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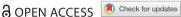Alexander Beresford, Marie E. Berry & Laura Mann

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Liberation movements and stalled democratic transitions: reproducing power in Rwanda and South Africa through productive liminality

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ABSTRACT
The lack of convergence towards liberal democracy in some African countries reflects neither a permanent state of political aberration, nor necessarily a prolonged transitional phase through which countries pass once the "right" conditions are met. Examining the cases of two ruling parties, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the African National Congress in South Africa, we develop the concept of *productive liminality* to explain countries suspended (potentially indefinitely) in a status "betwixt and between" mass violence, authoritarianism, and democracy. On the one hand, their societies are in a liminal status wherein a transition to democracy and socio-economic "revolution" remains forestalled; on the other hand, this liminality is instrumentalized to justify the party's extraordinary mandate characterized by: (a) an idea of an incomplete project of liberation that the party alone is mandated to fulfil through an authoritarian social contract, and (b) the claim that this unfulfilled revolution is continuously under threat by a coterie of malevolent forces, which the party alone is mandated to identify and appropriately sanction.

For decades, political scientists have debated whether democracy is spreading or receding on the global stage. On the one hand, a growing number of scholars have argued that some form of global "democratic recession" is underway, characterized by a combination of corroding democratic norms within established democracies[1] and the "resilience" of authoritarian regimes.[2] On the other hand, Levitsky and Way have pushed back against these arguments, drawing on prominent democracy indices to argue that "claims of a worldwide democratic downturn lack empirical accuracy" and that overall "the big picture of the last decade … is one of net stability".[3] For them, gloomy analyses of democratic recession stem from flawed understandings of the

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events of the early 1990s, and the "excessive optimism and voluntarism" that generated "unrealistic expectations that, when not realized, gave rise to exaggerated pessimism, and gloom".[4]

Analyses of the African continent have often oscillated between ephemeral bursts of optimism and pessimism.[5] These range from the heady and often teleological predictions of modernization theorists[6] and the celebrations of a "third wave" of democratization after the Cold War,[7] to narratives of pervasive African crises rooted in weak statehood, underdevelopment, and neopatrimonialism.[8] The reality is more mixed. At present, *The Economist's* Democracy Index still classifies no African countries as "full democracies",[9] while Freedom House argued recently that "democracy faced its most serious crisis in decades in 2017" with notable "regressions" in even the most consolidated democracies.[10] According to such institutions, states within Africa demonstrate varying degrees of digression from the ideal-type of liberal democracy, occupying a spectrum of classifications from "authoritarian" through to "hybrid regimes" and "flawed democracies". This article focuses on that ambiguous space betwixt and between authoritarianism and democracy. Like regimes in other developing and emerging economies, many African ruling parties display hybrid forms of governance. On the one hand, they might (to varying degrees) demonstrate the outer appearance of consolidated democracies, in terms of institutions and the ostensive practice of procedural norms such as elections. Maintaining this identity is important for sustaining domestic legitimacy as well as international status; the latter providing vital access to resources and markets.[11] On the other hand, these regimes may simultaneously utilize undemocratic or even authoritarian means of reproducing their political power.[12]

Indeed, occupying this space between democracy and authoritarianism is not only a prominent and resilient feature of such regimes; it can also constitute a vital means of sustaining power. It may therefore be time to move debates beyond the confines of democratic "transitions", "consolidation", "recession", or "backsliding". If we loosen our concern with identifying regime directionality, we reveal the liminality that often characterizes contemporary politics. Liminality – a concept traditionally employed by anthropologists and sociologists,[13] and rarely used by political scientists – denotes the manner in which societies or individuals can inhabit a "threshold status", in which they appear to be moving from one distinctive phase of their history to another, yet their transition to a new fixed status is not fully realized. Instead such states occupy an in-between state, or what Thomassen[14] describes as a "world of contingency", where there is no certainty of either outcomes or the direction being taken.

The first part of our argument is therefore that the lack of convergence towards liberal democracy and the continued prevalence of hybrid forms of governance reflects neither a permanent state of political aberration, nor necessarily a prolonged transitional phase through which countries pass once the "right" conditions are met. Rather, hybridity is part of the governance strategy: the reproduction of power rests upon a regime's capacity to draw from a menu of liberal and authoritarian norms and behaviours to maintain domestic and international legitimacy in the context of uneven development and slow economic transformation.

In the second, related part of our argument, we develop the concept of *productive liminality*, to help explain how the ambiguity and malleability of this liminal space betwixt and between authoritarianism and democracy can actively and productively be harnessed by regimes as a means of reproducing power. Specifically, we argue that this strategy is most recognizable in countries emerging from crises or periods of

mass violence, governed by dominant political parties who self-define as liberation movements.

We select two such countries governed by liberation movements to develop this analysis: South Africa under the African National Congress (ANC) and Rwanda under the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Despite their obvious historical differences, we select them because they share certain historical commonalities central to the means by which they reproduce their power, notably:

- The emergence of their countries from recent periods of mass violence and authoritarianism (genocide, minority rule, civil conflict);
- Their emergence in the 1990s during the intensification of economic globalization and democratization after the end of the Cold War;
- Their self-identification as liberation movements seeking to "emancipate" their populations from long-term and structural neo-colonial governance;
- An incomplete project of "revolutionary" political and socio-economic transformation.

