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ENABLING CONNECTIONS

Relational Comparison in a Global Conjunctural Frame

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Introduction

Prompted by the editors of the *Handbook on Comparative Urban Studies*, my task in this chapter is to explain how I have worked toward situating relational comparison in a global conjunctural frame. Relational comparison grew initially out of the first round of my research in post-apartheid South Africa (1994–2001) based in two former white towns and adjacent black townships formed through apartheid-era racialized dispossession and their connections with East Asia (Hart 2002, 2006). Closely aligned with Philip McMichael’s (1990) concept of incorporated comparison, relational comparison as I conceive it is grounded in Henri Lefebvre’s conceptions of the production of space (or space-time), along with his critique of everyday life and regressive-progressive method (Hart 2018).

Starting in 2003, I was drawn to focus on the massive upsurge of popular support for Jacob Zuma, and outbreaks of xenophobic violence following his election as president of the African National Congress (ANC) in 2007. This explosion of populist politics required taking nationalism very seriously, both in terms of its popular expressions and its official deployments. Yet, with some key exceptions, most left analyses of post-apartheid South Africa at the time neglected questions of nationalism. To engage these challenges, I turned to the work of scholars concerned with analyzing the escalation of right-wing Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) alongside the Indian National Congress’s ushering in neoliberal capitalism in the early 1990s. In delving more deeply into the historically specific but interconnected forces that came together in South Africa and India since the end of the Cold War, I was constantly thrust back to earlier historical periods. These efforts to deepen relational comparison took me in a more explicitly conjunctural direction, focusing on interconnected processes operating simultaneously at global and national levels and in the realms of everyday life in changing spatio-historical conjunctures (Hart 2018). Part of my aim was to forefront specific articulations of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, caste, and religion as actively and inseparably constitutive of *both* class processes *and* nationalisms in South Africa and India in mutually illuminating ways.

Just as I was starting work on a book following the early online publication of “Relational Comparison Revisited” in November 2016, my writing plans were blown apart by the Trump election and the intense debates it provoked. From a South African perspective, I was struck and

concerned by three aspects of these initial debates: first, parochial presumptions of American exceptionalism; second, with some notable exceptions much of the debate both on the liberal right and the left was cast in terms of race versus class, reiterating the race/class debate in South Africa stretching back to the 1970s; and third, attention to questions of nationalism was notably missing. The political stakes of how we understand these forces became terrifyingly clear during the Spring semester of 2017 when the Berkeley campus and its surrounds were thrown into turmoil by invasions of extreme right-wing forces trumpeting their rights of free speech and provoking violent confrontations. In retrospect, one can see these as forerunners of the murderous neo-Nazi displays in Charlottesville in August 2017, and the invasion of the US capitol on January 6, 2021. Since 2017 my research and teaching a Global Studies course has focused on what it means to bring the US into a global conjunctural frame in relation to – and from the perspective of – non-Western regions of the world.

Growing out of these engagements, my efforts to situate relational comparison in a global conjunctural frame are politically driven, recognizing theory, method, and politics as deeply interconnected. Clarifying these issues and their political stakes is a matter of considerable importance – especially because “conjunctural analysis” can and does take different forms, often incommensurate with one another, as exemplified in the work of Gramsci and Althusser. These tensions are evident in the outpouring of work on conjunctural analysis in cultural studies following the death of Stuart Hall in 2014.¹

The move toward conjunctural analysis in comparative urban studies is also generating debate. Starting from claims about the need to spatialize conjunctural analysis, a major strand of this work focuses on “the relative positioning of cities in the context of uneven development and multiscalar relations” (Peck 2017: 4).² Jenny Robinson calls this “scalar conjuncturalism”, based on a “nested and extended set of social processes which give some possible shape and opportunity for ‘thinking with elsewhere’, or through and beyond a delimited case” (2022: 254). The attraction of this approach, she observes, lies in its “broader, cross-scalar and politically resonant analysis” that views cities as “enmeshed in a shared inter-scalar verticality” (2022: 253,257). Yet she critiques efforts to construe “urban contexts” or cities as conjunctures, or as “conjunctural alloys ... in wider, structurally patterned systems” (Peck 2015: 168), pointing instead to what she calls “contingent conjuncturalism” (2022: 258).

