Violence and Violence Research in Africa South of the Sahara

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This review presents the major lines of investigation regarding violence in Africa since the Cold War. After a historical introduction to the development of violent phenomena and their political contexts, diverse issues such as civil war, democratization, vigilantism, and the role of youth are assessed. It is argued that recent research has produced important insights by re-focusing on violent phenomena beyond the state. Yet despite the increasing number of non-state violent actors active on the African continent, to speak of a "privatization" of violence may be premature.

Since Hegel, Achille Mbembe writes, Africa has been described as a space of "catastrophe, convulsions, disaster already happened or about to happen – of breakdown, instant terror. It matters little that the words do not relate any precise event, provided that they preserve, for the phenomena allegedly being described, stark immediacy, and testify to the primacy of sensation and the utterness of the region's disorder" (Mbembe 2001, 177). It is to overcome this specific imaginary that we must begin this review article of research on violence in Africa south of the Sahara by exploring the historicity of the issue. A historical introduction to the development of violent phenomena and the parallel evolution of political institutions is required, because forms of violence are always closely related to the respective political context. Moreover, such an approach linking the study of violence with a historical sociology of the political may be most fruitful for further research.

Our second concern in this contribution is to outline major research directions during the two decades since the end of the Cold War, during which dramatic change in the African socio-political landscape has been accompanied by a refocusing of Africanist scholarship. In particular, we focus on the fields of civil war, vigilantism and security in the urban space, and youth. Our decision has to do with an important claim regarding the supposed privatization of violence in

the last two decades. While parts of Africa have undergone a process of democratization, civil wars devastated other areas. The debates around these developments can be best brought into a single framework of analysis by analyzing the fields of study we have chosen. We argue that since the Cold War, research on violence in Africa has made important advances by focusing more closely on „non-political" forms of violence, such as social and criminal violence. In this context, the big number of non-state-armed groups, the newly found agency of youth, but also the increasing number of security companies and communal vigilante groups has been interpreted as a privatization of violence regulation. However, it is evident from the books and articles reviewed here that it is misleading to discard the role of the state. Whatever the form of „private" violence, public authorities play an important role, whether as targets, instigators, profiteers, or regulators. Moreover, even supposedly private violence has important repercussions on the form of political order in the respective society. The argument of a privatization (Abrahamsen and Williams 2007) may thus be misleading, given that the distinction between public and private in neopatrimonial societies is by definition always blurred (Médard 1991; Bayart 1993).

Readers will miss other important fields of inquiry. For example, we do not deal specifically with the fields of peace

mediation and peacekeeping, with sexual violence in war, or with terrorism. The question of gender, meanwhile, recurs throughout. As Cynthia Cockburn argues, gender is an ordering principle that pervades all power systems (2001, 15). Instead of adding a specific section on gender and violence, we therefore opted to treat gender as a cross-cutting analytical perspective.

Even despite these chosen topical limitations, there are immense difficulties in writing a review article on violence research in Africa. The first problem is that for disciplines ranging from anthropology and history to political science (from which most works reviewed here stem), violence is an underlying theme across a wide range of material, but rather rarely the explicit issue of analytical concern. Whether we are concerned with armed conflict, the formation of the state, or even supposedly unrelated issues such as the development of health provision (Hunt 1991, 1999), violence obviously plays an important role. However, in most research physical assault is mentioned only in passing or even remains unacknowledged. Many authors do not directly deal with the actual physical action and reaction, but describe instead what leads to the act and what happens thereafter.

What is lost in such distanced or indirect treatment of assault on individual physical integrity is the effects on the person concerned, but also the psychological impact on society and political order. The strong symbolic significance of violence is mirrored by the extensive media coverage of certain phenomena. Media reports tend to sensationalize violence, exploiting the horror experienced by victims and observers. While such sensationalization hardly contributes to a better understanding of causes or outcomes, it nonetheless provides an important clue to the emblematic repercussions of violence: The horror and trauma on the one side, and the immediate experience of power on the other. Such aspects, and their consequences, deserve more analytical scrutiny. Thus a direct examination of violent acts and their immediate and indirect consequences is a research desideratum. Nonetheless, academic works that deal with violence from an analytical distance have also contributed many insights.

