never develops organically or of its own accord, as if its location in the capitalist relations of production should automatically yield a class-for-itself – let alone socialist politics. In nearly every instance, political content comes from *outside* the class and often from extra-proletarian sources. Whether we are talking about Marx and Engels, Lenin, or someone else entirely, they argue that politics is wholly contingent and has nothing to do with class position whatsoever.

We might turn Hart’s critique of interpellation against Laclau and Mouffe as well. Do discursive formations have no material basis, as they argue? Do they not encounter classed subjects already inserted in given relations of production with all of the historical determinations and structural constraints that these entail? The very notion that populist strategy is about creating an appealing discourse that can be

articulated to a 'people' (Laclau 2005) neglects to consider the material reality of that people – its common sense, in Gramscian terms, which is of course a markedly classed phenomenon. And do these populist discourses not always have classed effects? When, for example, they describe a post-war discursive shift, they can only account for it in relation to 'the expansion of capitalist relations of production and of the new bureaucratic-state forms' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 162).

It is here that Hart asks us to return to Laclau's earlier work (1977), in which he first developed the idea of populist articulations that do not simply reflect existing class arrangements. But at this point Laclau had not yet abandoned class and popular-democratic articulations are developed only in relation to existing class projects. Political actors construct a discourse around an antagonism between 'the people' and what, borrowing from Poulantzas ([1968] 1978), he called 'the power bloc'. But this antagonism is articulated to a second: class struggle. If class were irrelevant, how would populist politicians consistently resolve the popular-democratic contradiction (between 'the people' and 'the power bloc') without threatening the pockets of capital? In ignoring class in their later work, Laclau and Mouffe remove any material constraints that might govern the realm of possible articulatory practices, slipping instead into a concept of articulation in which only discourse produces political subjectivities. But as Hart points out, this is an ahistorical, abstract determinism that 'fall[s] back on a structural analysis of language that is every bit as rigid as the structural Marxism of which they are so critical' (2002a, 31). In the place of one determinism then, they give us another.

This abstract determinism is not so present in Laclau's earlier writing on populism, though Hart does take him to task for relying on 'interpellation' as a way of accounting for the pathway from articulations to the formation of political subjectivities. Any ideological discourse, Laclau tells us, coheres as such only insofar as it is capable of interpellating 'subjects' (1977, 101). But this falls back on a model of subjectification in which potential subjects are simply

empty containers to be filled with content rather than really existing people who already have complex worldviews and understandings of their places in the prevailing order. In other words, Laclau absolutely advances our understanding of articulation, extending Althusser's sense of 'linking together' to include the production of meaning (Hart 2013, 308). With this move, we can see how these linkages are tied to prevailing worldviews, or in Gramsci's language, common sense. But he stops short, Hart insists, constrained by his reliance on 'interpellation', which constitutes subjects through discourse rather than re-articulating already existing configurations.

It was Hall who made this Gramscian breakthrough, confronting the Althusserian penchant for assuming that dominant classes have full control over ideologies, deploying them at will. Ideologies, Hall argues, already exist, both among rulers and ruled, and it is from these existing components that new worldviews must be re-articulated. He takes this directly from Gramsci, understanding these ideologies – each fundamental class's common sense – as 'themselves the complex result of previous moments and resolutions in the ideological class struggle [and as such] can be actively *worked upon*' (Hall 1980, 334; emphasis in original). Like Laclau, Hall targets reductive formulations that simply deduce political and ideological currents from some economic base. Instead, he insists that we need to depart from the 'historical premise' that these do not emerge ready-made from the conveyor belt of history but are forged in the process of re-articulation. But we must do so, contra Laclau and Mouffe, without abandoning the 'materialist premise'; namely, that ideological and political structures can never be fully detached from their material conditions of existence. A dialectical analysis of articulation would think these two premises in relation to one another, balancing contingency and determination.

It is on this count that Hall takes to task the great South African sociologist Harold Wolpe, who popularised the Althusserian meaning of articulation in relation to debates over capitalism and apartheid.