Rather than engage directly with this debate and its longer histories, my purpose here is to chart an alternative approach, driven by the imperative to comprehend resurgent nationalisms and racially inflected right-wing populist politics in politically enabling ways. I start by clarifying the different concepts of space and time that underpin different versions of conjunctural analysis. More specifically, Althusser worked with a concept of multiple temporalities abstracted from space (although reliant on spatial metaphors), whereas Gramsci focused on the multiplicity of interconnected *spatio*-temporalities, acutely attuned to questions of scale. Related to these differences, Gramsci’s conjunctural analysis is inherently comparative in a way that Althusser’s is not – and is closely linked with his concept of politics as translation (Kipfer and Hart 2013; Kipfer 2021). Accordingly, claims that it is necessary to spatialize conjunctural analysis could apply to Althusser but certainly not to Gramsci.

My strategy for locating relational comparison in a global conjunctural frame is grounded in a lineage pioneered by Stefan Kipfer (2002) that brings together Gramsci and Lefebvre – while also recognizing that the challenges of the present conjuncture require going beyond the Gramsci-Lefebvre lineage to focus on articulations of class and capitalism with race, gender, sexuality, caste, religion, and other dimensions of difference, along with changing forms of nationalism and imperialism (Kipfer and Hart 2013). Drawing on this work, the second part of this essay

summarizes key elements of the global conjunctural frame I have found useful in thinking comparatively about the rise of exclusionary nationalisms and right-wing populist politics in different regions of the world since the end of the Cold War. Finally, I reflect briefly on the political implications and ramifications of this framework.

Forms of Conjunctural Analysis: Concepts of Space and Time

[A] conjuncture is not a slice of time [or a period], but can only be defined by the accumulation/condensation of contradictions, the fusion or merger ... of “different currents and circumstances”.

Hall 1980a: 165

Conjunctural analysis in the Anglophone world has become most closely associated with the work of Stuart Hall and the approach to cultural studies he pioneered at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and beyond. The co-authored book *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al 2013 [1978]) remains a towering example of conjunctural analysis. In my forthcoming book, I discuss in greater detail how Hall’s conjunctural analysis navigated a path between his readings of Althusser and Gramsci.³ Hall signposted what he took from each of them with considerable precision (2016 [1983]). Yet this was a perilous path, I suggest, fraught with political and analytical tensions encapsulated in Althusser’s (Althusser and Balibar 1970) ferocious critique of what he saw as Gramsci’s Hegelian form of historicism exemplified in the concept of philosophy of praxis at the core of *The Prison Notebooks*. A substantial body of more recent scholarship has called into question Althusser’s allegations and made clear the sharply different political projects in which each was involved. For Althusser, even in his later work, “Marxist intellectuals seem to remain philosophers or theoreticians who *spontaneously* reproduce the division between intellectual and material work typical of the capitalist class society” (Koivisto and Lahtinen 2012: 272); Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis, in contrast, aimed at dismantling this division.

For Hall, Gramsci served to “define an alternative or limit to Althusser’s hardening of structuralist categories” (2016 [1983]: 155). Pointing to the latter’s deployment of the concept of levels in terms that “displace relationships experienced historically and processually into a spatial model”, Hall noted that “Althusser takes the [structural] model even further by elaborating a number of levels within the social formation: the economic, the political, the ideological, and the theoretical” (2016 [1983]: 105). Hall was always careful to qualify this framework and departed from it in his post-structural turn in the 1990s. Yet his comments in conversation with Doreen Massey in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and their joint work on neoliberalism exemplify its enduring influence:

[This] is not a moment to fall back on economic determinism, though it may be tempting to do so, since the current crisis seems to start in the economy. But any serious analysis of the crisis must take into account its other “conditions of existence” ... Different *levels* of society, the economy, politics, ideology, common sense, etc., come together or “fuse.” The definition of a conjunctural crisis is when these “relatively autonomous” sites – which have different origins, are driven by different contradictions, and develop according to their own *temporalities* – are nevertheless “convened” or condensed in the same moment. Then there is a crisis, a break, a “ruptural fusion.”

