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## **Globalization and Governmentality in the Post-colony: South Africa under Jacob Zuma**

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Abstract

## **Globalization and Governmentality in the Post-colony: South Africa under Jacob Zuma**

by Thomas A. Koelble

This paper addresses two twin questions – what accounts for the deep political and economic crisis in South Africa? The answer this paper develops is that both desired outcomes – a thriving capitalist economy and a solid democracy – were based on Western models and assumptions about the South African developmental trajectory that did not take into account the fact that few of the prerequisites for either outcome existed. By critically applying the work of Partha Chatterjee, I make the argument that around 60 per cent of South Africa's population is marginalized from both the capitalist economy and its democratic processes. As a result, this large population views both democracy and capitalism with disdain and mistrust. The 'politics of the governed', as Chatterjee refers to it, is about access to scarce government-controlled resources and based on rules of exception where those who protest in the most effective (often violent) manner obtain access whereas those who occupy less strategic positions are ignored and forgotten. The politics of the governed takes place in a global setting in which the state is no longer economically sovereign and less able to distribute resources to achieve public goods. The combination of a large political society governed in a more or less democratic system and an open, capitalist economy produces a distinctive style of populist politics, corruption and violence.

## **Introduction: Globalization and Political Society**

Open any independent newspaper in South Africa during the year 2017 and news webpage in South Africa and the message is clear – democracy is under threat from a rogue President who has heaved his political associates, friends and family into positions from which they are able to profit massively at the expense of the nation. These family members, associates, and friends amass huge fortunes, both within and outside of South Africa, and do so with impunity, poking a middle finger at the law enforcement agencies, Parliament, taxpayers, and the voting public (Bhorat et al., 2017). The President is abusing his position to ensure the prosperity of his cabal but is also readying an exit option in Dubai, should things go wrong.<sup>1</sup> South Africa's hopeful emergence as a constitutional democracy equipped with a 'turbo-constitution' has developed into a one-party dominant oligarchy. The President rules with impunity and racial, ethnic and other social divides are ruthlessly exploited by the political elites for electoral gain. To make matters worse, the South African economy's anemic average growth rate of less than 3 per cent per annum lasted right through the commodities boom of the period from 2002 to 2013 when other commodity producers were scoring impressive growth rates.<sup>2</sup> Currently in recession, the economy exhibits large public sector debt, and low levels of investor and consumer confidence culminating in the recent credit ratings downgrade to junk bond status by two of the three global credit ratings agencies. How did the 'miracle transformation' of South Africa in 1994 turn into the corrupt nightmare of the Zuma years?

The following paper addresses the twin question – what accounts for the current deep political and economic crisis in South Africa? The answer this paper develops is that both desired outcomes – a thriving capitalist economy and a solid democracy – were based on Western models and assumptions about the nature of the South African developmental trajectory that did not take into account the fact that few of the prerequisites for either outcome existed. Instead, South Africa follows a trajectory far closer to that of India or China. By critically applying the work by Partha Chatterjee (2004; 2011) on India to the South African case, I will make the argument that South Africa is unlikely to follow a Western developmen-

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1 See "#Guptaleaks: The 331 million Dubai Mansion", amaBhungane: Center for Investigative Journalism, 1 June 2017, available on <http://amabunghane.co.za> which reports that the Gupta family has purchased a mansion costing Rand 331 million for the President, who also appears to have asked for residency in Dubai.

2 Other African commodity-producing economies, such as Angola, Botswana, Namibia, and Nigeria, grew by 7 to 10 per cent during this period.

tal trajectory because the conditions and pre-conditions are entirely different to those necessary for a Western-style economy and polity to emerge. Instead, South Africa and India exhibit similar socio-economic settings with a large population that finds itself outside of civil society, which functions as the core constituency for Western-style democracy. Political society encompasses a large portion of the population – in the South African case well over 60 per cent of the population – that is only loosely organized into democratic life and almost totally decoupled from the economic system, yet dependent on state welfare. Consequently it views both democracy and capitalism with disdain and mistrust. The politics of the governed, as Chatterjee refers to it, is about access to governmental resources and based on rules of exception. Political society is made up of many competing groups that are in competition over scarce resources and use whatever channels open to them to obtain these resources. The politics of the governed is often marked by violence and protest as means of negotiation with government departments as that gets attention and exceptions. The rules of democratic engagement therefore are completely different in post-colonial spaces in comparison to societies in which civil society predominates and in which the distribution of resources is based on principles of equality and a functional bureaucracy.

My second argument is that South African democracy was born under a completely different sky than those in Euro-America. By the end of the 1980s, globalization had taken on a very different form – marked by an enormous circulation of capital, goods and services, ideas and concepts, and people. This global circulation impacts on the formation of political and public opinions, interests, and creates opportunities of movement of domestic capital, goods and services, ideas and concepts, and people. The decoupling of political from civil society in South Africa has taken a distinctive form at the same time as globalization has given this decoupling a sharper edge – global movement of capital ensures that South Africa is not as economically sovereign as its political leaders would like it to be. Globalization has structured and shaped both the South African political landscape and its economic base. The combination of a large political society in an open economy provides the foundation for a distinctive style of populist politics, corruption, and violence in the post-apartheid democracy.

