

Reworking Apartheid Legacies

Global Competition, Gender and Social Wages in South Africa, 1980-2000

Gillian Hart



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Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
COFESA	Confederation of Employers of South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DCD	Department of Constitutional Development
EOI	export-oriented industrialization
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GEAR	Growth, Employment, and Redistribution
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IDP	Industrial Development Point
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ILO	International Labour Organization
Iscor	Iron and Steel Corporation
ISI	import substitution industrialization
LED	local economic development
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MEC	minerals-energy complex
MERG	Macro-Economic Research Group
PoE	Panel of Experts
R	rand
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Program
RIDP	Regional Industrial Development Program
UF	Urban Foundation

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

In this paper, Gillian Hart examines the changing relationships between labour-intensive industrial production and the conditions of reproduction of labour in South Africa between 1980 and 2000.

In the early 1980s, the apartheid state offered generous incentives for labour-intensive industries to locate in “industrial decentralization points” either in or adjacent to former bantustans. Light industries—many of them from Taiwan (Province of China) and employing mainly women—mushroomed in these areas, while the number of heavy capital-intensive industries in the main urban centres decreased sharply. In 1991 the government of F.W. de Klerk, in response to fierce criticism from powerful South African business interests, slashed the subsidies. Since the mid-1990s, the post-apartheid state has embraced foreign direct investment (FDI) and export production as the centre-piece of its neoliberal policy. Yet until now, according to Hart, these promises have remained unfulfilled. Under pressure from cheap imports, employment in labour-intensive industry has shrunk dramatically, FDI has been minimal, and neoliberal imperatives have constrained redistributive social policies.

The paper draws both on secondary evidence and the author’s research in two former industrial decentralization points in northwestern KwaZulu-Natal with a strong connection to sites in East Asia, to advance three related arguments:

- First, the conditions of reproduction of labour are central to understanding the peculiarly South African forms of engaging with the global economy. These conditions are not only the result of social policies, but also of a much longer and deeper history of racialized dispossession and expropriation.
- Second, a gendered perspective is crucial to understanding the relationships between industrial production, social policy and the conditions of reproduction of labour. Yet an approach that focuses on the “impact of globalization” on women is severely limited. Instead, attention must be given to how gendered relationships and identities articulate with race, ethnicity and other differences; and how these, in turn, shape the forms and dynamics of industrial production. The ways in which Taiwanese industries have taken hold in South Africa provide vivid illustrations of the inextricable connections among class, gender and race; and of the complex histories that enter into the making of the social wage.
- Third, the paper underscores the importance of the politics of place, showing how dispossession and industrial production played out quite differently in two seemingly similar towns in South Africa during the apartheid era; how the social policies set in place after apartheid have filtered through configurations of local state power in strikingly different ways; and how strategies to attract foreign investment are provoking intense, but locally differentiated forms of struggle.

These local divergences illustrate the interconnections between workplace and community politics, and how these overlap with struggles in other social arenas to shape the social wage. The author contends that these three arguments underscore the contradictions and unsustainability of the neoliberal project in conditions of profound deprivation and inequality.

The argument unfolds in three parts. First, the paper outlines the emergence of labour-intensive forms of industrial production based predominantly on women's labour in decentralized regions of South Africa in the 1980s, and how Taiwanese investment took hold in these areas. The second section examines why East Asian investment in decentralized regions of South Africa has been so socially explosive. These comparative insights reveal how gender, race and other differences shape the dynamics of industrial accumulation. They also illuminate connections between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour—in particular, how agrarian histories have played into the formation of the social wage and shaped the conditions of global competition. The third section discusses the ANC government's embrace of neoliberalism in the mid-1990s, and shows how the local state has become a key site of the contradictory imperatives of redistribution and accumulation.

In extending the definition of the social wage beyond employment-based entitlements, or even conventional social policy, to encompass agrarian questions, the purpose of this paper is both political and analytical. This broader conception allows for a fuller understanding of how historically specific relationships between production and reproduction of labour have shaped divergent trajectories of low wage industrialization. In addition, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, this extended definition helps draw attention to histories of racial dispossession. In the process, it holds open the possibility of broadly based claims for redistributive justice based on citizenship rights, and for linking struggles in multiple arenas as well as across the rural-urban divide.

By focusing on the relationship between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour, Hart calls attention to the historically specific—and deeply gendered as well as racial—processes and practices that have shaped what are, in effect, sharply divergent trajectories of labour-intensive forms of industrialization.

In the post-apartheid era, the social and spatial legacy of dispossession is evident in the profound tensions between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour. These tensions, in turn, have become condensed within the so-called “developmental local state.” The paper also outlines how structural constraints inherited from the past are being reworked in significantly different ways in seemingly similar places.

Through a comparative focus on the connections between production and the conditions of reproduction of labour, Gillian Hart sheds new light on agrarian questions. The point of drawing on East Asian connections to dramatize the history of dispossession, says the author, is not to propose a technocratic redistributive “solution” to the evident limits of low-wage export production in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead, these connections provide a means for delinking the land question from agriculture narrowly defined, and re-articulating it in terms of the social wage and broader livelihood imperatives.

