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## The politics of violence and populism in post-colonial democracy: The role of political society in South Africa

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# WZB

Berlin Social Science Center



Thomas A. Koelble

## **The Politics of Violence and Populism in Post-colonial Democracy: The Role of Political Society in South Africa**

**Discussion Paper**

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Abstract

**The Politics of Violence and Populism in Post-colonial Democracy:  
The Role of Political Society in South Africa**

by Thomas A. Koelble

This paper argues that current levels of violence and populism in post-colonial spaces such as South Africa are a consequence of a socio-history of violent dispossession, exploitation and impoverishment and is perpetuated by the continuation of the socio-economic and political conditions rooted in that history of exceptional violence, inequality and injustice. A switch in the political system does not reduce violence by itself. The disposition towards violence can only be shifted by a fundamental shift away from the economics and politics of the apartheid era. Since such a shift is unlikely to occur under current conditions, the perpetuation of violence and populist politics are likely to remain key features and constitutive elements of post-apartheid democracy.

## Introduction

One of the most remarkable features of South Africa's democratic dispensation is the persistence and intensity of its violence. Violence comes in many forms ranging from everyday criminal activity (murder, armed robbery, assault) to politically motivated violence (anti-government protest, assassinations of political figures, xenophobic attacks on immigrants). Violence has been variously labeled as structural, physical, and even 'liquid'.<sup>1</sup> But whatever the nature and cause, the consequence is that these levels of intense violence have deleterious effects for a participatory western-style democracy and reproduces a populist politics in which violent political rhetoric and action is commonplace (Keane, 2004). One of the core assumptions about the benefits of democracy is that since it is based on principles of human rights, it brings about a marked decrease in both domestic and international violence – a proposition that turns out to be untrue for transitional economies and democracies (Karstedt, 2015).

This paper argues that current levels of violence and populism in post-colonial spaces such as South Africa are a consequence of a socio-history of violent dispossession, exploitation, and impoverishment and is perpetuated by the continuation of the socio-economic and political conditions rooted in that history of exceptional violence, inequality, and injustice. This violence is multi-dimensional as it pertains to race, ethnicity, class, and gender. It involves political, economic, cultural, social, and psychological dimensions. A switch in political systems does not reduce violence by itself. The dispositions towards violence can only be affected if the social and economic structures of capitalism allow for a fundamental change in living conditions for the vast majority of the population. And since these fundamental conditions are not likely to emerge, post-colonial democracies will remain violent democracies in which populist rhetoric and violence forms the basis of political discourse and action (von Holdt, 2012; 2014; Hansen, 2001). In other words,

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1 'Liquid violence' is sometimes used in reference to the politics of access to water. For instance, there are municipalities in South Africa, which are failing to supply adequate water to poorer communities. Farmers in those municipalities have refused access to their borehole water supplies, which are used to provide drinking water to their livestock. Such denial of water has been termed 'liquid violence' and cited as a reason for attacks on such farmers. In a similar vein, Nixon (2011) argues that environmental damage amounts to 'slow violence' against those affected by it.

this paper claims that violence and populism are constitutive elements of post-colonial democracy and closely related to each other.

### **Political Society, Globalization, and Western-style Democracy**

In order to construct the argument, I am leaning on the work by Partha Chatterjee's *Lineages of Political Society* (2011) and *The Politics of the Governed* (2004).<sup>2</sup> Having grappled with the complexities of South Africa over the last two decades, its violent socio-history of industrial and agricultural hyper-exploitation, codification of racial and other forms of discrimination, colonial and other forms of expropriation, murder, mayhem, and extra-ordinary violence, its attempts, against all odds, to adopt a democracy based on western principles, achieve inclusive growth as advocated by many western economist to achieve some modicum of equality, witnessed the extra-ordinary theft of public resources by a rapacious political clan dressed up in nationalist/socialist rhetoric, I have been tempted to resign myself to the conclusion that this experiment is not only doomed to failure but incomprehensible. Yet the work by Chatterjee and his subaltern studies colleagues, mainly on India, resonated deeply with the South African material. My Indian counterparts were grappling with similar complexity requiring an apparatus of analytical and empirical sophistication that could do justice to the object of analysis. And address meaningfully the critical demand of some of my students to 'decolonize' the curriculum, even within the narrow confines of a business school, as the students instinctively and intuitively felt that what they were being taught was, in no way, shape, or form, adequate to the task of understanding the complexities of their environment.