### **Taking Globalization Seriously**

Let us, for a moment, imagine a sociology that takes seriously the impact of globalization. Globalization conceptualized as the massive circulation of a plethora of images, ideas and philosophies, production techniques, concepts, capital in its

many forms, people in all their diversity, a cornucopia of goods and services, concomitant desires and wants for these goods and services. While globalization has occurred in other periods of human history, what marks the epoch of the last thirty years as unique is the technology, the speed, and the vastness of size by which these various 'things' travel and encompass the world's population. Some travel using traditional means of transport – planes, trains, automobiles, ships and the like – while others circulate in the netherworld of the Internet and cyberspace. They are received through ports of entry as container loads of materials; planes loaded with tourists, migrants, refugees, and new residents; they infiltrate everyday life through the cellphone or the computer screen; they appear in billboards and shop-windows – and they are ubiquitous, influential, and powerful (LiPuma and Koelble, 2005). From the jungles of Amazonia to the steppes of Mongolia; from the Kalagadi to the outer reaches of the Gobi, the imprint of globalization is both visible in its concrete, material form and invisible in terms of the abstract ways in which it shapes the perception of modern life around our globe. The anthropologist James Ferguson, writing in his book *Global Shadows*, remarks on the effects of this circulation of images and imaginaries. On the one hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that in the African case, economic convergence with Europe or even Asia is no longer a viable goal (Ferguson, 2006: 184). This means, in effect, that for a Zambian miner there is a world of opportunity and vast riches out there. He can see these objects of desire on his grainy TV screen and on his shiny cellphone that connect him to the other parts of the planet. On the other hand, it is also clear that this world of wealth, abundance, opportunity will never be accessible to him – no matter how hard he might try to get there. And this leaves him with a set of expectations that is ever present, eternally gnawing, but never fulfilled.

Let us suppose then that this global circulation shapes, perhaps even determines, the social structure in any given locale. Unlike Marxist and many other sociologists who viewed society as a function or derivative of the domestic economy, this conceptualization of society begins with the impact of global circulation as its starting point. This conceptualization does not entirely reject the sociology of the last 200 years – I wish to develop an analysis that takes seriously this global circulation and brings it 'up to speed' with the contemporary global system of circulation. Let us suppose, for the moment, that there is a group of individuals in each locality that essentially views this form of hyper-globalization in positive terms. It is quite likely that such individuals profit from this new form of globalization. These individuals are likely to share some common traits – they are likely

to possess the social, economic/financial and cultural capital to take advantage of globalization. They enjoy the benefits of this massive circulation of goods and services; they are likely to be able to tap into the cultural aspects of this globalization in terms of access to music, films, theatre productions; they are likely to be connected to each other on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. These individuals are likely to share a cosmopolitan outlook on life and may well share more traits with other cosmopolitan minded individuals around the planet than with many of their fellow citizens. The free circulation of goods, capital, people and ideas forms the mainstay of either a form of liberalism/neo-liberalism or some variant of social democracy which has presented a vision of society that is 'open' to new ideas and concepts, based on human and many other rights, that is welcoming of strangers and migrants, that is competitive yet protective of the young, elderly, and poor, and that is productive and innovative in terms of the creation of goods and services it then ships around the world. Concentrated in the metropolitan cities and landscapes of "the West", these individuals have their counterparts spread across the globe in non-Western countries. And these individuals are making a case for the emulation of Western modernity in their own spaces producing images of what life could be like in China or India or Russia if only the Western model of modernity was internalized and followed in their space. The Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, borrowing from Ferdinand Braudel, describes the islands of privilege within which this cosmopolitan elite is likely to live as the 'bell-jars' of the developing world to indicate the cut-off nature, its insulation and isolation, from the rest of society in Latin America, Asia or Africa (de Soto, 2000: 1).

Of course, this form of globalization has its critics both in the core economies of the West and the so-called developing world. Very often concentrated amongst those individuals and social groups that have not benefitted greatly from globalization or which have, in fact, suffered as a result of it, these critical voices oppose the cosmopolitan and liberal outlook. Nationalist and socialist groupings express skepticism about the benefits of the global spread of goods, capital, and labor. Nationalists usually argue that the 'community' of the nation has suffered as a consequence of globalization and its cosmopolitan outlook. Outdone by some other group, nationalists claim that the nation would be healed and made whole again, if only it was left alone to develop in its own time and place. The encompassment by values other than those seen as integral to the 'soul' of the nation, or its psychology, the influence of the foreign is seen as the root cause of the problems faced by the national community. Pointing to poverty, unemployment, alco-

holism or drug abuse, a lack of education, or a myriad of other supposed symptoms of national malaise, nationalists argue that closing the borders and cutting the flow – both in and out of the claimed space – of capital, goods, ideas, and people will enhance local capacities to produce wealth, prosperity, happiness, and pride.

Many socialist thinkers take a remarkably similar view and suggest that only if local capacities are protected against outside influence and developed, can local economies survive and thrive. While nationalists might view capitalism as a potential ally in the quest for national improvement as long as it is left to operate in the “interests of the nation”, socialists reject the capitalist system in its entirety. Capitalism is seen to be the root cause of poverty, deprivation, inequality, and inherently unjust. At the core of the socialist critique of capitalism stands the concept of the commodification of land, labor, and capital. Much of socialist theory, as Polanyi (2001) argues, deals with the effects of commodification and efforts to overcome it or reduce its negative impact. Both the nationalist and socialist perspective differs fundamentally from that of the cosmopolitans and views globalization as a threat to the national or local community. While Marx certainly prescribed international solidarity among the working classes, he rejected the cosmopolitan perspective as essentially bourgeois and capitalist. The emphasis on ‘community’ is of great importance in both of these perspectives since it is ‘the community’ for which many socialists or nationalists claim to speak.