Critically, we are not concerned with identifying a new regime type to which these parties belong. We are mindful that these countries have very different democratic indices, with Rwanda widely categorized as "authoritarian" and South Africa as a "flawed democracy" perceived to be experiencing some form of "crisis" owing to corruption, and the "corrosive effect of the perpetual incumbency" of the ruling party.[15] There are also significant historical differences between the two countries and parties themselves, and we are not claiming that there is a singular, ineluctable historical trajectory which they follow vis-à-vis democratic consolidation and/or regression.[16] Our argument is processual, not classificatory; we are concerned with how these different parties draw upon similar strategies for reproducing their power, namely the exploitation of the ambiguous spaces betwixt and between authoritarianism and democracy. We contend that both political parties deploy what we call *productive liminality*, a strategy characterized by three core elements, with varying degrees of intensity and success. First, these parties discursively construct the idea of an extraordinary mandate necessitated by an "unfinished revolution", which these parties are alone mandated to deliver. Such revolutions are said to take time, requiring patience on behalf of the population and extraordinary forms of governance to manage popular unrest. Unlike the "contingent democrats" of Asian developmental states, these parties operate at the margins of the global economy making their economic transformations even more challenging and slow.[17] In a sense, the limited successes of these parties' bold liberation missions justify their continued control, for it is only once transitions are complete that their "extraordinary mandate" will end.

Second, these regimes proffer what we call *authoritarian social contracts* in the interim: their continued rule is underpinned by a degree of consent sustained through a substantive offer of security and prosperity, albeit one whose terms of inclusion and exclusion are ultimately defined not in open democratic dialogue, but by the ruling party. This contract involves forms of elite patronage used extensively by dominant party regimes to sustain loyalty.[18] However, it also involves forms of mass patronage: where economic transformation is perceived to be slow and expectations high, welfare is required while "the transition" is underway and incomplete.

Third, those deemed to abrogate the social contract risk a form of what we call *political abjection*. Opposition that cannot be co-opted are maligned as threats to the broader social and political health of the nation and portrayed as actors who harbour ambitions to return these societies to past instances of mass political violence and neo-colonial relations. These individuals are said to warrant illiberal state interventions against them.

This form of *productive liminality* is not unique to the two parties concerned here. Indeed, what we wish to illuminate through this comparison of two very different countries is that such strategies can be deployed – again, with varying degrees of intensity and capacity for success – by parties occupying different positions on a spectrum of democracy, but which nonetheless share a common interest in perpetuating the notion that their suspended revolutions or social missions justify or necessitate an idiosyncratic form of hybrid governance. By eschewing a fixation on regime directionality we instead draw attention to the liminal spaces "betwixt and between" mass violence, authoritarianism, and democracy, and how these spaces are instrumentalized by regimes to help reproduce political power.

Extraordinary mandates

Liberation-ideology is not a time-bound, finite political resource of political parties that came to power as "heroic" liberation movements. In the case of Rwanda and South Africa, both parties have rooted themselves in longer-term structural missions of economic and social transformation. Both parties actively propagate the notion that a full and complete transition to democracy is incomplete, yet have paradoxically born the responsibility for its completion for two decades. In effect, the ambiguity of their societies' liminal status can be harnessed to renew the ideological basis of their mandate. These parties therefore use the notion of an extraordinary mandate to legitimate and sustain a demand for political unity behind the liberation movement for a period well beyond the immediate aftermath of upheaval.[19]

South Africa

The ANC consistently reaffirms its self-identification as a movement locked into a continuous revolutionary struggle to transform society, rather than an "ordinary" political party. A common refrain of the ANC, therefore, is that its "National Democratic Revolution" (NDR) is conterminous with the national will, and that the party's position in society is primarily characterized as a "vanguard" of all the "motive forces" of society needed to fulfill it.[20] In its official documents the party therefore claims its mandate was "earned in the crucible of struggle and the battles for social transformation".[21] The most recent contends " … the ANC currently remains the only primary force capable of driving the project of social transformation"[22] in South Africa, which, it has recently argued, will take "50 to 100 years to usher in new era of industrialization and development".[23] Meanwhile, its leadership has gone further, repeatedly suggesting that its mandate is decreed by God, and that the party is destined to rule "until Jesus returns" (News24, 7 May 2016).

Rwanda

Similarly, since its ascent to power in the wake of the 1994 genocide, the RPF's leadership has positioned itself as the highly competent "liberators" of Rwanda and the only

movement capable of building a modern state. The liberation it promises Rwandans is not only a liberation from the violence of the genocide (a message which conferred substantial international legitimacy), but also a liberation from the "legacy of distrust, hatred and conflict" left by the Belgian "colonial masters" and which has continued to shape post-colonial politics ever since.[24] President Kagame and other RPF elites articulate a particular revolutionary discourse that associates their development vision with "liberation" from aid dependency, which they purport strips Africans of their dignity.[25] Given the country's pervasive poverty and aid dependence, these elites note that "liberation" from foreign interference will take time, granting the RPF an extended timeframe in which to implement its sweeping development agenda. Like the ANC, it claims to have an extraordinary mandate to fulfill this long-term transformation, a mandate that extends well beyond that of an ordinary political party confined to fixed term limits.