Some years ago, Edward LiPuma and I wrote two articles for the journal *Democratization* in which we developed a critique of the dominant paradigm in the study of democracy (LiPuma and Koelble, 2006; Koelble and LiPuma, 2008). In a piece called *Democratizing Democracy* we developed the argument that a key assumption of much of the political science literature on democracy was based on a set of western norms and values. The work by Freedom House and other democracy rating schemes such as Polity or the Bertels-

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2 I do so acknowledging some of the critical points made by, for instance, Michael Levien (2013) regarding the conflation of strategies and political goals of poor people's movements in Chatterjee's work (2004; 2011).

mann Index took for granted, without any form of critical reflection, that democracy consisted of certain functioning institutions and principles, a state apparatus designed to ensure citizens' equality, and assumed a linear history of political development that largely reflected the rise of civil, political and social rights. The inevitable outcome was that a set of democratic institutions such as those found in Western Europe and North America were at the top of the democracy list and democracies of color and the post-colony found themselves at the bottom. And, further, these states were struggling against further demotion to the minor leagues of international rankings as defective, quasi, sham, illusionary, or illiberal democracies.

In an earlier *Democratization* article on the South African and Brazilian economy and their connectivity to global financial markets we attempted to show why it was virtually impossible for post-colonial democracies to emulate the path set out by the Euro-American democratic/capitalist pioneers (LiPuma and Koelble, 2006). Not only does post-colonial socio-history not line up with the institutional and normative principles of capitalism in the West but the entire ensemble of constellations within the political economy and society is so vastly different from that of Euro-America, that post-colonial spaces are not remotely equipped to develop along western lines. And given their international positioning in terms of global financial markets which reward the production of raw materials and care little about the domestic condition of the population, these economies are beholden to such markets (Koelble and LiPuma, 2016). In fact, they are beholden to such an extent that it questions the notion of economic sovereignty in its entirety. While post-colonial governments might have some wiggle-room in terms of economic policy, the value of their currencies, their commodities, their imports are set by global forces well beyond those of the individual central bank or government. And we concluded by arguing for taking globalization seriously as both a concept and a political/economic constraint to governments nominally committed to bringing about greater equality, justice, and opportunity to their respective populations. The underlying theme in our analysis is that neither post-colonial democracy nor capitalism is likely to emulate western models. Both need to be analyzed as trajectories in their own right. Now, a decade later, this call for a rethink of the western paradigm in order to understand post-colonial realities is even more relevant and urgent as much of the non-

western world is grappling with enormous issues that threaten both their democratic systems and their economic survival.

### **The Literature of “Failure” and Euro-American Norms**

To hold post-colonial and other non-western spaces to account by western norms and standards is to ensure one of the favorite descriptions of much of the political economy work that has been done on post-coloniality – failure. Failure comes in many forms: there is the failure to democratize across the post-colony. Then there is the failure of Africa to develop and grow economically (Collier, 2009). More, there is the failure of many post-colonial spaces to become more equitable and just in socio-economic terms; the failure to innovate and industrialize. In short, there is a failure to modernize along the lines of the western democracies and capitalist economies. The litany of failure is writ large in the annals of Freedom House but also across the work of many an economist who has thrown up his or her hands in disgust at the apparent failure to develop along Euro-American lines (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012).