Wolpe (1972) used 'articulation' to mean a linkage, describing the South African social formation as articulated modes of production. Whereas the prevailing view in both Marxist and liberal circles at the time was that capitalist development would necessarily eradicate 'pre-capitalist' pockets (Friedman 2015), Wolpe showed how the apartheid state in South Africa actively preserved these non-capitalist enclaves, even fostering their expansion. He argued that because residents of these spaces had not been dispossessed, they had direct access to means of reproduction – meaning that they could sustain themselves independently of the market. It was the insidiousness of the South African state to create a migrant labour regime in which mineworkers could consistently return to these extra-capitalist 'homelands' and eat for free. In short, it was a means of subsidising their wages, allowing them to fall below what would otherwise be the physical limits imposed by necessary labour time.

In addition to the migrant labour system, Wolpe's model was among the first to think of processes of racialisation in relation to capitalist development, rather than assuming the two were necessarily in conflict, or that racism was some holdover from some pre-modern era of ascribed rather than achieved identities. But Hall admonishes Wolpe for bending the stick, theorising such a neat correspondence between base and superstructure as to be essentially functionalist: Wolpe argued that articulated modes of production 'required' racial subjugation. 'The level of economic analysis, so redefined, may not supply sufficient conditions in itself for an explanation of the emergence and operation of racism,' Hall suggested (1980, 322). This economic configuration does not automatically secrete racism; instead, racial stigmatisation was a conscious re-articulation carried out as a political project of the apartheid power bloc. It was this critique, Hart (2002a, 2007) asserts, that led Wolpe (1988, 50–54) to reformulate his own understanding of race–class articulations in his subsequent work. This is what Hart (2007, 86) calls the 'Gramscian conception of articulation': it harnesses

Althusser's articulation as 'joining together' to Hall's articulation as 'producing meaning'. In so doing, it captures how people grasp for fragments of understanding, piecing them together so as to create working, coherent worldviews. These assembled shards may remain in stable configurations for a time, or they may be constantly in flux. In either case, their stability is never eternal, but must be perpetually renewed, to paraphrase Hall (1985, 113). This project of renewal takes the form of creating new articulations and dissolving old ones, which in practice means that the forging of political consciousness is simultaneously a struggle over how people understand the meaning of their actions in the world. It also means that this 'political consciousness' is not necessarily invested with the powers of autonomy; it may very well mean being *subjected* to the rule of the capitalist state. It is for this reason that articulations are a site of unremitting struggle: they are polyvalent, as Hart teaches us, and as such, may go in many directions (Hart 2007, 98; 2014, 203, 207).

In the final section, I analyse an instance of contrasting re-articulations in a township in contemporary Cape Town. Despite comparable locations in socio-economic space, two groups of squatters articulated very different meanings of land occupation that had real, material consequences: one group was evicted, whereas the other was able to secure toleration from the municipal government. This analysis draws on Hart's Gramscian insight that re-articulations do not descend from on high, but are the evanescent moments of 'articulat[ing] multiple, often contradictory meanings into a complex unity that appeals powerfully to "common sense" across a broad spectrum' (Hart 2008, 692). While in the work of Laclau, Hall, Hart and other recent uses of articulation (for example, De Leon, Desai and Tuğal 2015), attention is devoted to how parties and states re-articulate fragments of common sense, in this closing section I want to emphasise how processes of re-articulation simultaneously occur in more informal civil society organisations, something akin to what Hart has called 'movement beyond movements' (2006a, 2007, 2013, 2014).