The second reason for the complexity of writing about violence research in Africa is rooted in the moral im-

plications of the topic. Violence is an emotive issue, and cannot possibly be described without at least an implicit normative evaluation. Such normative evaluation, in turn, leads to the issue of legitimate representation. The study of violence in Africa, as in other postcolonial spaces, is closely related to questions of perspective. Mahmood Mamdani, for example, relates contemporary political discourse on violence to the colonial imaginary of the non-Western savage and the Western savior (Mamdani 2009). At the same time there is a need for differentiation between the portrayal of Africa as a region of meaningless brutality, and an adequate criticism of illegitimate uses of violence by authorities (Mbembe 2001, 24–101).

Even though we have sought to emphasize studies by African scholars, these voices are still underrepresented due to the weak institutionalization of violence research on the continent itself. African universities, starting from a weak base at independence, expanded their activities during the brief period until the late 1970s. Thereafter, economic crisis, increasingly authoritarian regimes, and societal turmoil drained material and political support. Consultancies for international development agencies supplement many university teachers' income, but leave little space for freely developed research agendas. Private universities, which are blossoming, concentrate on teaching rather than research. Many academics leave their home institutions for Europe and North America, and accordingly most research on violence in Africa is undertaken in institutions outside the continent. Universities and research centers in Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, and the United States contribute most. The biggest exception is South Africa, which provides extensive cutting-edge academic scrutiny of violent phenomena.

Regardless of where they are born, socialized, or employed, there are very few social scientists researching Africa. Clearly, given the comparatively high rate of political violence on the continent and the scope of its problems, violent phenomena are understudied. Large parts of the continent, in particular rural regions, remain practically untouched by academic scrutiny. The surprise about insurgencies, such as in West Africa in the early 1990s, and more recently also in Darfur, testifies to this neglect. These con-

flicts were of course not at all sudden outbreaks of extreme and organized mass violence. Rather, political and socio-economic developments leading to civil strife remained unnoticed, sometimes for decades. On-going attempts to install "conflict early-warning systems" are doomed to failure if the quantity of scientific research is not increased. On the other hand, certain countries are comparatively well covered, in particular those that are relatively prosperous: South Africa again, as well as Nigeria and Kenya. What French colonialists termed "l'Afrique inutile," those parts of the continent without exploitable resources, remains virtually out of the frame.

The structural limits of Africanist scholarship are also reflected in the scarcity and unreliability of quantitative data. The Africanist tradition, rooted in anthropology, is reflected in most of the literature cited in this review, which is almost without exception based on qualitative methods. This tradition also leans heavily toward single case studies. Systematic comparisons between African societies remain scarce, still less with other continents. Only the field of development studies produces its own set of dependable data. Afrobarometer (http://www.afrobarometer.org/) is virtually the only institution providing cross-nationally comparable opinion surveys, but covers little more than a dozen countries. Future research should build on the existing qualitative strengths of Africanist tradition, but also add quantitative and comparative methods more systematically.

1. Violence and Political Institutions in African History

Given the scarcity of written sources, very little is known about violence in pre-colonial Africa. It is commonly argued that before the arrival of imperialist forces, warfare and violence were limited. Without firearms, violence was restricted to face-to-face interaction. The few large centralized political domains that existed alongside many stateless societies made use of violence to uphold and expand their rule. The abundance of land in the sparsely populated continent, however, allowed for flight and migration as a widespread reaction to violent suppression (Vansina 1966; Smith 1989; Reid 2002; Chrétien 2003).

These circumstances changed dramatically with the advent of capitalist incursions. The transatlantic slave trade after

1492 disrupted societies, particularly along the West African coast. While mercantilist elites at the coast thrived as intermediaries, the violent hunt for human merchandise had devastating consequences for inland societies. Societies in the Sahel also suffered from the decline of trans-Saharan trade, as sea trade favored coastal societies (Rodney 1972; Wirz 1972; Lovejoy 2000; Fisher 2001; Iliffe 1995, 127–58). On the eastern side of the continent, the slave trade had for centuries been the domain of merchants operating in the Indian Ocean. Their activities peaked in the nineteenth century, when the Waarabu traders established commercial/political domains stretching from Zanzibar to the Congo River (Whiteley 1971; Page 1974; Iliffe 1979; Cooper 1997; Fair 1998; Fabian 2000).

The West African jihads and the Southern African „Mfecane" represented potential indigenous trajectories toward modern state systems, including „modern" violence. The West African Islamic jihads, beginning with the revolutionary founding of the Caliphate of Sokoto in 1806, succeeded in establishing prosperous statehood based on religious legitimacy. The second major process of violent state formation in this period, the Mfecane, was a large-scale migration movement in Southern Africa from after 1800. It has long been traced to the expansion of the Zulu kingdom. Newer historiography acknowledges the major impact of Great Britain's acquisition of the Cape Colony in 1806, and subsequent Afrikaner treks into the continent (Hamilton 1995; Etherington 2001; Cobbing 1988; Iliffe 1995, 168–80; Robinson 2000).