Hall and Massey 2010: 38; *emphasis added*

Despite also being drawn to and influenced by Althusserian analysis, Massey made clear in *For Space* that “Althusser did not, explicitly, relate his critique [of Hegel, and indirectly of Gramsci as well] to concepts of space; his concern was rather with thinking through the possible nature of disrupted temporalities” (2005: 40). She maintained, however, that his critique opened possibilities for thinking space “in an alternative way, with interruptive and disruptive characteristics” – going on to suggest that “what post-structuralism has most importantly achieved is the dynamisation and dislocation of structuralism’s structures” (2005: 41–42). Yet, as Robinson observes, Massey “arrived [in *For Space*] at a somewhat one-dimensional analysis of ‘space’ as the intersection of ‘trajectories’ and a sense of ‘space as simultaneity’” (2022: 257).

Hall’s post-structural turn is clearly exemplified in his 1994 DuBois lectures at Harvard, most notably “Race as a Sliding Signifier” (Hall 2017 [1994]). From my own (necessarily partial) perspective of deep immersion in South African debates over the relations of race and class, what gets left by the roadside in this turn is Hall’s profoundly important essay “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance” (1980b). Intervening in intense debates over race and class in South Africa in the 1970s, Hall significantly reworked Althusser’s concept of articulation by loosening its tight structuralist bolts and moving it in a more flexible Gramscian direction – a move that aligns closely with Marx’s method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete, in the sense of concrete concepts that are adequate to the concrete in history, through multiple relations and determinations. The question of “adequacy” is primarily political and inextricably linked to praxis: the capacity of a (necessarily partial) conception of the world to inspire and inform efforts to change it.

Gregor McLennan has recently argued that Hall’s concept of articulation did not break new ground but was rather “spelling it out in more detail in relation to [Marx’s Notes on Method in] the 1857 ‘Introduction’ and in a much more flexible register than that of the Althusserians” (2021: 166).⁴ While agreeing with this argument, I have found it useful to take the concept of articulation further in a Gramscian direction by attending to his spatial theory of language and translation and relational conception of the person.⁵

Before elaborating these points, let me outline Gramsci’s conjunctural analysis, which distinguishes between “organic movements (relatively permanent) from movements which may be termed ‘conjunctural’ (and which *appear* as occasional, immediate, almost accidental)” (Q13§17: 1971: 177; emphasis added):

A common error in historico-political analysis consists in an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural. This leads to presenting causes as immediately operative which in fact only operate indirectly, or to asserting that the immediate causes are the only effective ones. In the first case there is an excess of “economism” or doctrinaire pedantry; in the second, an excess of “ideologism”. In the first case there is an overestimate of mechanical causes, in the second an exaggeration of the voluntarist and individual element.

Q13§17: 1971: 178

This distinction is first and foremost political, seeking to define what Gramsci called “the terrain of the ‘conjunctural’ ... [upon which] the forces of opposition organize” (ibid.). It also stands in sharp contrast to interpretations cast in terms of radical contingency. Acknowledging that what he called the “dialectical nexus between these two categories of movement” is difficult

to establish precisely, Gramsci posited what he called “various moments or levels” in the “relation of forces” – economic, political, and military. In contrast to Althusser’s “determination by the economic [level] in the last instance”, Gramsci attended in the *first* instance to what he called social relations of force as a crucial starting point in the analysis of situations, emphasizing, however that “The specific question of economic hardship or well-being as a cause of new historical realities is a *partial aspect* of the question of the relations of force, at the various levels” (Q13§17; 1971: 184–185; emphasis added).