Re-articulating land claims

Land occupations in post-apartheid South Africa are nothing new. The abrogation of influx controls in the 1980s allowed racialised populations ejected from cities to return en masse, and without adequate housing options, informal settlements proliferated on peri-urban fringes around the country (Levenson 2019). But it was the 2001 occupation of Bredell Farm, just north of Johannesburg, that Hart argues was the opening salvo in her 'movement beyond movements' (2014, 21). This has less to do with the fact of the occupation – relatively unremarkable when placed in context – than it does with how this occupation was articulated. Seven thousand squatters 'purchased' plots from a small opposition party called the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which invoked the 'specter of Zimbabwe' (Hart 2002a, 305). While the PAC's involvement was surely opportunistic, it 'was simultaneously tapping into deep veins of morality, history, memory, and meaning, as well as the depth and intensity of poverty and inequality. In the process, it not only exposed deep and growing discontent. It also dramatised land issues as a key potential site of counter-hegemonic struggle singularly lacking organised social forces, yet widely available as the basis of mobilization that could move in significantly different directions' (Hart 2002a, 308).

The post-apartheid government was left deeply vulnerable to collective demands for land and housing. It had staked its legitimacy on claims to be a remedial force capable of reversing the material wrongs of racialised dispossession, but in practice its redistributive programmes were slowly implemented, underfunded and technocratic by design (Levenson 2021, 2022). This meant that those residents waiting for access to urban housing could occupy tracts of vacant land, especially those already owned by municipalities, but also plots held by absentee landlords, and they could claim to be enacting the same programme of decolonisation and national liberation that the ANC asserted as part of its national democratic revolution. And when municipalities attempted to evict them, they could invoke memories of apartheid-era state repression.

The imagery was actually quite comparable: an Anti-Land Invasion Unit would arrive, often flanked by large armed police tanks called Casspirs, widely associated with the apartheid state. Once they secured court authorisation, they would try to forcibly remove residents, repossessing their belongings. The popular re-articulation of contemporary eviction as apartheid redux clearly stung government officials. Bonginkosi Madikizela, the Western Cape's provincial housing minister, told one journalist, 'In order for them not to be evicted, they are coming up with this narrative and portraying us in government as monsters ... It's not true' (Birnbaum 2016).

Cape Town is a particularly contentious site of struggle, as until the 2016 local elections it was the only major municipality in the country governed by a party other than the ANC. Madikizela, once an ANC stalwart, joined the Democratic Alliance (DA) about a decade ago. With the ANC in opposition in Cape Town but in power nationally, residents are able to legitimise their demands by claiming to be implementing the ANC's programme when they occupy land, insisting that they are doing so against the inability of the DA to realise the post-apartheid promise. But associating with a party is not without its attendant risks. By participating in a party-orchestrated occupation, squatters remain open to allegations of opportunism, as well as politicising what might otherwise be perceived as a struggle for survival.

In 2011 a group called the Mitchells Plain Housing Association (MPHA) organised a mass land occupation in Mitchells Plain – Cape Town's second largest township. Many of the participants lived in overcrowded houses in surrounding neighbourhoods, houses that the apartheid government had provided to their parents or grandparents when they were initially removed to Mitchells Plain in the 1970s. Now, a couple of generations later, the children and grandchildren of these evictees are *gatvol* – 'fed up' in Afrikaans – of living in overcrowded houses. Many others live in shacks erected behind formal houses. If they are lucky, they may stay with relatives, but more likely, they pay rent, electricity and water. Or else they cannot access toilets and taps in the

house and have to scavenge for water elsewhere. Indeed, backyarding is the most common type of informal dwelling in Cape Town, and more than one in five of its residents currently live in a shack.

The MPHA was actually a front group of sorts for the ANC. It did not openly identify as party affiliated, but its leadership were exclusively ANC members and they hoped to move ANC-sympathetic residents into a neighbourhood that historically has voted for the DA without exception. They articulated their claims to land in narrowly individualistic terms – akin to what Hart calls 'individual restitution claims' instead of collective redistributive demands (2002a, 309; 2014, 20). On the day the occupation began, residents thought they were participating in a legitimate, state-sanctioned housing programme. The land was an open field next to a commuter railway station and owned by the municipal government. They paid a small fee to the MPHA and when they arrived, along with a thousand others, people were on their hands and knees with members of the association, marking out plots of land with bits of string and wooden stakes – as if it were actually private property. Even if the homes were flimsy and the plots small, residents perceived themselves as homeowners in the making, acquiring a sense of autonomy absent to backyarders.