Partha Chatterjee provides a convincing analysis of the origins of this kind of normative, cloaked in science, behavior. Going back to the work by Bentham, who expressly took England as his standard, and argued that since human nature was the same everywhere, and desired policy outcomes were also the same (i.e. improvement in standard of living, the fulfillment of political, social and economic rights), variations could be observed, measured and then corrected if only one knew which factor to correct and adjust. Chatterjee writes:

*“(R)eading Bentham today, one can almost imagine an anticipation of statistical handbooks of social indicators, with which any undergraduate of the twentieth century is now able to rank countries of the world according to standards of living, mortality rates, quality of governance, human development and dozens of other evaluative criteria”* (Chatterjee, 2011: 7-8).

Chatterjee invokes Foucault’s descriptions and analysis of modern state power characterized by efforts to enumerate and then “normalize” behavior of citizens and/or subjects. The ‘norm’ democracy became of immense importance for post-colonial elites to emulate, and the failure to adopt both democratic and capitalist principles became a case of deviation from the



norm established by the colonial powers. On a global scale the supposed failure of post-colonial societies and economies are seen as deviations. But what if one were to see their trajectories as developmental paths in their own right rather than failures? True, many post-colonial societies are not as affluent as Euro-America and their political elites are not as honest as Swedish politicians might be, but is that a reason to view their developmental paths as failures, especially if we take into account the immense differences in socio-historical and economic trajectory?

Chatterjee points out that there is an imagined western model of political, social, and economic development. This model depends on the rough sequencing of development from a pre-capitalist agrarian society to a capitalist commercial one, the emergence of civil associations, rational bureaucracy, and a coherent nation-state, then industrialization, the universal franchise, and finally the welfare state. Now, there is a debate amongst historians of capitalist systems in Europe whether this stylized version of the European development trajectory is an accurate reflection of what occurred (Sharma, 2015; Boucoyannis, 2015). But whatever the case may be, it has been a model profoundly influential in the minds of development economists, politicians, and policy think tanks (Rist, 2006). What happens, asks Chatterjee, when this already idealized sequence is not followed at all due to colonial intervention? What happens when rational bureaucracy and the universal franchise precede the other steps as it did in India? What happens when democracy precedes industrialization as in large swaths of Africa? What occurs if industrialization does not take off at all? Or when the nation is fragmented rather than united and adopts a democratic form of government?

Under such different conditions it is entirely predictable that the form and function of the state would not be a replica of the western state (Chatterjee, 2011: 12-13). Several authors point out that the political spaces in Africa and elsewhere in the post-colony developed very separate spheres of colonial governance – Mahmood Mamdani, for instance, describes the deep divide between a civic society, mostly in urban and industrial spaces, regulated by a modern code of civil law and a large domain of custom, mostly in rural hinterlands, left to the rule of ‘traditional leaders’ and customary law (Mamdani, 1996). Many other theorists have commented on the existence of a ‘dual economy’ and some have drawn attention to its importance in terms of eco-

conomic development and under-development (Ekeh, 1975). James Mahoney (2010) illustrated the divergent patterns of economic development in Latin America following from different colonial patterns.

Chatterjee argues that the Indian republic is born with a democratic constitution, universal suffrage, and competitive electoral representation but lacking a transformed agrarian sector or a developed industrial/commercial society. He elaborates thus:

*“the space of politics became effectively split between a narrow domain of civil society where citizens related to the state through the mutual recognition of legally enforceable rights and a wider domain of political society where governmental agencies dealt not with citizens but with populations to deliver specific benefits of services through a process of political negotiation”* (Chatterjee, 2011: 13-14).

What Chatterjee describes is very familiar to any student of the post-colonial world – the negotiations that take place between a vast array of ‘communities’ and governmental agencies for a set of benefits. The following extract resonates with any observer in South Africa:

*“Take the familiar example of squatter settlements of the poor in numerous cities of the post-colonial world. These urban populations occupy land that does not belong to them and often use water, electricity, public transport, and other services without paying for them. But governmental authorities do not necessarily try to punish or to put a stop to such illegalities because of the political recognition that these populations serve certain functions in the urban economy and that to forcibly remove them would involve huge political costs. On the other hand, they cannot be treated as legitimate members of civil society who abide by the law. As a result, municipal authorities or the police deal with these people not as rights-bearing citizens but as urban populations who have specific characteristics and needs and who must be appropriately governed. On their side, these groups of the urban poor negotiate with the authorities through political mobilization and alliances with other groups”* (Chatterjee, 2011: 14).