Authoritarian social contracts

A great many scholars have documented the authoritarian traits of both parties, particularly their control over media freedoms, suppression of dissent, hostility towards opposition, abuse of state resources, and single-party domination of elections. Less attention, however, has been paid to the ways these regimes cultivate consent and manage policy failings and popular demands for change. Indeed, social contracts have been documented between authoritarian regimes and their populations elsewhere in the world.[26] These contracts draw attention to the ways in which popular compliance might be consent-based and contingent, rather than simply reflecting the state's capacity to guarantee order through political suppression.[27] They form an intrinsic element of more durable dominant party governance argued to be responsive, adaptable, and malleable, rather than uncompromising, intransigent, and brittle.[28]

We argue here, that in the context of their "unfinished" missions of social transformation, an interim form of authoritarian social contract exists between these parties and their respective populations. These involve an offer of peace and development in exchange for political acquiescence towards the regime's long-term project of social transformation. Specifically, we identify two core pillars of the "offer":

- First, the offer of "peace" on the terms of social inclusivity defined by the regime, notably non-racialism under the ANC and Rwandicity in Rwanda;
- Second, the offer of incremental material betterment and social mobility through liberal economic ideology. While legitimacy might be sustained in part through the distribution of welfare, these tendencies are not all-pervasive and exist alongside more ambitious projects of industrialization and poverty alleviation.

While these contracts speak an inclusionary language of political and socioeconomic transformation, they are nonetheless undergirded by authoritarian political logics that serve to extend the regime's power.

South Africa

South Africa's supposed "miracle transition" from apartheid was celebrated by analysts around the world at the time. Central to the offer of peace was the establishment of both

the constitution and also the broad promotion of "non-racialism" and a "non-racist society" by the ANC.[29] The party has consistently emphasized its own centrality in securing such societal tolerances and freedoms, arguing that the party "weaved into the DNA of the new South Africa the African humanism of *ubuntu* and thus laid the foundation for a nation and society based on solidarity, accountability, tolerance and caring".[30] Reconciliation is, therefore, the first element of the authoritarian social contract. It is ostensibly a substantive offer of "peace" and "social cohesion" during a vulnerable transition period. However, as Caryn Abrahams argues, "the social cohesion project, being so intimately connected with nation-building, essentially instantiates a version of nation that is based on and produces a narrative that seeks to solidify the ANC's hegemony".[31]

Indeed, harnessing the imagery and iconography of the liberation struggle, and maintaining a monopoly on its reproduction, is central to the ANC's identity and its ability to extend an open-ended mandate. Both qualitative and quantitative research into South African party loyalties consistently identify the ongoing significance of racial identities in shaping voting behaviour, and in particular the importance of the ANC's identity as a racially inclusive liberation movement synonymous with bringing social peace.[32]

While the terms of inclusion into this social contract are nominally universal and enshrined in the constitution, the ANC nonetheless attempts to act as the ultimate arbiter regarding which expressions of citizenship are politically acceptable while the country is suspended in its liminal status. As Levitsky and Way have observed, liberation movement identity is important for maintaining the loyalty of party supporters and political elites because it heightens the "exit costs" for those who might potentially leave.[33] To party supporters, leaving the party holds the prospect of entering the political wilderness: assembling new political formations that can rival the historical legitimacy and resources of the ANC presents a formidable challenge, while the prospect of joining opposition parties stigmatized as "counter-revolutionaries" bent on returning society to minority rule is potentially unappealing.

Like many other regimes, the ANC has also sought to induce party loyalty and increase the "exit costs" for political dissidents through elite patronage. Patronage takes three main forms. First, political office within the state and party has become the gateway to resources and power, and is widely perceived as a reward for political loyalty.[34] Second, the ANC strives, as far as it can, to consolidate its position as a "strategic centre of power" in the wider economy; a gateway through which both capitalists and aspiring capitalists must navigate, not least through its control over government tendering, but also through the manner in which it has sought to regulate opportunities associated with Black Economic Empowerment initiatives.[35] However, one should not see the above forms of patronage as simply some Faustian pact between political elites and capital: it is the simultaneous commitment to mass patronage that underpins the longevity of the regime.

Notwithstanding the dire socioeconomic legacies inherited from apartheid, under successive ANC governments steady rates of GDP growth have underpinned incremental improvements to the livelihoods of many South Africans, including their access to basic services and improvements in the Human Development Index (HDI). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) notes, for example, that there has been "remarkable progress" since the transition to democracy, not only with regard

to growth and poverty reduction, but also in terms of reductions in extreme poverty and increases in educational enrollment.[36]

As we will elaborate further below, issues of inequality, poverty and unemployment continue to undermine developmental progress. In response, successive ANC governments have committed large resources to expanding access to social welfare as a means of alleviating the suffering of the population. This strategy follows broader trends in the Global South depicted as a "return of the state" wherein social protections (in the form of cash payments) have been extended alongside the pursuit of neoliberal macroeconomic strategies.[37] While the welfare system exhibits considerable shortcomings,[38] it is nonetheless argued to provide an "exceptional" social safety net when compared to other countries in the Global South.[39] These grants and pensions are often central to wider household livelihood strategies[40] and can facilitate entrepreneurial activity and/or give people the means to find work.[41] Although some scholars have dismissed this assistance as crude "tokenism",[42] such critiques miss the broader significance of such transfers. As James Ferguson notes, they "make it possible for the new state to provide highly visible and very effective support … a way of 'delivering' something tangible and valuable, even in the absence of jobs".[43]