Let us then further postulate that in each nation state, these positions for or against globalization find their expression through both state action – in terms of government policy – and civil society engagement. Civil society is here used to describe the organizations and associations through which a variety of different groups express their views, their interests, and their desires in terms of policy. These civic associations and organizations range from trade unions to business groups to churches to a plethora of non-governmental institutions. In many of the world’s more established democratic regimes – loosely termed the West – these civic organizations underpin and form the social bases for political parties that, in turn, compete for government power and claim to express the views of their various constituencies. It is commonly accepted in both the political science and sociology literature that these civil society organizations constitute the mainstay of political associations and that political parties are able to claim that they represent a large proportion of the population (Gourevitch, 1986). And the literature in political science and sociology illustrates that both the ‘middle class’ and the ‘working class’ in most established democratic regimes fall into one of the

three camps – liberal, socialist or nationalist (though there are obviously some blended versions). And, as several political economists have demonstrated, it makes a great deal of difference whether individuals find themselves in highly competitive and technologically advanced sectors of the economy which thrive on global trade and their ability to dominate the global market or not (Hall and Soskice, 2001). If so, they are likely to see globalization as a good thing; if not, they are likely to hold critical views of globalization. Similarly, a person employed in the public sector or a state-owned enterprise under great competitive pressure from global entities or domestic corporations is likely to support protective measures from the government rather than free trade and liberal ideologies. The more trade union members are dependent upon state protection, the more likely they are to support nationalist or socialist platforms and voice communitarian demands.

To develop a view of society that takes globalization seriously requires a serious contemplation of both economic interests and philosophical positions. While I concede that the dichotomy of cosmopolitan versus communitarian visions is perhaps a little simplistic, it does address a divide that has become increasingly pronounced in the politics of Europe and the West in general. The campaigns of Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump encapsulate the immense gulf that exists between these political camps – one that is in favor of a free flow of capital, goods, people, ideas and concepts and one that seeks to reverse what are considered to be the disadvantages of a neo-liberal, cosmopolitan world order. A vision that seeks to keep out migrants by putting up immense walls on borders and limits trade flows. This conflict also plays out in a variety of electoral contests in Europe (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary, and, of course, Britain are recent examples) and presents a frontal challenge to the cosmopolitan ideas that underpin the European Union. It is becoming increasingly clear that the left versus right categorization of political parties and ideologies is becoming less persuasive across the globe and it may be of conceptual and analytical utility to view the ideological and political landscape through the lens of globalization as a prism with which to derive traction on political views, attitudes and ideologies.

These positions are all to be found in the South African social, economic and political landscape. And they coincide with racial patterns reflective of the apartheid past. There is a cosmopolitan grouping in urban centers that is highly affluent, that orients its lifestyle and preferences in global terms, and that possesses the cultural, social and economic capital to take advantage of travel, employment opportunities, goods, services, and many of the other benefits that globalization

has to offer. Given the socio-history of South Africa this grouping is mainly white, though there is a growing black entrepreneurial upper and middle class developing that also views globalization in a positive light. Within the main political party in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), one can identify a cosmopolitan wing though it is small in comparison to its nationalist and socialist components. The opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) represents cosmopolitan views and liberal ideology. It draws its electoral support mainly from the colored and white constituencies, but struggles to break into the black majority in any meaningful way. And the problem is obvious – a party aligned with the interests of a constituency that is largely viewed as the beneficiaries of apartheid, of capitalist exploitation, of expropriation, and the authors of searing inequality, is unlikely to make headway in a political society in which support for its ideas and concepts are likely to be minimal.

The nationalist and socialist ‘wings’, or factions in the ANC, are broad and again divided into regional, ethnic, and, importantly, patronage groups vying for power and positions in the party and in the state. For instance, the socialist camp within the ANC divides into the South African Communist Party (SACP), which is a party within the ANC, and many other ideological positions. In contrast, there is no central nationalist group in the ANC but many Africanists within the movement can be described as nationalists as they express views linked to the black Africanist tradition. In other words, ideologically the ANC is split into several competing camps and these divisions play out in party congresses and in tensions within the movement over government policy (Gumede, 2005). And since the ANC represents the overwhelmingly black electorate in the country, it is not surprising that its ideological orientation is critical of both Western-style democracy (often referred to as a concession to “Whites” in the transition of 1994) and capitalist interests (recently referred to as “white monopoly capitalism”). In other words, neither capitalism (in both its local and global forms) nor democracy is seen as positive to the large majority of the population. And while the President may be corrupt and damaging to the country’s economy, the ANC is unlikely to lose its electoral support among the poor for a variety of reasons, one of which is that the ANC has created a pool of welfare policies upon which over 17 million impoverished South Africans depend (Mbeki, 2009). And, according to government statistics produced

in June of 2017, the number of welfare recipients outstrips the number of people in employment.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Divide between Civil Society and Political Society**

One of the most important distinguishing features between the societies of the Western world and the post-colony is the size of the population almost entirely disconnected from the modern economy. And which views the capitalist system in highly critical terms. While the cosmopolitan vision may be the subject of a fierce political contest in the Western world, it is confronted by a very different coalition of forces in developing and post-colonial settings. There it confronts not only socialist and nationalist critics in civil society, but also an enormous obstacle in the form of a large population that has not benefited from globalization or capitalism. In fact, as Kalyan Sanyal impressively argues, political society is suffering from the consequences of 'primitive accumulation' in the rural parts of the post-colonial world in a way that is not dissimilar to the processes suffered by the European peasantry during the fifteenth to twentieth centuries (Sanyal, 2007). This population is likely to express hostility to capitalism's core assumptions about how the economy and society should operate. While established democracies are characterized by a civil society that encompasses much of the population from the working classes upwards, post-colonial societies exhibit large population groups that are outside of the realm of civil society though there is a plethora of groups claiming to represent that part of the population.

