

## **Thinking about SWOP in our post-apartheid world: research, theory, social justice and ‘violent democracy’**

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I will present the beginnings of an essay, posing the question whether the concept of ‘violent democracy’ provides an adequate lens through which to think about the emerging post-apartheid order and its disorders, and at the same time whether it provides an adequate frame for the SWOP research programme in its investigation of the ‘making and unmaking of social order’. This essay grapples firstly with the multiple layers of social order and contestation that characterise our current political reality – firstly the constitutional settlement and its institutional pillars, secondly racial transformation and the national question, thirdly the emerging informal political system, and fourth the entrenchment of patriarchy in formal and informal institutions, situating these clashing and dissonant orders in relation to an emerging complex of corporate and elite patterns of accumulation. It then moves on to identify some of the lines of enquiry emerging within SWOP in different research clusters and consider how we might think about the challenge of achieving an analytical synthesis capable of generating fresh and productive insights into the nature of post-apartheid reality, through a research programme with diverse lines of enquiry. Finally, I touch on two issues that are central to the SWOP project, namely the dilemmas of critical engagement with the project of social change through collaborating with social actors beyond the academy, and the challenge of theory-making in the global South. I am presenting this ‘essay’ with the hope of provoking engagement across and beyond SWOP about the nature of our post-apartheid world and our research strategy for getting to grips with its deeper dynamics and meanings. We hope the new SWOP seminar will serve as a vibrant forum for exploring exactly these issues.