The ANC has also attempted to sustain lasting loyalty from sections of South Africa's powerful organized working class in employment. Some scholars argue that a "class compromise" has emerged in the post-apartheid era in which the trade unions, and their relatively privileged membership, are now primarily concerned with protecting their own interests and what is effectively the political and economic status quo. As Nattrass and Seekings note, the fact that many unions have now formed investment companies themselves means that large sections of organized labour have benefited from the "blurred" distinctions between labour, capital and the state, often at the expense of the wider poor and unemployed.[44]

While the country remains in a liminal status and social transformation has only been partially achieved, these forms of elite and mass patronage have been used instrumentally to extend the party's control over social mobility and encourage political loyalty, raising the "exit costs" to would-be defectors. However, they are also simultaneously central to consolidating the ANC's ideological self-image as *the* fulcrum of positive social transformation and black empowerment.

Rwanda

Like South Africa, Rwanda underwent a massive political transition in the early 1990s. The genocide and war left many existing political parties, journalists, and civil society actors dead, displaced, or discredited, allowing the RPF to consolidate its tight control over all sectors of society. Positioning itself as the only legitimate guarantor of security, the immediate post-genocide transition period allowed the mostly-Tutsi RPF to legitimize itself as a political alternative for the mostly-Hutu population.

In place of the perceived divisiveness of competitive politics, the RPF offered security first, followed by a wholesale transformation of the country's society and economy. According to the party, this transformation could not be accomplished by relying on democratic reform, but was rather better managed through an authoritarian performance-based social contract between government and citizen.[45] Underpinning that contract has been the regime's developmental leadership. In 2000, the RPF unveiled the Vision 2020 development strategy, which sought to transform Rwanda into a

middle-income country over 20 years. Shortly thereafter, the regime began an intensive public consultation process, which culminated in a revised 2003 constitution stating a strong commitment to development and democratic governance, prohibiting ethnic politics, and introducing an affirmative action clause for women. These visions root the party's legitimacy in long-term structural change. Achieving these promises will take time and, indeed, a popular referendum led to a constitutional change that allowed President Kagame to run for (and win) a third term in 2017. Thus the transition period continues indefinitely, and the RPF cultivates this suspended transition period as a means of reproducing its power.

Because urban-based, Anglophone Tutsis – many of whom grew up in exile – comprise the majority of RPF leadership,[46] the party has worked to convince Rwandans that it is liberating the *entire* population from ethnic violence and economic dependence. To do so, it promotes the concept of *Rwandanicity* – the idea that "we are all Rwandans".[47] At a 2015 speech commemorating the 21st Liberation Day, Kagame reminded everyone, "Liberation is not for one person, or one particular group, it's for everybody therefore the fruits of liberation should benefit everyone equally".[48] Of course, after decades of ethnically-defined political violence, Rwandanicity has required heavy policing; since 2003, any public discussion of ethnicity has technically been outlawed on the basis that it promotes "divisionism". The government justifies its tight control over public discourse by referencing the important role of the media in mobilizing ethnic violence during the genocide.

In lieu of ethnic explanations of power and wealth, the RPF has instead promoted the virtues of hard work, self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and good performance.[49] This discourse is extremely important for the RPF as the existential survival of Tutsis depends on the de-politicization of ethnic labels. Good performance is integrated into governance structures with officials required to take part in *imihigo* (the signing of performance contracts), to submit to audits of job performance, and to take part in televised public ceremonies in which officials are rewarded or chastised for their performance.[50] The government has rolled out a number of informal and formal education projects to "sensitize" the population to such values as part of the broader "unity and reconciliation" project.[51] These values are integrated into the work of *gacaca* courts, *umuganda* (mandatory community work), *itorero* and *ingando* (re-education camps), and during national genocide commemoration ceremonies.[52]

Gacaca courts, in particular, were set up across the country as a form of transitional justice and became a central element of the RPF's project of consolidating an official genocide narrative and binding the Hutu population to a new social contract. These trials involved an implicit compromise where state assistance and support were offered to Hutus prepared to incriminate their collective identity and/or denounce family and friends for acts of genocide.[53] As Chakravarty notes, this compromise reflected "an informal elite-mass social contract that consolidated the new order by tying the new elites to their societal constituents, and demonstrating the benefits of cooperating with and advancing within the system".[54] This bargain was difficult to ignore as the RPF had entrenched itself as the central focal point of resource allocation in post-genocide Rwanda.

Like South Africa, Rwanda has also built an impressive social protection system since 1994. While GDP growth has hovered around 8% over the past decade and poverty rates have ostensibly decreased, the majority of Rwandans remain financially insecure, land poor, and unable to find non-farm employment.[55] Thus, many rural Rwandans

occupy a protracted position in that they have bought into the regime's emphasis on hard work, yet cannot quite move above the poverty line. In order to diminish feelings of exclusion among the rural majority, the RPF has prioritized social welfare. The 2011 National Social Protection Strategy outlines a series of programmes that provide cash transfers to the poorest sections of the population. The largest, the Vision 2020 Umurenge Program, now reaches over 200,000 households.[56] The government introduced these programmes to provide a safety-net to the most vulnerable after a 2005/6 survey found poverty was not falling rapidly enough to meet Vision 2020 targets. Social spending also allows the RPF to entrench a positive and impartial image within the population and cultivate a sense of the country's extraordinary circumstances, which require a prolonged period of social development.