In developed economies and democratic polities, a relatively small proportion of the population would fall into the category described by Chatterjee and Sanyal. In the post-colony, however, the population within 'political society' encompasses a large majority of the nation. And it is this population group that presents modern, Western-styled democracies and economies with some enormous challenges, not only in terms of political representation and stability, but in terms of economic prosperity. For those in political society there are virtually no possibilities of upward mobility. While a large part of the political society population in India and other developing countries is still to be found in the rural areas, a similarly deprived population in peri-urban and urban areas is also growing rapidly. Sanyal refers to this population group as constituting a "need economy". Its members are in need of assistance from the state in all sorts of ways ranging

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3 See Michele Jones, "More People on Welfare than Working", *IOL News* 28 June, 2017, available on [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za).

from housing to basic infra-structure and mostly unable to pay for even the most basic of necessities (Sanyal, 2007: 208-251). And it is in reference to this population that Partha Chatterjee argues that democracy may be at odds with modernity in the Western sense because for political society, democracy is a tool for obtaining a level of governmentality (accessing resources) rather than the obtaining of civil society status based on a conceptualization of human and other rights.

The existence of a large population that is not represented or encompassed by civil society and that agitates for inclusion in state-led policies is often overlooked in much of the political economy literature derived from Western models. Chatterjee writes the following:

“The critical difference, as I pointed out earlier, has been produced by a split in the field of the political between a domain of properly constituted civil society and a more ill-defined and a contingently activated domain of ‘political society’. Civil society in India today, peopled largely by the urban middle classes, is the sphere that seeks to be congruent with the normative model of bourgeois civil society and the domain of capitalist hegemony” (Chatterjee, 2011: 219).

Chatterjee illustrates that, if its civil society was all there was, then India would not differ much from Western democracies and economies. But it contains this very large population that is able to exercise the franchise but is largely disconnected from the capitalist economy. In fact, it is being displaced from the rural areas by the agrarian capitalist revolution – not unlike the peasantry in Europe was pushed off the land from the sixteenth century onwards – and, as a result of modern, capital-intensive instead of labor-intensive capitalist production, is unlikely to find employment. The historian Eugen Weber described in great detail the painful process of the imposed transition from ‘peasant to Frenchman’ in his classic study of French modernization (Weber, 1976). He examines how the French central state imposed land reform, agricultural reform, a language policy and bureaucratic administration on the population and dispossessed many of them in the process (Weber, 1976). Similar processes are taking place across the developing world where rural society still predominates. In other words, the processes of ‘primitive accumulation’ and the resulting impoverishment/displacement of large sections of the population in Africa, Asia and Latin America is underway but within the context of a highly globalized economy and an interconnected world (Sanyal, 2007). Their pain is a global and highly politicized pain – it is visible and documented on a daily basis, whether on the Internet or the TV screen. And unlike the peasantry of seventeenth century Europe, the victims of contemporary primitive accumulation can turn to the processes of newly found

democracy to establish their claims, their rights to inclusion, their desire for services, and their need for goods.

While there may be disagreement over the various developmental paths taken by the developed capitalist economies, there is a consensus that capitalism was tempered by democracy through the emergence of a vibrant civil society. Civil society organizations were crucial in the emergence of civil and political rights; the consolidation of democratic processes; and the establishment of a human rights culture within capitalist societies. Civil society stands in opposition to the capture of the state by a coalition of aristocrats and the monarch and ensures that a set of rights emerges to protect the interests of the bourgeoisie, the working class and even of what is left of the peasantry in Western economies. And, over time, the overwhelming majority of citizens are represented through civil society organizations in one way or another in Western, capitalist economies. In the post-colonial and developing countries settings, that is not the case – there large portions of the population are outside of civil society and agitate for benefits through actions that differ vastly from those practiced by civil society organizations. Protest, violence, and other much more direct forms of action prevail and shape the political sphere at the political society level. And it is these levels of violence that call for a much more careful and detailed analysis of the role of violence in post-colonial democracies and how these levels of violence are managed and perpetuated by the state.

### **The Politics of Governmentality in the Post-colony**

The historical trajectory characterizing Western economies and polities differs fundamentally from those experienced by the colonial world. Chatterjee suggests that the most important transformation during the colonial period occurs in the realm of civil society (Chatterjee, 2011: 88-89). The colonial period sees the emergence of political associations, trade unions, and other non-governmental organizations along the lines found in the West. But these civil society organizations operate in a very different context of a state designed to extract resources and seeks to administer and control the population. The colonial state has as its ultimate aim economic/social control and bureaucratic enumeration of the population to ensure the longevity of the colonial project. It contains none of the transformative elements and emancipatory moments that shaped the emergence of the European state and the civil, political and social rights described in detail by Thomas H. Marshall (1950). As a consequence, much of the history of civil society organizations in the colonies evolves around the use of Western philosophy

to undermine the legitimacy of the colonial project by pointing to its contradictions regarding the equality of human beings, the universality of individual human rights (Mbembe, 2017). Condemned to sit 'in the waiting room of history' Indians and many other colonial people were waiting to be promoted to the status of what Europeans had achieved. Eventually, the anti-colonial struggle brought about the end of the colonial period by installing copies of European systems of governance and economics based on European philosophical and practical models. Chatterjee notes that the anti-colonial struggles in civil society are framed by questions of (Western) modernity; by bringing about conditions such as political independence, state sovereignty, and national cohesion similar to those attained in the colonial power. Emulation of Western modernity was the end goal of civil society organizations in the post-colony and informed much of the anti-colonial struggle.