This modus of operation carries significant risks, especially in the relationship with those members of civil society who abide by the law, own property, and pay taxes. Chatterjee suggests that these rules of exception are usually cloaked in justifications by the authorities that it is less costly to provide services to such illegal communities than it would be to remove them and house them elsewhere. In other words, the specter of urban violence, protest, resistance, and resulting upheaval is never far from the politics of gov-

erning such populations. However, given the size of the population that is governed in this manner, post-colonial governmentality implies an enormous number of exceptions. And for the population groups seeking such exceptions, the case they make is that they have a right to live in urban spaces, that they seek employment and a better life, that they are the victims of the apartheid/colonial past and that they (not privileged whites who now own land that actually belongs to Africans) have a general right to land ownership anywhere in South Africa (Alexander, 2010). And it is little wonder then that the term “populism” is often used in the media to characterize the politics of political parties and groups claiming to represent these population groups (Vincent, 2009) – a point I shall return to later.

A key component of Chatterjee’s analysis is that post-colonial governmentality plays out at two very different levels – civil society and political society. The civil society level encompasses the middle class and capitalism is embedded in terms of production, the concept of property rights, civil rights accruing to the individual and encompassment in the formal economy. Political society is a much more fragmented, contested, and anarchic space encompassing a large part of the population that acts largely on the fringes of capitalism. However, these groups utilize the democratic system to place pressure on political parties to obtain access to state resources. Chatterjee notes that often the “rich” and propertied class in civil society will justify their transgressions against the law by claiming that politicians are corrupt and that exceptions are granted to the poor on a regular basis. Some even flaunt their transgressions with impunity but they do not manage to mobilize the kind of moral justification that the poor can muster. Chatterjee remarks that,

*“it could even be said that the activities of political society in post-colonial countries represent a continuing critique of the paradoxical reality in all capitalist democracies of equal citizenship and majority rule, on the one hand, and the dominance of property and privilege, on the other”* (Chatterjee, 2011: 17).

Chatterjee notes that the normative principles of western political theory have an enormous influence on post-colonial politics but that the actual praxis of governance has resulted not in the abandonment of those principles but a piling up of exceptions and improvisations in the course of administering the law. And the task of theorizing an adequate analysis of the post-

colonial political praxis is to come to grips with this mountain of improvisation.

To return then to our first point of departure: post-colonial and other non-western democratic systems and capitalism had to, by necessity, take a very different course of development to those laid out by their western predecessors. To constantly harp on the issue of failure is to completely miss the internal and external dynamics of the emergence and consolidation of the political and economic systems in post-colonial and other non-western spaces. These are trajectories in their own right, their own volition and singular rather than applications of a universal model. And the task for a theorist of post-colonial society, economy and polity is to develop a theoretical apparatus capable of grasping the complexities of that very important fact. The following section addresses some of the issues confronting post-colonial democracy, capitalism and their populations in both civil and political society.

### **The Politics of Violence**

What does politics in political society look like and what implications does it have for democratic theory in the post-colony? To Chatterjee, violence, populist politics, and a deep gender division shapes the politics of political society in India. Thomas Blom Hansen's study of a political organization called Shiv Sena in Mumbai illustrates the role of the local strongman, the *dada*, who has built a network of loyalty and protection which he then uses to not only reproduce his own standing in the community but presents himself as the spokesperson for the 'community' (Hansen, 2001). Violence is used as a means of projecting strength, power, and the ability to bring justice when the state is clearly not able to do so. Shiv Sena intervenes in all matters of everyday importance to members of political society ranging from jobs, to housing, to sanitation, the price of essential items, and dealings with the police and other municipal authorities. Hansen describes the way in which Shiv Sena uses violence to project an image of local power. Chatterjee reflects on the fact that politics in political society is far removed from the Weberian ideal of the state holding a monopoly of the means of legitimate violence – in the poor neighborhoods of political society it is strongmen that exercise that power. And this leads Chatterjee to remark that under such circumstances it is not surprising that such violators of the law become le-

gitimate representatives of such communities in the political parties and that their positioning is not a reflection of a perversion of electoral democracy but an indication of the inability of the regime of law to bring the heterogeneity of the society within its order (Chatterjee, 2011: 21). Violence is therefore not random or mindless but a very specific show of force calculated to elicit a response from government and the public.