Thus, despite its authoritarianism, the RPF has succeeded in shaping public perceptions of its extraordinary mandate. It is virtually impossible to visit Rwanda without noticing the enthusiasm for Kagame and the RPF among many citizens. Rwandans turned out in remarkable numbers to elect Kagame to the presidency in 2003, 2010, and 2017 (winning 95, 93, and 98% of the vote respectively). In 2015 over 3.7 million people in the country signed a petition in support of a constitutional referendum allowing Kagame to run for a third term. Lawmakers claimed they could find only ten unsupportive people in the entire country (*New York Times*, 18 December 2015). Of course, it is difficult to untangle genuine beliefs from manufactured consent, and the presidential elections and referendum were certainly fraught with coercion and incumbent advantage – few outside observers would consider them "free" or "fair".[57] Yet it would be too simple to say that ordinary Rwandans were forced into voting for Kagame. Instead, many Rwandans have bought into the RPF's project of "reimagining" Rwanda and believe Kagame is the best person to lead it.[58]

Limits to "revolution"

While both South Africa and Rwanda have made substantial progress in terms of GDP and HDI progress, both societies nonetheless exhibit multidimensional poverty and intersectional inequalities. South Africa is now the most unequal country in the world in terms of income inequality. A major contributing factor is the pervasive levels of unemployment which, according to the expanded definition, means that almost nine million South Africans are unemployed – equating to a 35.6% rate of unemployment.[59] These problems have been compounded by rampant corruption that has generated debilitating internecine factionalism within the ANC, compromising its organizational integrity and its capacity to govern effectively.[60] This has generated widespread popular frustrations that have found expression in a diverse and growing protest culture.

Rwanda has received global acclaim for its success in reducing inequality and poverty: between the 2011–12 and 2013–14 household living conditions surveys, Rwanda's Gini coefficient dropped from 0.49 to 0.45 and its poverty rate fell from 44.9% to 39.1%.[61] However, many qualitative studies have raised doubts about the veracity of the government's statistics.[62] Today, Rwandans struggle to find wage employment and secure sufficient land for agriculture. This difficulty is due, in part, to rapidly increasing population density; as of 2016, there were 483 Rwandans per square kilometer (up from 321 in 2002).[63] While the government of Rwanda has gone about "re-imagining" the rural landscape through the imposition of crop

intensification and land consolidation policies, the push for rapid modernization and professionalization in the agricultural sector risks exasperating and increasing inequality.[64] In urban areas too, the gap between the government's entrepreneurship promotion discourses and the reality of urban livelihoods puts pressure on the regime's ability to manage expectations about the pace of change within the country. Youth, in particular, are sceptical of their ability to participate in the "New Rwanda" and often exhibit a fatalism about their futures.[65]

Given these limits to the revolutionary progress promised by both parties, both must productively manage discontent by satiating the frustrations of the discontented through their social welfare programmes discussed above – as well as through the processes of political abjection described below.

Political abjection

Paradoxically, these regimes exploit the liminality of their societies, characterized by their incomplete transitions to democracy and incomplete social and economic transformations, to control expressions of citizenship – and, as a result, the terms of entry into the sphere of "acceptable" politics. This control involves the bifurcation of society into "deserving" and politically abject citizenry. Where the poor accept their lot or channel their frustrations in ways that do not directly oppose the party, they are not only tolerated but often venerated: they are the noble and hardworking poor whose poverty is to be collectively mourned but not utilized as a platform for oppositional politics. However, should they politicize their plight in ways that oppose the party directly, citizens will often experience a form of *political abjection*. This approach builds on the work of Kristeva and Tyler who analyse how certain individuals and social groups are discursively constructed as abject "revolting subjects" who, in one way or another, represent an existential threat to society's social and moral health.[66] Drawing on Wacquant's account of how neoliberal statecraft requires the constant fuelling of "social insecurity" through a proliferation of fears about economic insecurity, terrorism and mass violence,[67] Tyler argues that regimes create figures of "national abjects" who are employed to incite and legitimize "tough" economic measures and punitive governmental responses, even when these policies frequently curtail the freedoms of all citizens and further impoverish democracy.[68]

Here, we develop the concept of political abjection as a sustained political strategy wherein opponents of these parties are not simply marginalized, but discursively ejected from the "acceptable" sphere of politics and stigmatized as génocidaires, colonial stooges, advocates of apartheid, or as ultra-leftists bent on destroying the social foundations of their states. Like nationalist parties in other sub-Saharan African countries and elsewhere,[69] these parties' continued rule is presented as conterminous with the nation's prosperity and security. This situation creates an "us vs. them" dichotomy where opposition to, or defection from, the liberation movement is characterized as unpatriotic treachery and/or evidence of collusion with a coterie of dangerous others intent on returning society to mass violence.[70] These parties thus play an extended role of ideological gatekeeping: striving as best they can to control access to the legitimate political marketplace, mediating which groups can legitimately contend for power and which are to be considered politically abject. Though to varied degrees and with differing tactics, these parties discursively legitimate illiberal means to police "exceptional" threats.