Koivisto and Lahtinen (2012: 276) conclude their useful exposition of different versions of the concept of conjuncture by pointing to two key dangers: (1) dichotomous understandings of “structure” and “conjuncture”; and (2) conjuncture coming to function as “a new conceptual dictator” that “dissolves everything into conjuncture”. For Gramsci, this means locating conjunctural analysis on the broader canvas of *The Prison Notebooks* – including, very importantly, the specific character of his spatial historicism that Althusser so profoundly misconstrued.

In my forthcoming book, I discuss recent work based on close philological readings of the *Prison Notebooks* that recognizes how Gramsci’s attention to multiple spatio-temporalities is central to his conjunctural analysis and to related issues of bourgeois hegemony and passive revolution. For example, Thomas (2009: 284–285) clarifies the multi-scalar dimensions of Gramsci’s multiple temporalities: (1) a relational conception of “the person” (as opposed to the subject) as an ensemble of relations with others and with nature; (2) Gramsci’s spatial understanding of language that exemplifies “the fractured nature of historical time, insofar as its constitutive metaphorical nature reveals layers or sediments of different historical experiences sitting together in an uncomfortable *modus vivendi*”; (3) the fissured relations between urban centers and rural peripheries; (4) hegemonic relations among nations at the international level that “consign some social formations to the past ‘times’ of others”. The concept of multiple spatio-temporalities offers a powerful means for clarifying concretely the relationship between organic and conjunctural movements. It also bears directly on questions of comparison – and, as we shall see, on how Gramsci’s use of translation as concept and practice might be allied with relational comparison (Kipfer and Hart 2013).

In advance of the more recent recognition of the centrality of multiple spatio-temporalities, Kipfer insisted that Gramsci’s historicism was simultaneously geographical: “Rather than counterposing time, history, and diachrony to space, geography and synchrony, Gramsci analyzed particular conjunctures as a confluence of multiple temporal rhythms *and* spatialities” (Kipfer 2002: 136)⁶ – or, as he subsequently put it, “multiple, *spatially mediated* temporal rhythms” (Kipfer 2013: 86; emphasis added). This concept resonates as well with Lefebvre’s regressive–progressive spatio-historical method that I have found useful to deploy together with Gramsci’s conjunctural analysis.⁷

Another productive resonance with Gramsci’s conjunctural analysis is Lefebvre’s framework in *The Urban Revolution* (2003 [1970]) that distinguishes the global level (defined as the state and capital); the level of everyday life; and the urban level that *mediates* between the global level and everyday life. “The urban” here refers *not* to “the city” as a type of human settlement but rather to processes of *urbanization* that encompass “evolving relations between city and country” (Goonewardena 2014). Both Kipfer (2009) and Kanishka Goonewardena (2005, 2011) underscore that Lefebvre conceives of “levels” *dialectically*, in terms distinctively and explicitly different from those of Althusser.⁸ They also insist that Lefebvre’s levels are *not* conceived as scales – although each can be conceived in multi-scalar terms – for reasons both analytical and political: “Scale and level [in Lefebvre’s sense] must be distinguished because the latter forces one to maintain an

integral perspective that ties particular aspects of social life to an open-ended horizon of totality as *possibility*” (Kipfer 2009: 79). As Goonewardena incisively puts it,

The conception of these three “levels” not only informs Lefebvre’s outstanding contribution to a spatially mediated theory of totality In addition, it distinguishes his vision of the struggle for socialism: one that would be waged against the dominant “global” (level G), primarily but not exclusively on the intermediary “urban” terrain (level M), with the nourishment of the utopian energies released by the contradictions of “everyday life” (level P).

2005: 67

In addition, these three interrelated levels “run marathon distances through Lefebvre’s *oeuvre*: level G on the globalization of the state and economy corresponds to the voluminous *De l’état*; level M [the urban] yields numerous writings on the ‘city’ and ‘space’; and in the *longue durée*, level P deals in (again!) multiple volumes with ‘everyday life’” (ibid.).