The prevalence of such ‘strongmen’ as local power-holders has its equivalent in South African neighborhoods, townships, and rural areas. It has become commonplace for both the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) to seek out such local strongmen to campaign and mobilize votes in certain neighborhoods. Particularly in Cape Town, where gangs are estimated to number some 130,000 members and control large swaths of the city, both the ANC and DA political parties accuse each other of collusion with gangsters that control neighborhoods and access to the electorate (Pinnock, 2016). Indeed, in some neighborhoods of Cape Town, electoral campaigning can become a very dangerous pursuit if carried out without at least tacit toleration by gangs. And Cape Town is by no means the only city or town in South Africa where criminal organizations operate with impunity – the levels of organized crime are exceptionally high and in many parts of the country the police force is outgunned and outnumbered (Altbeker, 2007).

There are various sorts of ‘strongmen’ active in townships, informal settlements, and rural communities. In the township in my suburb of Hout Bay, Imizamo Yethu, there are several community spokesmen (invariably they are men) who are also active in local community policing organizations. These groups organize, for instance, citizens patrolling the township at night to ensure that public ablution facilities are safe for access. In some neighborhoods, these citizen initiatives might serve to protect school children on their way to and from work.<sup>3</sup> These citizen initiatives can, however, also turn into vigilante groups. They might even organize community ‘courts’ and met out justice to alleged perpetrators – often with the support of the local

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3 See, for instance, the Walking Bus initiative in the Wesbank township of Cape Town where parents form a cordon around school children to walk them to and from school to protect them from the gangs in the area. “The Walking Bus”, 947 News, 26. June, 2017 on [www.947.co.za](http://www.947.co.za).

police. As Super (2016) argues, in post-apartheid South Africa the government's push for 'taking responsibility' for local growth and security has had the consequence that for many informal settlements and township communities, local community organizations take on the role of policing their neighborhoods. Since the South African Police Service is thinly stretched and only sporadically available to these large communities, some have taken matters into their own hands. And there are frequent cases where alleged perpetrators have been punished and executed for crimes ranging from petty theft to rape or murder by such citizen initiatives (Super, 2016; Morris, 2006). And traditional leaders, chiefs and their headmen function in a similar fashion in large tracts of the rural hinterlands of the country (Ntsebeza, 2005; Williams, 2009).

In addition, there is an enormous academic and public debate about the levels of violence in what are referred to as 'service delivery' protests (Paret, 2015). Ostensibly these protests are directed against municipal councils for unsatisfactory water and electricity provision, sanitation and ablution facilities, garbage collection, and a host of other issues such as over-crowding of townships, the low quality of public transport, the quality of educational facilities and so forth (Alexander, 2010). All of these issues have led to violent confrontations involving the damage of private and public property, disruption of traffic and public service delivery, and, of course, physical violence against the police or members of the public. Some voices claim that such violence is part of liberation, of democracy that forces the government to listen to the grievances of the poor (Pithouse, 2016; Bond and Saul, 2014). And the state reacts to these popular expressions of discontent with its own form of repression and violence (von Holdt, 2012; 2014). One of South Africa's leading experts on crime suggests that in the democratic era, the function of policing has become a way of managing the internal political conflicts of the governing ANC. Steinberg (2016) suggests that the political conflicts over patronage opportunities, power and positions within local or provincial government, and the resources distributed by government are at the center of intra-ANC factional politics that spill over into full-scale violence and mobilization of supporters by these factions. In the run-up to the local government elections in 2016, for instance, some twenty political assassinations were recorded. Shaw and Thomas (2016) suggest that political murder has become a form of commerce. The level of violence prevalent in local gov-

ernment elections speaks to the perceived importance of controlling patronage opportunities in local government, especially in rural areas of the country where employment opportunities are scarce (Beresford, 2015).