However, the framing question in political society in the post-colonial period is that of democracy. Chatterjee argues that the struggles of political society might have at some point in the past had 'revolutionary potential' in that they were directed against capitalism and governmentality (at least in its European form), but he holds that this potential receded over the years in the post-colonial setting. Political society formations agitate for inclusion, for the redistribution of and access to benefits distributed by the state, but not for a wholesale replacement of the system. The implications of the existence of such a large-scale political society and the fact that it pits modernity (in its Western sense) against democracy (in the political society sense) means that post-colonial spaces such as India or South Africa are not likely to reproduce Western-style democratic systems, even if the systems are borrowed from the West in terms of their constitutions and structures. The politics likely to play out in such a context will, by necessity, be very different from the politics playing out in the West (Chatterjee, 2011: 86-93).

This political society makes claims on the state and is governed, as Chatterjee demonstrates in several books and articles, by temporary, often unstable, arrangements that allow for a regime of what he terms 'exceptions'. It is best conceptualized as "negatively constituted as an abnormal field of exceptional practices that deviate from those that are approved of in proper civil society" (Chatterjee, 2011: 231). Poor slum dwellers living on top of railway lines, for instance, make claims on the state – such as not being removed from the area they occupy – as a concession, an exception to the rule, because they are poor, and cannot find living space anywhere else. While members of civil society would never be permitted such exceptions, members of political society articulate these requests for excep-

tion on a routine basis and are routinely given permission by the state authorities as a result of their status. A further distinguishing characteristic of political society claims is that they are made on behalf of entire communities of people rather than individuals, as in civil society. These claims are only grudgingly accepted by the state – after all, they encourage ‘illegality’ and ‘exceptionalism’. Yet, illegal squatters are allowed to live in spaces that are actually not meant for them because moving them involves a great deal of disruption, may lead to protest and, in some cases, exceptional violence. In India, as in South Africa, the rule of exception is applied and the community of squatters is left to live where they have settled as long as it does not conflict with a more fundamental governing principle (for instance, the occupation of conservation and protected areas). The state thereby accepts that a level of illegality is a condition of life in the post-colony.<sup>4</sup>

Some examples may be illustrative. A police officer will not hesitate to issue a parking ticket to a car standing in a no-parking zone in the inner city of Cape Town. A taxi driven by a member of political society, however, is a law unto itself, even if police officers were brave enough to tackle the many irregularities of taxi behavior across the country. Taxi drivers stop wherever they choose, whether their car’s taillights work or not; they park in spaces that obstruct traffic without hesitation; and they merge into traffic as if there were no other vehicles on the road. They drive next to the road on pavements and sidewalks during traffic congestion; they do not pay attention to speed limits; they routinely overload their vehicles with passengers; road rules do not apply to them and many of them are armed and dangerous. And taxi-driving behavior is only one of many everyday examples of the ‘rule of exception’. Rules of exception apply to the rural sector and the rights and privileges enjoyed by traditional leaders, chiefs and their entourage who treat “their subjects” as if they hold no constitutional rights whatsoever (Ntsebeza, 2005). Rules of exception apply to informal business owners in townships who pay no rates or taxes and pay little or no attention to labor, environmental, health and safety laws pertaining to their businesses; rules of exception apply to township dwellers and the shack economy who establish their shacks wherever they can irrespective of town planning and other regulations;

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4 In a public discussion on Facebook, a French member of the Hout Bay Organized citizens group asked the mayor of Cape Town why the City had not paid sufficient attention to the enormous and uncontrolled growth of a township called Imizamo Yethu. The mayor responded to this question with the glib comment “Hout Bay was undergoing a normal process called urbanization” and that all residents of Hout Bay needed to get used to it. See “Hout Bay’s Changing Landscape”, Hout Bay Organized, June 9, 2017 on [www.houtbay.org](http://www.houtbay.org).

rules of exception apply to the non-payment of electricity and water bills to township and rural communities.

And, it would appear, that rules of exception also pertain to the corrupt activities of ANC politicians and appointees to a host of government-owned entities. The story (April and May of 2017) of Brian Molefe, the ANC's CEO of the electricity utility ESKOM, provides an interesting example. Molefe voluntarily resigned from the position following a report by the Public Protector (dubbed "State of Capture" which outlines the alleged corrupt activities of the President and his family and business associates) accusing him of having favored President Zuma's business partners, the Gupta family, in a variety of deals (Public Protector 2016/17).<sup>5</sup> Molefe, accused of having directly and personally profited from these arrangements, resigned, ostensibly, as he claimed in his public letter of resignation, in the interests of good governance. Within a few hours, Molefe was appointed a Member of Parliament for the ANC. Rumor had it that he was to replace the axed Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan who had been embroiled with the President in an ugly spat over several highly questionable deals involving the state-owned enterprises, Gupta family businesses and various Zuma appointees. For whatever reason, the President did not appoint Molefe as Minister of Finance upon dismissing Gordhan, opting instead for the even more compromised Malusi Gigaba.<sup>6</sup> A few days after his non-appointment as Minister, the ESKOM's board of directors announced that it would pay Molefe Rand 30 million in a pension payout. The board justified the payout as fair compensation based on what Molefe would have received as a pension from ESKOM if he had stayed his entire term. In other words, he was to be paid out for a future pension and on the absurd reasoning, if one can call it that, that he would have earned this pension had he continued to work for ESKOM for several years into the future, had he not been accused of corruption!