Building on these arguments, my work draws directly on the complementarities and synergies between Gramsci and Lefebvre – but recognizes as well the limits of the Gramsci-Lefebvre lineage in confronting questions of colonialism and imperialism, as well as the centrality of racial, gendered, sexualized, and other dimensions of difference in relation to capitalism and class.⁹ Propelled by the dangerous rise of right-wing nationalisms and populist politics in different regions of the world, I have sought to work toward a global conjunctural frame for relational comparative analysis to which I now turn.

Relational Comparison in a Global Conjunctural Frame

In “Relational Comparison Revisited”, I suggested that extending relational comparison to focus explicitly on conjunctural analysis entails “bringing key forces at play in South Africa and other regions of the world into the same frame of analysis, as connected yet distinctively different nodes in globally interconnected historical geographies – and as sites in the *production* of global processes in specific spatio-historical conjunctures, rather than as just recipients of them” (Hart 2018: 373). Instead of viewing the nation-state as a pre-given bounded unit (or scale), the emphasis is on historical and ongoing processes of nation formation in relation to specific forms of imperialism in changing spatio-historical global conjunctures. Informed by Gramsci’s conjunctural analysis as well as Lefebvre’s regressive-progressive method, I focused initially on the “extraordinary and illuminating convergences and divergences between forces at play in India and South Africa at key conjunctural moments over the 20th century” (Hart 2018: 387) that are essential to understanding proliferating nationalisms and the explosion of populist politics in South Africa and India following the end of the Cold War.

It was from this South African and Indian perspective that, in late 2016, I came to see how the most pressing question in relation to the US is not what explains Trumpism but rather why did it take so long for a demagogic figure to ascend to state power in the US given the long histories of racism, right-wing Christian nationalism and populist politics, the ravages of neoliberal forms of capitalism, and abandonment of the working class by the Democratic Party (Hart 2020)? Efforts to address this question thrust me further back to earlier global conjunctures to confront settler colonialism and historically specific but interconnected forms of racial capitalism. They have also compelled close attention to changing forms of US imperialism since the middle of the 20th century in relation to processes of nationalism and neoliberal capitalism, which, in their entanglements with everyday life, are crucial to addressing the belated rise of Trumpism.

Indebted to Gramsci, Lefebvre, and others, the framework I have found useful connects **global conjunctures** and praxis in the multiple arenas of **everyday life**, with projects, practices, and processes of **bourgeois hegemony** mediating between global forces and everyday life. This frame is informed by and has affinities with Lefebvre's (2003 [1970]) three mutually conditioning "levels" (the global, the urban, everyday life) understood as dialectically interconnected with one another and multiply scaled rather than as a nested scalar hierarchy. As in Lefebvre's formulation, everyday life is conceived as the key site of contradictions and possibilities for social change – recognizing that his concept of everyday life is closely linked with Gramsci's conception of common sense (*senso comune*) through their shared "preoccupation with contradictory lived experience rather than the effects of specialized cultural production" (Kipfer 2002: 126–133). At the same time, the imperative to engage directly with questions of imperialism, nationalism, and nation formation requires extending and reworking aspects of Lefebvre's framework (Kipfer and Goonewardena 2013).

First, I deploy a Gramscian understanding of processes of bourgeois hegemony – and related concepts of passive revolution and the integral state – as mediating in multiple (and multiply spatialized) ways between everyday life and "the global" (Hart 2020). This conception resonates as well with Lefebvre's insistence in his later work on how a spatialized comprehension of hegemony is crucial to grasping the strengths, limits, and contradictions of bourgeois hegemony (Kipfer 2002). Among other things, this framing offers a way of understanding articulations of nation and nationalism – operating in and through multiple dimensions of difference – as integral to bourgeois hegemonic projects as well as generated in practice in the arenas of everyday life. Crucially important is Aijaz Ahmad's observation that "the 'nation' is not a *thing* which, once made, simply endures; ... 'nation', like class, is a *process* which is made and re-made a thousand times over, and, more than process, 'nation' is a *terrain of struggle* which condenses all social struggles, so that every organised force in society attempts to endow it with specific meanings and attributes" (Ahmad 2000: 145).