At least in principle, a broadly based and historically grounded redefinition of the social wage holds open the possibility for organized labour to shift from a rearguard defence of

diminishing, relatively well-paid and predominantly male jobs to forging broader alliances and coalitions with other social forces—including those pressing for agrarian reform, as well as other movements such as those taking shape around HIV/AIDS—to engage both with macroeconomic policy, and with locally and regionally specific conditions. A strategy of connecting struggles in multiple arenas is not simply a matter of pitting “civil society” against “the state,” but of recognizing how they define one another through constantly shifting engagements. Whether and how a strategy of linking what are commonly seen as separate rural and urban struggles under the rubric of the social wage could work in practice is likely to hinge crucially on understandings of gender not simply as “women”, but as defining elements in the exercise of power, deeply entwined with race, ethnicity and other dimensions of difference, as well as with the material conditions in which people find themselves.

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Résumé

Gillian Hart examine ici l’évolution des relations entre la production industrielle à forte intensité de travail et les conditions de reproduction de la main-d’œuvre en Afrique du Sud entre 1980 et 2000.

Au début des années 1980, le régime d’apartheid était généreux lorsqu’il s’agissait d’inciter des industries à forte intensité de travail à s’implanter dans des zones de décentralisation industrielle, à l’intérieur ou à proximité des anciens bantoustans. Les industries légères, pour beaucoup originaires du Taiwan (Province de Chine) et employant une main-d’œuvre essentiellement féminine, poussèrent comme des champignons dans ces zones, tandis que le nombre d’industries lourdes à forte intensité de capital diminua dans les grandes agglomérations urbaines. En 1991, le gouvernement de Klerk, face aux critiques virulentes de la part de puissants intérêts économiques sud-africains, réduisit considérablement les subventions. Depuis 1995, l’Etat de l’après-apartheid fait des investissements étrangers directs (IED) et de la production pour l’exportation la pièce maîtresse de sa politique néolibérale. A ce jour, pourtant, cette politique n’a pas, selon Gillian Hart, tenu ses promesses. Des importations bon marché ont provoqué une contraction de l’emploi dans les industries à fort coefficient de main-d’œuvre, les IED ont été minimes et les impératifs néolibéraux ont fait obstacle à une politique sociale de redistribution.

L’auteur s’appuie sur des sources secondaires et sur les recherches qu’elle a effectuées dans le nord-ouest du KwaZulu-Natal, dans deux anciennes zones de décentralisation industrielle très étroitement liées à des sites de production d’Asie orientale, pour avancer trois arguments connexes:

- Premièrement, les conditions de reproduction de la main-d'œuvre sont d'une importance cruciale si l'on veut comprendre la manière spécifiquement sud-africaine de s'intégrer dans l'économie mondiale. Ces conditions ne résultent pas seulement des politiques sociales mais tiennent profondément à un passé beaucoup plus ancien de spoliation et d'expropriation fondées sur la race.
- Deuxièmement, il est crucial, pour comprendre les rapports entre la production industrielle, la politique sociale et les conditions de reproduction de la main-d'œuvre, de différencier entre les hommes et les femmes. Toutefois, une étude se focalisant uniquement sur "les répercussions de la mondialisation" sur les femmes serait restreinte. Il faut s'intéresser plutôt à la façon dont les relations et identités marquées par une différenciation selon le sexe se conjuguent avec la race, l'appartenance ethnique et d'autres différences et dont celles-ci influent à leur tour sur les formes et la dynamique de la production industrielle. Les modes d'implantation des industries taiwanaises en Afrique du Sud illustrent de manière frappante les connexions inextricables entre la classe sociale, le genre et la race, ainsi que la complexité des éléments historiques entrant dans la composition du salaire social.
- Troisièmement, l'étude souligne l'importance du jeu politique local en montrant que la spoliation et la production industrielle ont joué un rôle très différent dans deux villes apparemment semblables d'Afrique du Sud durant l'apartheid; que, filtrées par les configurations du pouvoir local, les politiques sociales mises en place après l'apartheid ont produit des résultats étonnamment différents et que les stratégies conçues pour attirer les investissements étrangers provoquent des luttes acharnées, mais différenciées selon les endroits.

Ces différences locales illustrent les liens entre le lieu de travail et le jeu politique local et les recoupements avec les luttes menées sur d'autres terrains sociaux pour la constitution du salaire social. Pour l'auteur, ces trois arguments soulignent les contradictions et le caractère indéfendable du projet néolibéral là où règnent un grand dénuement et de profondes inégalités.

L'auteur développe son argumentation en trois parties. Tout d'abord, elle relève l'émergence, dans les années 1980, de formes de production industrielle nécessitant beaucoup de main-d'œuvre, essentiellement féminine, dans les régions sud-africaines de décentralisation et montre comment les investissements taiwanais se sont implantés dans ces régions. Dans la deuxième partie, elle examine pourquoi les investissements est-asiatiques dans ces régions ont produit une telle explosion sociale. Ces observations comparatives révèlent comment le genre, la race et d'autres différences influent sur la dynamique de l'accumulation industrielle. Elles éclairent aussi les rapports entre la production et les conditions de la reproduction de la main-d'œuvre – en particulier la façon dont l'histoire agraire a contribué à la formation du salaire social et

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