Not surprisingly, the trade unions found this argument interesting since it would mean that every pensionable worker would be entitled to future pension payouts

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5 Verbatim copies of Molefe's resignation letter are available in several news media outlets. See for instance, "Full Statement: Eskom CEO Molefe resigns", 11 November, 2016 in Fin 24, available on [www.fin24.com](http://www.fin24.com).

6 Gigaba's role in the entangled web of Zuma's dealings with the Gupta family and its various enterprises is central, as revealed in #Guptaleaks and a variety of reports by investigative journalists in Amabhungane and academics in the Betrayal of a Promise report indicate. As Minister of Home Affairs he was instrumental in obtaining South African citizenship to the Gupta brothers in record time. Home Affairs is not noted for its speedy conclusion of any process and most citizens spend many hours in line waiting for ordinary documents and simple processes such as ID or passport renewals can take months to complete.

even if they resign voluntarily from a position. Clearly this situation is highly irregular but given that President Zuma has supported many such 'exceptional' solutions for his friends, associates, and family members it is just one in a long line of exceptions to the rules that apply to ordinary civil society citizens. While members of civil society are embroiled in all sorts of bureaucratic procedures pertaining to their professions, taxes, and other aspects of life, members of the political elite appear to be exempt from such inconveniences. Unsurprisingly, the unions and opposition parties mobilized against this deal and placed pressure on the responsible Minister for Energy, Lynne Brown, to rescind the payment. She obliged but added fuel to the fire by claiming that Molefe had not, in fact, resigned from his position despite him having done so publically.<sup>7</sup> ESKOM's board then attempted to reclassify Molefe's resignation as a retrenchment to pay him the money. Of course, him having resigned voluntarily in a public letter does not square with the suggestion that he was retrenched or that he retired. The matter is still part of an on-going discourse about the nature of governmentality practiced by the Zuma government.

Political society encompasses a large majority of the population in countries such as South Africa or India. Chatterjee observes that it poses a particular problem for democratic theory because, unlike civil society, it voices demands on behalf of 'communities' instead of individual citizens. While democratic theory recognizes the individual as the primary actor and holder of rights and duties, political society's demands are made on behalf of a subset of members of political society – the slum-dwellers of Mumbai; the inhabitants of the shacks in Kayelitsha; the ethnic group of Xhosa people living in the Eastern Cape; or, indeed, black South Africans citizens as opposed to whites. Political society in post-colonial settings produces an enormous tension between modern democracy (the domain of political society) and capitalist accumulation (the domain of civil society in the post-colony). Political society finds itself outside of the sphere of the modern economy and makes claims on that economy through its electoral weight. And it does so through the ballot box as well as agitation, protest, and violence. Such violence does not co-

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7 Until recently, Lynne Brown was a highly respected figure within the ANC but in recent months, she has been embroiled in a series of dubious business deals between Gupta owned companies and the state enterprises which she, as the responsible minister, oversees. See Sam Sole, Craig McKune, and Stefan Bruemmer, "The 'Gupt-owned' State Enterprises", *amaBhungane*, 24 March 2017, available on [www.amabhungane.co.za](http://www.amabhungane.co.za). To her credit, she reversed her position on Molefe's resignation in mid-June of 2017 hoping, in vain, that her decision would be the end of the matter.

exist easily with discursive or participatory democracy in the Habermasian tradition.

### **Reasons Why Democracy and Capitalism in the Post-colony are Unlikely to Develop and Operate in the same manner as in the West**

As Chatterjee observes, the trajectory of development that saw economies and nation states in the West move from feudalism to commercial society to industrial economy/society and the post-industrial economy/society alongside civil, then political and then socio-economic rights was clearly not followed in the post-colony. And since it was not followed there as a result of the colonial intervention, it is highly unlikely that such societies would then also produce carbon copies of western democracies and economies. In the Indian case, and South Africa as well, democracy precedes not only primitive accumulation and the destruction of the peasantry, but in many senses has a post-industrial economy without having produced a fully industrial one. Such polities and economies have to contend with a labor market that is unlikely to absorb the “surplus” labor coming off the countryside into the urban sectors. And coming into the urban spaces looking for opportunities that they know are not available in the rural sectors. Expectations of modernity are high; the likelihood of these being met are low; and the dissonance between expectations and realities need to be managed by the political elites. Unlike Western democracies, the democracies of Africa, Asia and the Americas have to contend with a much more congested and contested political environment in which members of political society make claims on the resources of stressed, often badly performing economies. And the reaction by those in civil society to democratic demands for the improvement of conditions for those in political society often leads to anti-democratic reactions by the middle classes and the political elites beholden to capitalist accumulation as has already occurred in several South East Asian countries such as Thailand (2006 and 2009) and Bangladesh in 2007 or across Latin America in the 1960s to the present.