While the debate about the causes and consequences of violence in democratic South Africa have led some observers to claim that the country is at war with itself (Altbeker, 2007) and that it is a 'violent democracy' (von Holdt, 2014), political violence, as widespread as it is in terms of protest action, is not the only issue of violence confronting the country. The murder rate in South Africa makes it one of the most violent places on earth at some thirty-three murders per 100,000 inhabitants, only outranked by countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala in terms of per capita murders. Cape Town has the distinction of being among the top ten cities in terms of per capita murders. The figures on violent crime such as robberies, car theft, burglaries, most of them accompanied by the use of potentially deadly weapons are eye-watering. In just one township of Cape Town, Mitchells Plain with an estimated population of just under 300,000 people, an average of 21,000 violent crimes take place in a year.

While many of these violent crimes take place in political society, the underlying 'violence talk' of politicians often has a class and racial dimension to it. Political leaders such as Julius Malema, for instance, argue that taking from whites is also an act of liberation, very much along the lines of Fanon's argument about violence in the name of liberation (Posel, 2013; 2014; Vincent, 2009). Violence is an everyday experience for the vast majority of citizens of South Africa and speaks to the limits of the democratic state not only in terms of being unable to protect citizens against violence but in terms of actually condoning violent speech and acts in everyday life. Violence is a constitutive part of post-apartheid democracy and nowhere is this more clearly illustrated in the abhorrent statistics related to rape.

### **Gender and the Politics of Rape**

Rape is a common, everyday occurrence in contemporary South Africa (Vetten, 2007). There is a heated debate about the number of rapes as it is common knowledge that rape victims tend not to report the crime. The reason for that is that the vast majority of victims do not feel safe in reporting a rape and the reasons are clear – lack of proper police procedures, no protec-

tion for the victim, no prosecution and certainly no conviction of the perpetrator, social pressure not to report the crime as it frequently involves a relative who committed the crime, and, most disturbingly, the fact that a report to the police may end up costing the victim their life (Vetten et al., 2008). And rape is not the only sexual crime that is treated in this fashion – hate crimes against gay or lesbian South Africans are commonplace and hardly ever successfully prosecuted as are violations of children, even infants (Gqola, 2015).

Gender activists and academic observers point out that there is a stark contradiction in much of South Africa's dialogue about gender and violence (Hunter, 2010). On the one hand, there are many instances where gender equality and sexual rights are celebrated and they are certainly enshrined in the constitution of the new dispensation. There is even a Women's Day public holiday. However, attitudes towards sexual offenses are lax or even openly dismissed as either irrelevant or non-consequential (Suttner, 2009). For instance, during the rape trial of then President Zuma in 2006, the victim was openly accused in the media of sensationalizing the event (Robins, 2008). The then President of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League, Julius Malema, suggested that the plaintiff enjoyed the tryst and accepted money for a taxi ride home from him, implying that the entire matter was consensual. Even the ANC's Women's League did not come to the aid of the plaintiff but dismissed her allegations as politically motivated. Gender activists argued that the case, in a single sweep, destroyed many years of community work to combat sexual offenses.

To put the issue bluntly, South Africa may be witness to approximately a million rapes in the space of a year and hardly a case prosecuted. Vetten and her colleagues found that 30.8 per cent of schoolgirls reported having been raped by their teacher (Vetten et al., 2008: 16). There are, of course, numerous attempts to explain the rape crisis, and the leading scholars suggest that the socio-economic conditions of life are one of the most important factors. The conditions in the townships allow for few avenues for the expression of male masculinity, which indicates just how political rape is in the South African case as it directly confronts how a liberal democracy is to deal with the socio-economics to which most of its citizens are subjected and the forms of violence these socio-economic conditions engender (Morris, 2006).