The societal and ecological crisis in East and Central Africa took full effect with the final expansion of colonialism from after 1880. Colonialism meant violent conquests, rebellions, massacres and genocide, and previously unknown forms of labor exploitation and social stratification, as well as devastating epidemics and famines. By the beginning of the twentieth century the whole continent had been colonized by European powers, apart from Liberia and Ethiopia. The Europeans held the unmatchable advantage of machine guns, which they used to kill in unprecedented numbers. Notably, African mercenaries formed the rank-and-file of almost all colonial armies, creating the basis for the central political role of African armies after decolonization (Lyons

1985; Headrick 1994; Trotha 1994; Iliffe 1995, 187-211; Glassman 1995; Hochschild 1999; Chrétien 2003; Hoppe 2003; Leopold 2005a; Pesek 2005; Deutsch 2006).

Despite the relative briefness of colonial rule, capitalism, urbanization and labor migration, political reorganization and the reconfiguration of gender, ethnicity, religion, and family bonds led to profound changes in Africa's social structures. While economic exploitation and racial segregation were often violently enforced, especially in the form of forced and indentured labor, the period between 1918 and 1945 was marked by a relative quiet, a "pax coloniale." Large-scale anti-colonial revolts were avoided, as the old and new elites of African chiefs, teachers, clerks, clergymen, traders, farmers, non-commissioned officers, and trade union leaders instead used largely peaceful means to conduct political and social conflict (Cooper 2002, 20–65; Iliffe 1995, 213–44).

After the Second World War, social stratification and political conflict between independence movements and colonial authorities led to an increase in organized violence. In Kenya, land scarcity and British repression sparked the Mau-Mau guerilla war from 1952 to 1960 (Buijtenhuijs 1982; Kanogo 1987; Presley 1988; Berman and Lonsdale 1992, 225-467). In French Cameroon, armed insurrection began in 1955 (Mbembe 1996). Overall, however, decolonization was characterized by the absence of large-scale organized violence. Weakened by war, pressurized by the new superpowers, facing protest movements in many colonies and military defeat in Algeria and Indochina, the European colonial powers agreed to independence rather rapidly. By 1965 most countries in East and West Africa were independent (Cooper 2002, 66-84; Hargreaves 1996; Rotberg and Mazrui 1970). Only Portugal and the southern African settler colonies clung to the status quo; the latter region became a major battleground of the Cold War. Wars of independence, externally stoked civil wars, and uprisings against white domination lasted until 1980 in Zimbabwe, until 1990 in Namibia, until 1992 in Mozambique, until 1994 in South Africa, and until 2002 in Angola (Lodge 1983, 1991; Ranger 1985; Katjavivi 1988; Geffray 1990; Price 1991; Birmingham 1992; Kriger 1992; Chabal 2002; Cooper 2002, 133–54).

The initial optimism of the 1960s nationalist mobilization quickly waned, especially in Central, East and North-East Africa. Given the frequency of civil wars, an account of violence in post-colonial Africa has primarily to describe internal civil strife. The first country to slide into outright chaos was the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a litany of military mutiny, coups, external intervention, provincial secession, and insurgency began immediately after independence in 1960. It was 1965 before stable but authoritarian rule re-emerged (Young 1966, 1994; Young and Turner 1985; Callaghy 1984; Schatzberg 1980, 1988; Coquery-Vidrovitch, Forest, and Weiss 1987; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002; Birmingham and Martin 1998). In neighboring Burundi and Rwanda, colonially hardened ethnic conflict set genocidal dynamics in motion (Lemarchand 1977, 1994). In Sudan and Chad, civil wars across ancient boundaries between northern and southern political figurations began shortly after independence and lasted, with short periods of peace, for decades (Woodward 1990; Daly and Sikaninga 1993; Buijtenhuijs 1978, 1987). Ethiopia slipped into wars of secession in 1962, followed by revolution, civil war, famine, and finally inter-state warfare with Eritrea (1998–2000), which had won independence in 1991 (Clapham 1988; de Waal 1991). Uganda endured military dictatorship in the 1970s, followed by civil war until 1985 (Mazrui 1975; Mamdani 1996). The sources of these manifold wars and armed conflicts were, of course, very heterogeneous. Some common important factors can nonetheless be discerned in most of the armed conflicts, such as rivalries between Cold War superpowers entangled with internal elite competition; older and colonially induced group conflicts based on regionalism, ethnicity or religion; economic decline; and repression of social movements by authoritarian or militarized states. Much easier access to modern weaponry, which had been almost unavailable during the colonial era, allowed insurgents to confront regimes. Only a few states in eastern and southern Africa – most outstandingly Tanzania, but also Kenya, Malawi and Zambia – managed to uphold relative peace.

