

## Review

Gillian Hart (2002) *Disabling Globalization: places of power in post-apartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press

Christian M Rogerson

This is an extraordinarily rich book that is most difficult to pigeon hole in terms of defining precisely the work's essential contribution. Indeed, this is a volume with multiple scholarly contributions. At one level it is an unfolding 'locality' tale that chronicles almost two decades of economic and social change and struggles taking place in two South African medium-sized towns, namely Ladysmith and Newcastle. Both of these places, Hart shows, have long been engaged in practices of what today would be called 'local economic development' as their municipal managers vied to attract new investment – particularly industrial investment – into spaces that were foci for some of the most brutalising forced removals of the apartheid period. Both of these localities also represent focal points for apartheid socio-spatial engineering and contest concerning investments in the industrial decentralisation programme. Of special interest in these two localities is their East Asian connections as both localities at various points in the period 1970s through the 1990s became deeply embedded with transnational centres of accumulation. Both localities were involved in processes of dramatic local economic and social restructuring that linked to the attraction of investors – primarily in clothing, textiles and footwear manufacture – from Taiwan and Mainland China. What emerges here is a remarkable story therefore in interpreting 'geographies of difference' and in the differing trajectories of locality development of these two seemingly similar towns in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Of critical importance is 'the local state as a key terrain on which some of the most intense contradictions of the neoliberal post-apartheid order are taking place' (292).

The book's intellectual and theoretical roots, however, are anchored in a range of complex debates around discourses of globalisation and multiple trajectories of socio-spatial change. This backdrop gives the volume a potential audience far beyond that of a South African readership. The evident influence of writings by Lefebvre, David Harvey and Doreen Massey mark this analysis out as a study that might be characterised as falling within the writings of 'critical human geography'. As I was reading this volume I was struck especially by the imprint of Doreen Massey's theoretical ideas in shaping much of the directions taken in this work, more especially as regards economic restructuring and trajectories of socio-spatial change. Indeed, building upon such impeccable theoretical credentials, Gillian Hart's volume represents one of only a small handful of book length contributions that make an international contribution from taking South Africa as its empirical focus.

This volume must be read as far more than simply a tale of two small South African towns. As Hart convincingly argues, these two localities provide 'extremely valuable vantage points from which to engage with the reworking of South African society from the ruins of the apartheid past as well as key points of connection into wider regional, national and transnational sites and processes'. From the platform provided from Ladysmith and Newcastle, Hart draws upon the wealth of her former research experience on agrarian East Asia and sheds new perspectives on the land question in South Africa. Moreover – and in a statement on the titling of this work – the book offers a complex and nuanced analysis of how discourses of globalization are seemingly 'disabling'. It is argued that a 'central premise of this book is the importance of understanding "globalization" both in terms of intensified processes of spatial interconnectedness associated with capitalist restructuring, and as a set of discourses through which knowledge is constructed' (293).

Overall, this book represents impressive scholarship. That said, it is a hard read and I would imagine that the meat of the book is not one that can be tackled readily by undergraduate classes. The book is clearly a labour of love for Hart proclaims on page 290 that 'Letting go of this study has been difficult'. In time lines, the book concludes at the close of 2000–early 2001. In many respects the volume is a personal narrative and journal of reconnection to South Africa from a distinguished California-based scholar who left her native country in 1971. On many occasions the text is enlivened by the author's personal reflections on coming back to South

Africa and to the challenges and excitement of grappling with South African research issues from an earlier phase of engagement with agrarian East Asian issues. In the final analysis, this is a remarkable, superbly crafted book in the annals of South African social science. It deserves a wide readership. Primarily its appeal will be to scholars working in the fields of development studies, human geography, political science and sociology.