Bourdieu suggests in his *Logic of Practice* (1980) that generative schemes, such as one of pervasive criminal or political violence, cannot be erased from other spheres of life. In other words, if violence is a defining feature of one aspect of social praxis, it is going to be part of other aspects of social relations. Bourdieu argues that if violence is a defining feature of politics, it is going to be a defining feature of family life and all other spheres of life – it cannot but be present in other social relations if it is a prevalent means of politics. The violence that, for instance, children experience in their homes and environments is going to leave an indelible print on their propensity, their dispositions towards violence in other spheres of life. Growing up in a field of family relations characterized by violence brings about an acceptance of violence in all other forms of social relations and will be seen as ‘normal’ – a part of the habitus.

### **Populism and the Politics of the Spectacle**

What kind of politics is likely to emerge from political society? If Chatterjee is correct in arguing that much of post-colonial political life is characterized by the rule of exception in the relations between democratic state and the population in political society, and the South African material strongly supports his position, then that has clear implications for the form politics is likely to take. For communities to achieve ‘exceptions’, they have to be noticed in the first place. They have to produce some form of spectacle in order to attract more attention than some other community to achieve recognition by the state (Paret, 2015). South Africa’s protest movements have taken the politics of the spectacular to some interesting heights (Robins, 2014a; 2014b). It is commonplace for service delivery protests to involve damage to private and public property (from the barricading of major roads to the burning of tires, buildings, shops, trains, and buses), to physical attacks on police officers, members of the public who are not involved in the protest, and foreigners (Hickel, 2014). And, as Robins shows, a plethora of social movements in political society use a combination of ‘fast’ activism aimed at providing spectacular acts to attract attention (for instance, flinging human excrement at statues or passing cars and dumping it in front of municipal buildings or on roads to protest against poor sanitation and a host of other issues) and ‘slow’

activism which involves legal cases and organized protest marches (Robins, 2014a; 2014b).

Numerous observers speak about this form of politics as a form of 'populism' as it is directed against the 'elite', against the state, against those in power by those without power (Posel, 2014; Vincent, 2009). As it often has a racial overtone – either as a protest against the current economic and social order in which whites are seen as beneficiaries of both the past and present policy – or directed against foreigners – often those who have sought refuge in South Africa from other African countries and who have established small stores – the term 'populism' hopes to capture the anti-establishment position articulated by the protesters (Comaroff, 2011). Chatterjee, building on the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005), suggests that 'populism', which often carries a negative connotation, is, in fact, the effective mode of politics in the post-colonial world (Chatterjee, 2011: 140). Since the communities in political society find themselves in a constant struggle both with other communities over scarce resources distributed by the state and with the representatives of the state over access to those resources, the politics of mobilization, of spectacular attention-seeking, and of a political rhetoric that claims universality when making specific claims on behalf of a community become the most effective form of gaining attention and therefore a rule of exception in favor of the community conducting the protest. The more spectacular the protest, the more attention the demand is likely to obtain. And violent protest sends a message that the community is 'serious' about its demands and will perpetuate its protest until these demands are met (Paret, 2015).

## **Conclusions**

Much of the work done by Chatterjee and his colleagues is a work of undoing: Undoing the assumptions, models, and conceptual frameworks, which have misled social scientific attempts to understand modernity in the post-colony. Instead of organizing hierarchies, establishing a lack of quality of governance, cementing images of failure, this work focuses on the singularity of post-colonies to find commonalities in their experiences in the modern world and complexity to find common causes for their current condition. Taking seriously the impact of hyper-globalization, the limits of political institutions, the economic positioning in the global economy, the social and

cultural responses to colonial and post-colonial contexts requires an analytical apparatus that spans across several registers of understanding. It would be comforting to think that there is a magic bullet – if only individual property rights were cemented or if only inclusive economies existed, then economic growth would be secure and some form of equality possible – but these magic bullets simply do not exist. And they represent only one factor in an ensemble of causes and consequences and establishing any one factor as the cause of causes is likely to end up repeating the mistakes of past analytical attempts to (mis-)understand the post-colonial condition.

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