The confidence of MPHA members gave residents the impression that the occupation was legal. It took a few days for participants to accept that they had committed an illegal act. One participant described the revelation in her journal:

On Tuesday 17th May [2011] the sheriff of the court said over an intercom that we were there illegally and we were not allowed to be there. They gave us an interdict and gave us 5 minutes to vacate the land. Once again they removed whatever we had. People lost their IDs, their papers, their dentures ... That was when we realised that this is illegal, we were not going to get anything. Nobody was going to be able to help us with this. We had been manipulated into the situation we are in now.⁴

While she felt that they had been manipulated, there is another way to understand what transpired. MPHA leaders consciously sutured moralising discourses of becoming a homeowner to a sub-proletarian politics of necessity, both of which were already present in squatters' common sense. They rendered this common sense 'critical' insofar as they began with people's existing desires and resentments and re-articulated them to a politics of exclusivity. In practice, this meant that people who had nowhere else to go were persuaded that participating in a land occupation was a viable option. This sense of viability was actively legitimised through discourses of ordered 'individual restitution', to use Hart's phrase (2002a, 309; 2014, 20). The distribution of ersatz property to hopeful residents by an ersatz government organisation mimicked the logic of the government's housing programme – obscuring the fact that it was just as illegal as a disorderly land occupation without any intermediary body governing 'distribution'. When the case finally made it to the High Court, the judge read this articulation of land politics as the opportunistic manipulation of residents for political ends – not as an attempt to align with a government housing programme. After a year and a half of appeals and delayed hearings, every one of the occupiers was evicted from the field.

The MPHA's approach was one possible re-articulation of demands for access to land and housing. But a second occupation just down the road from this one rejected a politics of exclusivity – the distribution of mutually exclusive plots to those who paid a fee, the exclusion of those who did not – in favour of an expansive politics of inclusivity. The party front groups initially involved in the project were immediately expelled by angry residents who accused them of opportunism. Residents constituted themselves not as passive recipients of plots, but as an active social movement that relied upon constant growth to sustain itself. Rather than attempting to re-articulate immediate needs to the state's logic of ordered distribution, residents sutured these needs to a discourse of fighting for decolonisation. The government was represented not as a force for redistribution, but as a potential initiator of

eviction, recalling memories of the apartheid state. It was viewed as an obstacle to the realisation of the post-apartheid promise. The limited pace of housing delivery after apartheid allowed for this contentious discourse to be sutured to people's immediate demands for shelter.

On the day residents of the first occupation were evicted, one leader of the second occupation marched to the first, urging squatters to return with him to his occupation. 'We're not going anywhere unless you're going with us. Move with us!' he urged, backed by a dozen other occupiers. I could not help but think about the stark contrast in relation to the politics of petty proprietorship I had observed in the first occupation. There was no talk of manipulation in the legal proceedings, nor any sign of factional strife among the occupiers. Even when residents grew *gatvol* of their leadership, they called an occupation-wide meeting and elected a new representative committee. As the settlement grew, they divided it into four sections – A, B, C and D – each with its own representative, reporting back to an elected leadership. This is not to suggest that there were not disagreements – of course, there were. But it does demonstrate the extent to which residents' politics affected the outcome. The first occupation's persistent factionalism rendered it susceptible to being framed as opportunism. But the second occupation's coherent representative organisation, a consequence of its political constitution, shaped its acceptance by the High Court as a group of residents in need.