West Africa, on the other hand, was largely spared warfare between 1960 and 1989, with only the Biafra secession and war-induced famine in Nigeria (1967–70) as the first African humanitarian crisis resulting from violent conflict to be widely reported by Western media (de St. Jorre 1972;

Harrison and Palmer 1986). The conflicts that existed in most West African countries, often between coastal and inland regions, were initially managed by constitutional means (Iliffe 1995, 248). However, many states experienced military coups, dictatorship, or one-party rule (Rotberg and Mazrui 1970; Iliffe 1979; Cruise O'Brien, Dunn, and Rathbone 1989; Nugent 2004, 204–59). In 1989 only seven out of forty-five states south of the Sahara were politically pluralistic (Iliffe 1995, 261).

2. Research on Violence in Africa after the Cold War

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened up new spaces for political reform and inspired many movements for democratic change. Economic decay had already hollowed out political systems based on neo-patrimonial legitimacy. Long-term decline stemmed from the failure of state-led development in the 1960s, steep increases in the price of oil imports, and falling prices for Africa's export products in the 1970s, as well as a credit crunch and externally imposed structural adjustment programs in the 1980s (Iliffe 1995, 252-56; Cooper 2002, 91–132; on post-independence economies see also Hyden 1980; Bates 1981; Collier 1990; MacGaffey 1991; Scott 1998, 223–61; Guyer 2004; on neo-patrimonialism in Africa see Médard 1991; Bayart 1993; Chabal and Daloz 1999).

The excluded and marginalized (often urban youth) took to the streets. Frequently trade unions, churches, and re-emerging opposition parties took the lead. Very few regimes resisted their demands outright, and democratization became a relative, if hard won and often inchoate success story in many countries (Nugent 2004, 368–433). Yet the end of the Cold War did not lead everywhere to liberal democratic dispensations. A new wave of civil wars rolled across parts of West, Central and North-East Africa. Mirroring the South African experience of the Cold War, these civil wars were closely connected and reinforced one another. But unlike the Cold War era these wars were less obviously driven by the geostrategic motivations of African states and external allies. Social, political, and economic pressures within societies seemed to play a more important role.

Democratization processes in many countries and the related wave of violent conflict after the Cold War brought societal developments beyond the narrow confines of international and state politics into focus. Both processes were set in motion by societal groups, namely social movements and rebel organizations. This shift in perspective provided for a major advance in the study of violence on the African continent, as it also led to new insights into the relationships between social structures, political action, criminality, and security.

2.1. Civil Wars

Reflecting its prevalence on the continent, the study of civil war has become the dominant field of violence research in Africa, differentiated into a number of sub-fields. In studies of the root causes of civil wars, probably the dominant research issue, a recent shift towards questions of citizenship and political exclusion has emerged (Mamdani 1996; Akindès 2003; Sall 2004; Ouedraogo and Sall 2008; Colin, Kouamé, and Soro 2007). Loosely related with this are studies of how democratic elections may instigate, but also resolve violent political crisis (Amouzouvi 2000; Kaya 2004; Makumbe 2006; Akokpari 2007; Belinga 2007; John 2007; Lafargue and Katumanga 2008).

In West Africa, a string of civil wars shattered societies, beginning in Liberia in late 1989 and almost seamlessly encroaching neighboring Sierra Leone a little more than a year later (Richards 1996; Ellis 1999; Abdullah 2004; Keen 2005). At times, Guinea threatened to become involved in this cluster of warfare (Chambers 2004). While these conflicts ended in 2002–2003, the burden of armed conflict and partition shifted to Côte d'Ivoire between 2003 and 2007, with post-electoral fighting there from 2010 to 2011 (Akindès 2004; Banégas 2006). The West African nations of Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Niger, and Congo-Brazzaville also faced army revolts, secessionist movements, and insurrections (Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999; Vigh 2006; Foucher 2005; Klute and Trotha 2000; Deycard 2007). At the Horn of Africa, large parts of Somalia have been gripped by clan-based warfare and devoid of a national state or government since 1991 (Menkhaus 2003; Marchal 2007). After the civil war between the government and southern rebels in Sudan ended with a power-sharing deal in 2003, insurgents in Darfur began their fight for political inclusion (Prunier 2007; Mamdani 2009).