South Africa

The ANC has attempted to harness the power of discourses of social cohesion and non-racialism to establish a form of gatekeeping political power whereby it polices (as far as it can) the space of "acceptable" political contestation. As Caryn Abrahams argues, the ANC's control over definitions of social cohesion and non-racialism "recreates and entrenches the ANC's narrative that it is that vanguard for nation" because when it is made synonymous with nation-building and social protections, it "establishes the hegemony of the ANC government, and at the same time delegitimizes all other pursuits of social cohesion outside this discrete party-political space".[71]

Opposition parties are regularly stigmatized by senior leaders in the ANC-led alliance as harbouring ambitions to bring back apartheid. ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe, for example, has argued that the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) is part of an "anti-majoritarian offensive" aiming to return South Africa to minority rule (*Mail and Guardian*, 19 December 2014). ANC officials have repeatedly argued that the "DNA of the DA is racist" and affirm that only a vote for the ANC can prevent "the Boers" from returning to power (*Mail and Guardian*, 11 November 2013). Such narratives are given credence by DA leaders who have caused rifts within their party by publicly romanticizing apartheid politicians and downplaying the negative impacts of colonialism (AlJazeera, 2 April 2017).

In response to protests and dissent, sections of civil society are singled out and discursively elevated in their significance – usually well beyond their aspirations or material potential – as attempting to stir up frustrations and launch a broader offensive against the democratic state. The party claims that we can witness the emergence of an "anti-majoritarian offensive" threatening to bring with it "the overthrow of government and forceful seizure of power" by opposition groups.[72] Senior party officials have also spoken of foreign agendas – most notably the United States – which they argue seek to bring about "regime change" by mobilizing vulnerable and naive South Africans against the ANC (*ENCA*, 11 May 2016).

This strategy has been deployed with protest movements including *Abahlali Base-Mjondolo*,[73] the Marikana platinum strikers[74] and, more recently, the #feesmustfall protests by students campaigning for free university education. Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande, for example, claimed that "There is something sinister behind the student protests, it is clear there is a third force that has hijacked this campaign" (News24, 12 October 2016). Echoing such sentiments, Mantashe claimed the protests were being driven by foreign actors promoting "regime change" (*DispatchLive*, 4 July 2017), while leaders of the ANC Youth League claimed that foreign "imperialists" and "White supremacists" were behind this "third force" operation (News24, 24 January 2016).

We should not dismiss such discourses as empty rhetoric for two reasons. First, they possess a potent nationalist message that helps to consolidate the identity of the party and one that resonates strongly among voters. A recent poll found that over half of black South Africans under the age of 34 believed that if elected, it was the DA's policy to reinstitute apartheid (*Mail & Guardian*, 11 November 2013), while polling data consistently reveals how significant race and racial attitudes remain "defining factors of the South African political system".[75] Second, the party claims that attacks

on the ruling party (whether real or not) behoove the ANC to develop authoritarian tactics "that obviate the impact and attractiveness of these trickeries".[76] They warn, for example, such threats could generate an "increasing reliance by the state on security agencies and repression" and that these opposition campaigns and protests "might goad the state into precipitate action", citing the shooting of striking workers at the Marikana platinum mine in 2012 as an "extreme" example.[77]

An important aim of these discourses is not only to try and discipline society, but to also maintain discipline and unity within the party itself, including among its wider allies. Under successive ANC presidents, trade union allies challenging the ANC's economic trajectory have been derided as "ultra-leftists" and even "counter-revolutionaries" who were not only deaf to reason, but also bent on destabilizing South Africa and plotting "regime change".[78] This tactic highlights a limit to these discourses, however: when they are wielded publicly against internal factions of the party they undermine the coherency of the party's identity while also diluting their potency against external threats.

Rwanda

While the RPF has attempted to bring Rwandans into its sphere of influence through its liberation discourse, welfare, patronage, and through inclusion in the demarcated political forums discussed above, it has also engaged in parallel processes of abjection, in which people are cast out and cast down from acceptable political life. Forms of abjection include discursive framings of certain Rwandans as backward or "unmodern", or threatening to return the country to violence. They are also material as state security forces harass, arrest, and even kill those who threaten to destabilize RPF control. All Rwandans – rich and poor – who do not fully "buy in" to the RPF's agenda are vulnerable to ideological and material policing.[79] There is no middle ground. Critically, those who fall out of favour or explicitly critique the RPF's claim to power are accused of the ultimate sin: being genocide deniers. The RPF acknowledges that space for dissent is limited, but insists that consensual politics are necessary in the current context to prevent a return to violence.