Second, the concept of global conjunctures differs from Lefebvre's (2003 [1970]) concept of "the global" – but resonates with his development over the 1970s of "the worldwide" or *mondialité*, as well as his efforts to extend his initial metaphorical uses of "colonization" discussed by Kipfer and Goonewardena (2013). They point, however, to the limits of these moves by Lefebvre, "rooted in his unwillingness to properly explore the specificity of colonisation as a particular form of alienation" (Kipfer and Goonewardena 2013: 106) – as well as his failure to engage his contemporaries such as Fanon, Cesaire, and others. Hence their argument, with which I fully agree, that "To realize its full potential ... Lefebvre's concept of 'colonisation' needs to be blasted out of the Eurocentric confines of his overall work" (2013: 108).¹⁰ Gramsci was also "acutely aware of the supranational dimensions of the problems that he addressed" (Liguori 2016: 51), as well as changing forms of imperialism.¹¹ Yet, like Lefebvre, questions of how Europe (and the US) have been produced in and through their relations with non-Western regions of the world were not central to his work – although Ato Sekyi-Otu's (1996) generative reading of Gramsci as a "precocious Fanonian" points clearly in this direction.¹²

The frame I propose is organized around a set of key **global conjunctural moments**, defined as major turning points when interconnected forces at multiple levels and spatial scales in different regions of the world have come together to generate new conditions with worldwide implications and reverberations. One such moment was the end of the Cold War and the widely presumed and celebrated global triumph of neoliberal capitalism combined with secular liberal democracy, along with confident declarations of the demise of the nation-state. To understand why we have instead witnessed resurgent nationalisms, virulent racisms, and populist politics in

many regions, we have to go back to earlier global conjunctural moments – most immediately, the late 1940s and the late 1960s/early 70s, but also the *longue durée* processes of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and imperialism through which South Africa, India, and the US were formed as nation-states.

Focusing on the conjuncture of the late 1940s, the idea of Cold War Era (CWE) projects of accumulation and hegemony allows me to bring South Africa (Apartheid), India (Nehruvian Development), and the US (Fordism) into the same frame – while recognizing the ongoing significance of longer histories of colonialism and imperialism that shaped these projects and processes in ways that are *both* historically specific *and* interconnected. In a nutshell, I argue that (a) the specific ways in which these CWE projects fell apart starting in the late 1960s, and their relationship to when and how the neoliberal counter-revolution took hold in different national formations, are crucial to understanding the timing and forms of exclusionary nationalisms and populist politics in the post-Cold War era; and (b) these processes need to be situated in relation to changing forms of US imperialism since the 1980s that redefined the relations of the US to different regions of the non-Western world. From this perspective, the ascent to state power of an extreme form of right-wing nationalism and populist politics in the US in 2016 can be seen as neither aberrant nor pre-ordained but as a longstanding though latent possibility that required a particular conjuncture of forces to burst forth.

This analysis also points to the emergence of two distinct but related forms of neoliberal hegemony since the end of the Cold War: a liberal, technocratic form that seeks to *neutralize* the popular antagonisms often exacerbated by neoliberal capitalism (exemplified in South Africa by Mbeki and Ramaphosa, and in the US by Clinton and Obama), and a populist form that seeks to *mobilize* these antagonisms through articulations of nationalism with racial, religious, nativist, gendered, and other forms of difference, while also keeping them under control (exemplified by Zuma, Modi, and Trump). Rather than the failures of “progressive” neoliberalism, as many have argued, what have been set in motion are perpetual warring tendencies between liberal and populist forms of hegemony in the neoliberal era and the social forces that constitute them, although these battles have assumed distinctively different forms in South Africa, India, and the US. Developing this argument has compelled critical attention to the spatio-temporalities of different fundamentalist religious nationalisms, as well as the contradictions and limits of liberal secularism and multiculturalism.