The biggest and in terms of human cost most destructive cluster of wars and rebellions in contemporary Africa occurred in the Great Lakes region. An insurrection in Rwanda beginning in 1990 revived elite and ethnic conflicts dating from the pre-colonial and colonial period. The insurgents' enemies, in particular radical elements in the Rwandan government, reacted in 1994 with a genocide against the Tutsi minority, which resulted in death on an unprecedented scale (Prunier 1997; Des Forges 1999; Gourevitch 1999; Hintjens 1999; Melvern 2000, 2004; Mamdani 2001; Straus 2006). The political fallout led to "Africa's World War" beginning in 1996, largely fought on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and involving the armies of about ten countries and many more non-state armed groups. While these wars are now limited, with a peace deal in Burundi, more stability in the Central African Republic, and the withdrawal of foreign armies from the DR Congo, some regions are still suffering civil strife (Turner 2007; Veit 2010).

The study of civil wars in Africa has to a large extent been actor-centred, with a focus on insurgency groups, militias, and other forms of non-state armed organization (Clapham 1998; Bwenge 2003; Boas and Dunn 2007; Weinstein 2007; Debos 2008; Schlichte 2009). Internationally, materialist explanations pertaining to opportunistic and self-interested behavior of rebel groups have attained prominence (Berdal and Malone 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Africanist scholars have produced few works supporting these arguments and tended instead to voice critical perspectives. These critics emphasize the political character of contemporary conflicts and the complexity of motivations, as opposed to binary assumptions about "greed" or "grievance" (Marchal 2000; Marchal and Messiant 2002; for critical views referring also to non-African contexts see Kalyvas 2001; Schlichte 2006). These arguments anticipate the greed thesis, but without the latter's negative connotations. Nonetheless, the structural relationship between natural resources and violent conflict is an issue, most importantly regarding civil strife in the oil-rich Niger Delta (Ifeka 2001, 2004, 2006; Obi 2004, 2006, 2008; Omeje 2004, 2006; Anugwom 2005; Dibua 2005; Onuoha 2007, 2008; Owolabi and Okwechime 2007; Owusu-Koranteng 2008).

The greed vs. grievance-debate tended to hinder rather than advance social research, as the focus on perpetrators' motivations merely revisited older discussions. Already in 1970, Ted Gurr answered the question of "Why Men Rebel" with the grievance argument, which he termed "relative deprivation." Other scholars challenged this argument, and posited that "grievances alone cannot explain mobilization" (Tarrow 1998, 15) because grievances are practically ubiquitous, whereas protest and violent rebellion are not. The "contentious politics" school developed a perspective of "opportunity and constraint" as central conditions for the emergence of militant oppositions (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

While rebel groups gained enormous attention, state militaries and states apparatuses have attracted comparatively little attention. Rather than looking at what African states are doing, attention has – through the lens of „weak" or "failed" states – shifted to what they do not do, and how this supposed void leads to conflict (Young 1998, Reno 1998, Fawole and Ukeje 2005, Fomin and Forje 2005; critically Chabal and Daloz 1999). In response, other authors describe how alternative powerful institutions emerge even when state institutions collapse during civil war (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004; Menkhaus 2004; Tull 2005; Raeymaekers 2007). Yet we still know too little about the dynamics in violent state organizations in Africa.

2.2. Democratization, Criminal Violence, Vigilantism, and Urban Security
Democratization was the order of the day during the early 1990s in many African countries. In particular southern Africa entered a period of greater political stability after the end of the Cold War and the introduction of representative democracy in South Africa in 1994. As the political landscape became pacified, research agendas changed. At the same time, social and criminal violence seemed to be on the increase not only in South Africa, but also in commercially vibrant cities such as Nigeria's Lagos and Kenya's Nairobi.

Democratic societies rule through consent rather than outright coercion, and therefore rely on the legitimate authority of the state. One of the core responsibilities of a state is to protect the "right to life." The way in which the state pro-

tects this right can impact on its long-term legitimacy and authority. High levels of violent crime, assault, and murder indicate that the state might be failing to create the environment for a safe and secure community, and therefore impacting negatively on its capacity to govern effectively.