The concept of the “West” as having moved from agricultural feudalism to commercial economy to thriving democracies with abundant welfare state capacities, equipped with extensive human rights, social and economic policies designed to alleviate poverty, hunger, deprivation, inequity and eradicate injustice resulting in high levels of happiness for all citizens is a concept that is globally circulated about capitalism and democracy. The image is based on an imagined developmental path that was followed by few, if any, of the Western economies, but it is powerful in its bearing on the developmental path of developing countries (Rist,

2003). It is also an imagined modernity that is in crisis, even in the heartland of origin – the US and the European Union. One could, for instance, make an argument that focuses on the growth of political society in parts of the European Union. The existence of ‘disconnected population groups’ in Eastern Europe is well documented (Desilver, 2016). Yet, few political economists touch on the growth of political society in places like Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece.<sup>8</sup> Manuel Castells is one of the few authors to take this development seriously as he does in his treatment of Spain on the politics of the “indignadas” (Castells, 2015). Jean and John L. Comaroff (2012) argue convincingly that much of the “theory from the South” holds for developments in the North and it might be of some use to examine such trends by building on the case of post-colonial political economies. Rather than the customary flow of theory from the developed, privileged North to the South, a flow reversal reveals how Euro-America is beginning to look like parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. And what is an even more fundamental issue is that the developmental chain that is presumed to lead to successful development is one that was certainly not followed in the post-colony because colonial rule brought about a completely different developmental trajectory. A trajectory in which the establishment of rule over native populations through bureaucratic and political machines designed to support colonial ambitions was paramount.

I will not exercise all of the critical debates about democracy, colonialism, and capitalism; suffice it to say that the contradiction between democracy as a political system of citizen equality and capitalism as an economic system that inherently encourages inequity is sufficiently evident (Streeck, 2011). The tension capitalism poses for democratic systems is fundamentally about how to mediate social and economic inequality. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) struggle mightily to square the circle in their quest to find answers to the question of why so many (post-colonial) nations “fail” while the West “succeeds”. They suggest that ‘inclusion’ of all population groups is essential in building a thriving capitalist economy and a working democracy. And while ‘exclusion’ certainly took place in many

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8 Guy Standing’s analysis of “the precariat” in Europe and the US is an interesting contribution along the lines suggested in my analysis (Standing 2011). Standing argues that this growing phenomenon can be linked to the neo-liberal political and economic project which has pushed more and more individuals into a ‘precarious’ economic and social space characterized by anomie, alienation, anger, frustration, and meaninglessness. In contrast to the post-colonial situation, where individuals are pushed out of subsistence agriculture into subsistence without an economic base, the precariat is being pushed to the edges of the post-industrial economy.

contemporary Western countries, the forces of exclusion were overcome – either politically or militarily – by the forces of inclusion. To them, South Korea and Taiwan are the latest examples of countries that have made the transition from dirt-poor to highly affluent within the space-time of a generation by following inclusive policies. But the question of “inclusion” becomes rather pressing in cases like South Africa or, more disturbing, India with its enormous rural population. Chatterjee, unlike Acemoglu and Robinson, is very aware of the enormity of the problem in his analysis. Based on the work of Kalyan Sanyal, Chatterjee argues that capital-intensive and technology-driven production is far less labor-intensive than in decades past and unlikely to absorb the millions of displaced peasants and unemployed workers (Chatterjee, 2011: 213). The persistently high unemployment figures in South Africa (or Spain, for that matter) indicate the enormity of this problem. A technology-driven, capital-intensive, modern economy is unlikely to generate large numbers of jobs, especially not for untrained, unskilled laborers no matter how “inclusive” it tries to be.

Inclusion, especially if it flies into the headwinds of hundreds of years of colonial exclusion, is a terrifically difficult undertaking. And if the political economy is one that is highly dependent on global markets, on global investment in its commodity producing sector, the political bargain that local political elites will make with global companies is likely to look like the bargain struck in post-apartheid South Africa. While the political and economic elite, now consisting of both black and white beneficiaries, holds enormous economic power, the vast majority of the local population gets “paid off” with minimal social grants that allow them to survive on the margins of the capitalist economy with few avenues of entry (Mbeki, 2009). Political society gets what it is demanding – some form of governmentality and the resulting access to some resources such as infra-structure – but it gets that in very measured, minimal doses. And the political/economic elite gets away with the lion’s share of the commodity bonanza. So much so, that political society mobilizes against those who capitalize on capitalism (often in violent and quite unpredictable ways as this is what gets attention from the national and global media). And members of civil society, in the meantime, sit on the political sidelines, seething with anger at the exceptions being granted to political society and those in positions of political power. While members of civil society pay taxes to accommodate the political deal consummated by the elite and certain members of political society, the political elite lives the high life. Under such conditions, as Ernesto Laclau (2005) observes, populist politics is the only avenue of political expression open to members of political society. So far, the ANC has been able to

conduct an ‘anger management’ exercise in terms of allowing the many different voices of political society to be heard within the movement and provided a platform for fierce competition within the party over government positions and patronage opportunities (Steinberg, 2014; Beresford, 2015). The emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters as a political party in 2016 is an indication that the ANC is struggling to provide a broad enough platform for the multitude of political society groups and points of view. And “counter-democracy”, to use a term created by Pierre Rosanvallon (2008), becomes a prevalent reaction by middle class civil society. In some cases this ‘counter-democracy’ takes the form of a retreat into the private realm or support for military and other forms of authoritarian rule.

In other words, the manner in which the political elite exercises power in a post-colonial setting is very different from the way in which the political elite in a Western capitalist democracy wields power. The key to the difference, according to Chatterjee, lies in very different forms of social labor (Chatterjee, 2011: 138). Democracy circulates as the only ‘game in town’ in terms of a political system, discourse, and means of political ‘improvement’. Even dictators and authoritarians such as Hugo Chavez or Vladimir Putin pay homage to the democratic system and claim to be the victors of democratic processes to obtain legitimacy. Yet, the deep inequalities between civil and political society sectors encourage a system of ad hoc transfers to members of political society on the basis of a ‘rule of exception’ rather than a just administration of resources on the basis of equality. But the ‘rule of exception’ raises the issue of equality and fairness as the distribution of resources is based on very different criteria, i.e., the government’s wish to placate and lessen conflicts.