In political speeches, Kagame associates foreign critiques of his actions with colonialism, stating, "It is history repeating itself in a different form. It is a continuation of slavery, of colonialism, of arrogance, bigotry and telling the Africans, wagging a finger at them and saying 'this is where you belong'."[80] Kagame silences domestic critics by re-directing their critiques back onto them, accusing them of being "bad Rwandans", having problems – or worse, being genocide deniers. Bert Ingelaere describes this technique of discursive policing as a sort of "magic syllogism" whereby regime officials refute accusations of wrongdoing by saying that the alleged act is counter to domestic legislation or the regime's stated policies and goals and thus could never have merit.[81]

This discursive policing has deferred many Rwandans' aspirations for inclusion in the broader modernity project. Many have come to occupy a liminal status wherein they remain hopeful they will one day benefit from development, yet have not seen this progress in their daily lives.[82] The results are a weak civil society and collective silence about the human rights abuses underway. Activists who have publicly drawn attention to repression have been silenced in harmful ways – threatened, fired from work, denied work permits, jailed, beaten, and even killed.[83] Others targeted include

journalists, local officials, members of the opposition Green Party, and those working with foreign non-governmental organizations, researchers, and human rights organizations.[84] Such discursive policing is quickly supplemented by physically violent expulsions, creating a group of citizens who are now "enemies of Rwanda". The RPF executes its violent "expulsions" for a host of reasons: to "clean up" the country; to remove dissenters; to punish non-compliance; and to police what it means to be part of the "New Rwanda".

Creating the "New Rwanda" has also required the expulsion of certain Rwandans from physical spaces in order to "clean up" the country and make it appear more amenable to modernity and foreign investment. In Kigali and elsewhere, local officials levy fines on Rwandans for myriad infractions, including failing to wear proper shoes in public or "looking dirty".[85] The expulsion of vulnerable populations from the view of international visitors has been particularly egregious. For example, after plans for the "New Kigali" were announced in 2007, major development projects in the city's centre necessitated the demolition of approximately 70% of all dwellings, most of which were in poor neighborhoods.[86] Residents were resettled in more rural sites, and security forces rounded-up remaining "undesirable" – such as sex workers, street children, and the homeless – and detained them or sent them to *Iwawa*, an island in Lake Kivu near Democratic Republic of Congo.[87] Such "clean ups" have made Kigali legible to international visitors, which have repeatedly heralded it as the cleanest city in Africa.

Physical expulsions also take deadly form. Since 1994, journalists, human rights agencies, and regime defectors have accused the RPF of myriad extrajudicial assassinations inside and outside the country. David Himbara, a former high-ranking party member who has since defected, noted that since 2012, the RPF's targets have moved beyond opposition politicians and journalists to become more random. Recent targets include everyone from Kagame's personal physician, who was murdered in jail, to Gustave Makonene, the country director of Transparency International, to leading businessman Assinapol Rwigara.[88] In 2014, Human Rights Watch documented dozens of dead bodies that were found floating in a Burundian lake downstream from Rwanda, while in 2016, it documented the extrajudicial murders of 37 people suspected of petty crimes.[89]

These assassinations and extrajudicial murders have not yet led to significant changes in Western policy towards Rwanda, which continues to receive over one billion dollars in official development assistance annually.[90] Nor have human rights abuses dented the RPF's electoral support. The RPF has thus effectively struck a balance; it is not *so* authoritarian as to provoke international scorn yet remains authoritarian *enough* to secure its hold on power for years to come. The durability of this liminal status, in the context of slow and uneven growth, therefore depends on the RPF's continued success in maintaining popular expectations, bringing people into its favour and expelling those who pose a threat.

Conclusion

Both the RPF and ANC have struggled to accomplish the political and socioeconomic transformation of their societies and thus address all of the unreconciled, structural tensions inherited from the former regimes. Yet paradoxically these parties have incentives to stress the notion that their societies remain in a liminal status from

which a "revolutionary" transition remains elusive, and thus which warrant a form of paternalistic party governance. This notion is central to their claim to an extraordinary mandate to govern through a blend of democratic and authoritarian norms. On the one hand, their domestic and international legitimacy is premised upon maintaining a semblance of democracy. On the other hand, their power as political parties is reproduced not simply through the practice of democratic elections on a "level playing field": both parties – to varying degrees – draw upon a "menu of manipulation"[91] in their efforts to regenerate their power and legitimacy, including the extension of an authoritarian social contract and the abjectification of political opponents. Thus, while citizens of both states ostensibly exercise some degree of *de jure* rights of citizenship contained within their constitutions, the *de facto* democratic space within which they can exercise them is curtailed, to varying degrees, by the ruling parties' political predicament.

Hybridity is not necessarily a transitory phenomenon, nor does it reflect a form of permanent political stasis. Rather, these ruling parties actively utilize the liminal space betwixt and between authoritarianism and democracy to sustain support in a context and era in which achieving real economic and social transformation is slow and challenging. It is therefore important to foreground our discussions of democratization in African countries not with teleological assumptions of regime directionality, but rather with the study of regime liminality, hybridity, and ambiguity, within a broader discussion about the slow pace and temporality of contemporary economic transformations. Such a focus will allow us to better clarify the foundations upon which party power and legitimacy are currently premised. We contend that other ruling parties, such as the National Resistance Movement in Uganda or the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front in Ethiopia, utilize some (or all) of the same strategies associated with productive liminality, albeit with varying degrees of intensity and capacity for success, as may regimes in other regions of the world. Premising power in this way of course leaves these regimes vulnerable to delegitimization: consistently employing the idea that their societies remain caught between periods of history reflects a holding strategy in the absence of their capacity to secure long-term popular legitimacy through radical social, economic and political redress for the past.