Most immediately, this analysis underscores how widespread calls for the defeat of the right through a politics of left populism or “progressive” populism are dangerously simplistic, underestimating the sources, dangers, and complexities of the present moment. More broadly (but of necessity very briefly), I will now reflect on how situating relational comparison as part of a global conjunctural frame opens up politically generative possibilities that include, but extend beyond, the inherently political character of conjunctural analysis.

Relational Comparison and Conjunctural Analysis: Enabling Connections

Distinguishing different forms of both comparison and conjunctural analysis is crucial to grasping the political stakes of bringing them together. Hence the emphasis in the first part of this essay on the sharply different concepts of space and time in Althusserian and Gramscian forms of conjunctural analysis, as well as Gramsci’s spatial historicism and multiple spatio-temporalities. Different forms of comparison also carry radically different political implications. Grounded in Lefebvre’s relational conception of the production of space, relational comparison is directly

opposed to forms of comparison based on pre-given bounded units, as well to those that posit a pre-specified overarching process (or structure) and view different “cases” as variations of that process/structure.

Linking relational comparison and conjunctural analysis, the global conjunctural frame outlined in this essay builds on the synergies between Lefebvre and Gramsci, both of whom were sharply aware of the global reach of capitalist accumulation and its spatially uneven manifestations. At the same time, putting their concepts to work in very different spatio-historical conjunctures requires acts of translation as well as “betrayal” (Kipfer and Hart 2013). Thus, I have been propelled beyond them by the imperative to focus on the ongoing repercussions of specific but interconnected historical geographies of colonialism, racism, hetero-patriarchy, caste, and religion, and their articulations with changing forms of nationalism and imperialism.

By enabling wider connections such moves carry important political stakes. We have seen how, at its core, Gramsci’s conjunctural analysis is grounded in the distinction between deep-seated (or organic) movements from those the *appear* more immediate or contingent, with the purpose of “expand[ing] the capacity to act politically by helping to examine the conditions of a political intervention in their complexity ... and thus open up possibilities for action” (Koivisto and Lahtinen 2012: 167). We should also bear in mind that comparison, in general, functions not just as an analytical method but also as a vernacular practice and a political imperative.¹³ It is in this context that relational comparison understood as translation holds open the possibilities of mutually illuminating insights as part of a collective process of political engagement – to which conjunctural analysis can make significant contributions by illuminating connections to related processes.¹⁴ In short: what is entailed in a critical comparative strategy of conjunctural analysis is neither complexity for its own sake nor theoretical novelty but deeper understandings of slip-pages, openings, and contradictions from which more critical, coherent, and collective understandings and practices might emerge in the arenas of everyday life – along with possibilities for alliances and creative political action.

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Notes

- 1 Grossberg (2019) and Clarke (2019) exemplify sharp differences between Althusserian and Gramscian forms of conjunctural analysis, respectively, that I discuss in a forthcoming book.
- 2 See also Leitner et al (2020) and Leitner and Sheppard (2021).
- 3 Because Hall’s engagement with Althusser focused on *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, I do not engage with Althusser’s later work in this essay.
- 4 Hall (2003 [1974]).
- 5 Hart (2013); Ekers et al (2020).
- 6 In this essay, Kipfer builds on but moves beyond Morera’s (1990) work on Gramsci’s historicism.
- 7 Hart (2018: 377–378).
- 8 In *Critique of Everyday Life* (Volume II), Lefebvre distinguishes his dialectical conception of levels from Althusser’s formulation in terms of economic, political, and ideological levels.
- 9 Kipfer and Goonewardena (2013); Kipfer and Hart (2013).
- 10 Drawing on Lefebvre, Fernando Coronil, and Manu Goswami have made important contributions (Hart 2018).

- 11 See also Arrighi (1994), Morton (2007), and Fusaro (2020).
- 12 See also Bannerji (2021), Kipfer (2022), and Kipfer and Mallick (2022).
- 13 Goswami (2020) and Kipfer (2021).
- 14 Drawing on my research in two settlements in South Africa in the 1990s outlined in the Introduction, I discuss relational comparison as a politics of translation in a recent interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5hSKR9wa3k>

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