Capitalism circulates as the only viable means of achieving higher national incomes and greater affluence. And, again, all sorts of regimes claim to be capitalist, even where the family resemblance is slight as in the Chinese case. Civil society associations, as Chatterjee suggests, reflect capitalist hegemony despite encompassing trade union and other potentially anti-capitalist organizations; political society takes democracy at its word and uses the franchise and power of numbers to gain access to resources but in a highly skewed and uneven manner. And in this manner, political society actually reinforces the inherent inequities and injustices that capitalism creates in the first place. It thereby amplifies the basic contradiction between democracy and capitalism.

## **Conclusion**

The post-colonial political elite is under democratic pressure to provide resources to its electoral base, which in countries like South Africa and India is predominantly found in political society. For electoral reasons, benefits are directed to political society but in a haphazard way reflecting the 'rule of exception'. In political society, the rhetoric of a socialist and/or nationalist persuasion is far more likely to resonate with voters than cosmopolitan ideas and positions. It is therefore highly unlikely that policy preferences expressed by the cosmopolitan middle and upper class find resonance in this very broad constituency. The ANC has, so far, succeeded in maintaining a stranglehold on political society as its electoral base because it represents to most voters the only representative of the liberation movement and has provided a broad range of social policies that benefit the poor. And through its plethora of internal factions it has given many different voices within political society an opportunity to vent anger, grievances, and political demands in a circus of intra-organizational strife and competition for patronage opportunities, access to resources, and gatekeeping powers.

The political elite is, as elsewhere, intent on furthering its own interests and uses commodity production and ownership patterns to enrich itself, often through means that are regarded as corrupt. In turn, political society mobilizes against the regime's inequitable redistribution mechanisms – in South Africa, the protests against poor government-supplied services (electricity, water, roads, schools and so forth) often take very violent forms involving disruption to traffic, damage to public or private property, violence against the police or others such as shop-owners, often foreigners, whose shops are looted, burned, and destroyed. Yet, as Chatterjee notes, political society is highly fractured and not able to mount a sustained challenge to the economic and political system as long as the political elite is able to play its factions against each other in a post-colonial version of 'divide and rule'. Governmentality in such a setting is, as a result, very different from that associated with rational bureaucratic processes based on the equal and rule-bound distribution of benefits in Western democracies and welfare systems. To make the point bluntly, the past is not the past and to ignore the socio-history of a post-colonial polity and economy is a serious analytical and scientific failure on behalf of Western models of both post-colonial democracies and political economies. It lies at the heart of the failure of western scientific understandings of why countries "fail". Instead of focusing on "failure", it may be much more fruitful to think of these trajectories as developmental paths in their own right and with their own volition and logic.

## Postscript

On February 14, 2018, Jacob Zuma finally resigned from the Presidency of South Africa. His attempts to heave his ex-wife, Nkosana Dlamini-Zuma, into the leadership position of the ANC had narrowly and controversially failed in December of 2017 at the 54th ANC National Conference. Her appointment would have ensured that he would have been able to retire without facing prosecution on over 740 corruption charges. It is not surprising that he and his allies put up a protracted fight to retain intra-party and thereby state power. Accusations of bribery and skullduggery persist about Cyril Ramaphosa's intra-party victory, which was based on the narrowest of margins. It hinged on moving one of Zuma's key allies, David Mabuza, ANC premier of Mpumalanga province, into the Ramaphosa camp at the last moment of the ANC conference.<sup>9</sup> While Zuma still commanded enormous intra-party power, it was clearly waning, and in January of 2018 the parliamentary ANC threatened to vote against the President in a vote of no confidence should he refuse to resign. Having survived three motions of no confidence votes already (plus another three which had either been unsuccessful, amended or withdrawn due to the ANC's unflinching support of the President), it became clear that sufficient numbers of ANC MP's now sided with Ramaphosa. Zuma, at first defiant, then caved in to the relentless pressures applied by forces both within and outside of the ANC.

While Zuma's resignation was certainly welcomed broadly with relief, the institutional, economic and socio-cultural setting within which Ramaphosa has to operate is unchanged. Political society in South Africa still encompasses over 60 per cent of the population and remains marginal to both capitalism and democracy. While marginal, it commands attention since any political party wanting to win political power needs to provide incentives for this highly diverse constituency to vote for it. The social and economic conditions of unemployment, poor housing, health care, education and infrastructure characteristic of everyday life for the average South African also remain unchanged. And so do the incentives for the politically active and connected to use their positions of power to enrich themselves and their families and associates. President Ramaphosa now faces the unenviable task of reversing trends that became commonplace under Zuma, at the same time as having to create conditions for economic growth and a politics of

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9 David Mabuza is no stranger to the politics of corruption as was noted in an expose by the New York Times. See Norimitsu Onishi and Selam Gebrekidan, "South Africa Vows to End Corruption. Are Its Leaders Part of the Problem?" *New York Times*, August 4, 2018.

hope. The imperatives of the global economy are hardly in his favor given that global institutions are looking for a reduction of South African state debt, the privatization of its large and unprofitable public sector, and pay little heed to the demands of the average, poverty-stricken South African voter for an expansion of welfare, housing, education and health policies that are both universal and expensive. The two levels of pressure are almost entirely disconnected and this represents an enormous strategic and electoral problem for the President and his Cabinet.

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