Notes

1. Diamond, "Democratic Rollback," 36–48.
2. Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," 6–17; Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party*.
3. Levitsky and Way, "Myth of Democratic Recession," 48.
4. Ibid., 45–46.
5. See Cheeseman, *Democracy in Africa*.
6. Rostow, "Stages of Economic Growth," 1–16.
7. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," 12–34.
8. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics"; Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*; Mkandawire, "Neopatrimonialism."
9. *The Economist*, "Democracy Index 2017," https://infographics.economist.com/2018/Democrac yIndex/
10. Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis," https://freedomhouse.org/ report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018
11. Bayart and Ellis, "Africa in the World."

12. Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes?," 399–423; Wigell, "Mapping 'Hybrid Regimes'," 230–250.
13. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* 3–19.
14. Thomassen, "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality," 5.
15. Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2018"; Mangcu, *To the Brink*.
16. For example, while Paul Kagame has concentrated power around himself in Rwanda, closing down dissent even within his own party, the ANC continues to promote the regular turnover of its leadership through its internal democratic processes. Indeed, the recent election of Cyril Ramaphosa as party president, and his subsequent assumption of the state presidency, has already signalled a crack-down on corruption, although the wider implications of this leadership change are yet to be seen.
17. Bellin, "Contingent Democrats," 200.
18. Levitsky and Way, "Beyond Patronage," 869–889.
19. Lynch, "Democracy in Trouble," 1–22.
20. ANC, "Strategy and Tactics."
21. Ibid.
22. ANC, "Balance of Forces," 14.
23. ANC, "The Second Transition?," 37.
24. RPF-INKOTANYI, Party "Unity" Statement, http://rpfinkotanyi.rw/index.php?id=319. Accessed October 2017.
25. Mann and Berry, "Understanding."
26. Rimlinger, "Social Policy."; Forrat, "The Authoritarian Welfare State."
27. Cook, "The Soviet Social Contract."
28. Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party*.
29. Everatt, "Non-Racialism."
30. ANC, "The Second Transition?," 5.
31. Abrahams, "Twenty Years," 96; Suttner, "Revisiting," 20.
32. Ferree, *Framing the Race*; Paret, "Contested ANC Hegemony."
33. Levitsky and Way, "Beyond Patronage."
34. Ndletyana, Mkhalemele, and Mathekga, "Patronage Politics."
35. Beresford, "Power."
36. UNDP, "About South Africa."
37. Carnes and Mares, "Explaining the 'Return of the State'."
38. Vally, "Insecurity," 965–982.
39. Seekings and Nattrass, *Policy, Politics and Poverty*.
40. Sagner and Mtati, "Pension Sharing," 402.
41. Steinberg,"Grants."
42. Bond, "Social Policy."
43. Ferguson, "Give a Man a Fish," 10.
44. Nattrass and Seekings, "Trade Unions."
45. Chemouni, "The Politics."
46. Reyntjens, *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs Annuaire*.
47. RPF-INKOTANYI, Party Website, http://rpfinkotanyi.rw/index.php?id=319. Accessed October 2017.
48. Kagame, "Kwibohora 21."
49. Mann and Berry, "Understanding."
50. Gaynor, "Decentralisation."
51. Purdeková, *Making Ubumwe*.
52. Straus and Waldorf, *Remaking Rwanda*.
53. Chakravarty, *Investing in Authoritarian Rule*, 320.
54. Ibid., 320.
55. Republic of Rwanda, *EICV4*.
56. World Bank, "Rwanda Overview."
57. Reyntjens, *Political Governance*.
58. Thomson, *Whispering Truth*.
59. StatsSA, "QLFS Q4."
60. Beresford, "Power," 226–248.

61. Republic of Rwanda, *EICV4*.
62. Ansoms et al., "Statistics Versus Livelihoods."
63. World Bank, "Rwanda Overview."
64. Ansoms, "Post-Genocide Economic Reconstruction."
65. Sommers, *Stuck*; Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade."
66. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*; Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*.
67. Wacquant, "Crafting the Neoliberal State," 197.
68. Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 9–10.
69. Lynch, "Democracy in Trouble."
70. Dorman, "Post-Liberation Politics."
71. Abrahams, "Twenty Years," 105–106.
72. ANC, "Reflections," 14.
73. Pithouse, "A Politics of the Poor," 78.
74. Beresford, *South Africa's Political Crisis*, 53–56.
75. Ferree, *Framing the Race*, 242.
76. ANC, "Reflections," 14.
77. Ibid., 14.
78. Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki*, 264.
79. Gready, "With Us or Against Us."
80. Kagame, "Remarks Following the Arrest of Lt. General Karenzi Karake."
81. Ingelaere, *Inside Rwanda's Gacaca Courts*, 7.
82. Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade."
83. HRW, "Why Not Call This Place a Prison?"
84. Reyntjens, "Rwanda, Ten Years On"; Thomson, *Whispering Truth*.
85. Ingelaere, *The Ruler's Drum*.
86. Goodfellow, "Rwanda's Political Settlement."
87. HRW, "Why Not Call This Place a Prison?"
88. Himbara, Testimony to Congress. Rwigara's daughter, Diane Rwigara, attempted to run against Kagame in the 2017 presidential elections, but was deemed an unacceptable candidate and has now been charged with "inciting insurrection".
89. HRW, "All Thieves."
90. World Bank, "Rwanda Overview."
91. Schedler, "Menu of Manipulation," 36–50.

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