Conclusion

Far from overdetermined then, these contrary outcomes were both possible consequences of divergent re-articulations of land politics, ranging from individual restitution to collective redistributive demands, or what I have called a politics of exclusivity as opposed to an expansive politics of inclusivity. This preliminary effort to flesh out re-articulations 'from below' draws on Hart's reading of Laclau (1977) and Hall (1980), demonstrating that politics cannot be read

off socio-economic conditions. Both groups of occupiers began with roughly comparable 'social views and visions' (Sitas 1990, 263, 273) and came from similar backgrounds as backyarders or residents of overcrowded homes in Mitchells Plain. But it was the conscious project of re-articulation, the suturing of elements of residents' common sense to divergent political projects, which shaped their politics in practice. Meaning and social practice were (and remain) inseparable – arguably the key insight of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis. Struggles over the production of meaning are both an effect and a constitutive part of processes of politicisation. Political subjectivity is not imputed from on high by organisers who simply manipulate individual pawns, nor is it projected through top-down processes of interpellation or governmentality. Rather, as Hart teaches us, 'fragmentary common sense can become coherent through collective practices and processes of transformation' (2013, 315), which are precisely the strategies she describes as re-articulation: the cobbling together of existing fragments into new meanings, which are simultaneously the nodes around which coalitions, alliances and blocs coalesce. It is around these meanings, in other words, that political interests and subjectivities are articulated. This process of articulation is what we give the proper name 'politics'.

But these politics do not occur in a vacuum. As Hart, like Hall before her, makes quite clear, articulations are not about suturing free-floating discourses to one another at random, with contingent assemblages created from an unbounded rhetorical palette. Rather, these articulations are always historically specific processes and, as such, are constrained by material circumstances: 'One has to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made' (Hall [1983] 2016, 121). In the instances of the land occupations analysed here, class position and location in a matrix of power relations are everything. Without this as a starting point, there would be nothing to which to articulate various other discourses, elements and narratives. Hart's turn towards meaning, in other words, does not signal some sort of cultural turn away from class; instead, it is her attempt to take class seriously, interrogating how

processes of political subjectivation shape and are shaped by people's sense of the world, as well as their place in it. 'Classes ... are constituted not as unified social forces, but as patchworks or segments which are differentiated and divided on a variety of bases and by varied processes' (Wolpe 1988, 51). These bases and processes are precisely the articulations and re-articulations Hart describes. The unification of proletarian forces is not about imposing some external logic on an atomised class, importing knowledge or Luxemburg's 'idea' from the outside. Rather, it is about cultivating what material already exists – common sense, everyday life – and finding ways to develop these quotidian fragments into coherent worldviews. Therefore 'one might say that class unity, when it occurs, is a conjunctural phenomenon' (Wolpe 1988, 51).

NOTES

- 1 After Marx's death, Marxist thinking was formalised under the banner of orthodoxy. Especially during the reign of the Second International, it became commonplace to think about politics as an ideological 'reflection' of the material base. This crude economic determinism reduced the domain of subjectivity to what Andrew Feenberg (1986, 140) calls 'insubstantial thinking, pure reflection'. It was the goal of many subsequent Marxist thinkers, among them Gramsci and Althusser, to break with this static approach to understanding politics under capitalism. However, a word of caution is in order: as Daniel Gaido and Manuel Quiroga (2021) go to great lengths to emphasise, this 'mechanical interpretation' of Marxism should be associated only with the Second International's reformist wing. In subsequently reducing the entire legacy of the Second International to its reformist membership, Stalin erased the vibrant range of positions that actually flourished in the organisation at the time.
- 2 He claimed that a projected sequel to the fragmentary volume containing his famous interpellation essay would address class struggle, but this work never actually appeared (Althusser [1995] 2014, 1–2).
- 3 Though as Judith Butler (1997, 111) suggests, the relationship between interpellator and interpellated may be a bit more complicated in terms of temporal sequence: 'As a prior and essential condition of the formation of the subject, there is a certain readiness to be compelled by the authoritative interpellation, a readiness which suggests that one is, as it were, already in

relation to the voice before the response, already implicated in the terms of the animating misrecognition by an authority to which one subsequently yields.'

- 4 This was Faeza Meyer, who in collaboration with the historian Koni Benson, is planning to publish the full diary under the title *Writing Out Loud: Interventions in the History of a Land Occupation*. I thank both of them for allowing me to use this crucial source. Selections have been published in Benson and Meyer (2015).

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