The shift from political to social and criminal violence is increasingly explained with reference to the breakdown of social cohesion, which is perceived to have created an anomic context in which violent crime is likely to occur. Shaw notes in this vein: "[A]part from generating particular forms of criminality (most notably the organized variety), transitions also have important impacts on the social controls present in any society. In many instances a weakening of these provides an environment that may be more conducive to criminality" (Shaw 2002, 2). In this context the concept of "social cohesion" has become increasingly common in policy environments such as that of South Africa over the past few years. It is argued that in order to reduce levels of violence, the ways in which citizens relate to one another as citizens need to be transformed.

However, in South Africa and in postcolonial societies in general, the notion of „good citizens" who police themselves in terms of a commonly held set of norms and values, falls apart in a context characterized historically by multiple overlapping systems of social authority and normative regimes. As Peter Ekeh (1975) notes, the African colonial experience, and in particular the experience of indirect rule, such as in colonial tribal jurisdictions and Black "homelands" during apartheid) creates multiple spaces of rights, obligations, and ethical conduct that are not necessarily concordant with the juridical rights and obligations normatively articulated in democratic constitutions (see also Mamdani 1996; Joseph 1997). It is in this context that violent crime can lead to the creation of forms of community that are at odds with the unifying, nation-building efforts of governments. The result, in Africa and other regions of the global South, is Balkanized zones of governance and citizenship: informal settlements, gated communities, vigilante groups, and gangs.

The areas most affected by violent crime also tend to be the areas most affected by "everyday" social violence, such as

gendered and domestic violence, and economic marginalization. In South Africa, the areas most affected are black communities in townships, mostly working class with high levels of unemployment and poverty. In contexts of ongoing socio-economic deprivation, "community" can thus become an identity that coheres around a notion of social exclusion. People identify themselves as victims of a lack of delivery and poor local government representation and service, and see themselves as a community in opposition to the state. In the South African context this has been most explicitly articulated in "service delivery protests" (Delaney 2007).

In this context a growing body of literature on vigilante groups has emerged in the African context and beyond (for a global review, see Pratten and Sen 2008). Vigilante groups play an ambiguous role, in some instances offering genuine protection but sometimes degenerating into protection rackets. In the latter case, vigilantism is but one form of organized crime. This tension is mirrored by vigilantes' relationships with the state. Vigilante groups may pose a challenge to the state by threatening its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence but they are also often intimately linked to political leaders or formal political parties. Laurent Fourchard, for example, identifies an ambiguous relationship between the state and vigilante groups in southwestern Nigeria. Vigilantism can be interpreted as a sign of state erosion. But as Fourchard (2008) explains in the particular case study he relates, the term was originally introduced with a positive connotation by police forces themselves. It is thus far from clear whether vigilantism constitutes a challenge to state institutions. Vigilantism may represent an actively chosen alternative form of social organization, rather than simply being the consequence of state weakness (Buur 2008).

Nigeria is one of the countries most strongly affected by criminal violence and vigilantism. A survey of violent crime in the sprawling metropolis of Lagos, Nigeria, found that, faced with high incidence and fear of crime: "many communities and individuals took several measures to reduce their feeling of vulnerability and minimize risk of victimization. Eighty one percent of the respondents said that vigilantes existed in their communities, while seventy seven percent reported that the vigilantes were paid for their ser-

vices" (Alemika and Chukwuma 2005). Many militant groupings were founded as a response to the plundering of the country's resources by political elites, argue Charles Gore and David Pratten (2003; Ukeje 2001). Pratten goes on to argue that vigilante groups in Nigeria are primarily popular responses to criminality. Their spread however has been so ubiquitous that their impact is much more pervasive. Vigilantism in Nigeria is intimately linked to the political economy, connects urban and rural spaces, reproduces or restructures lineages and ethnicity, and includes activities ranging from crime fighting to political lobbying. Discursively, Nigerian vigilantism is embedded in narratives of contested rights (Pratten 2006, 2008a, 2008b).

In South Africa there has also been an increase in the prevalence of vigilante groups across the country. Ranging from more formally organized groupings such as People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) in the Western Cape, groups in KwaZulu-Natal province started out as community neighborhood watches, some of which have taken on violent and radicalized forms. Identification with a specific „community" in the case of PAGAD and neighborhood watches indicates the recovery of a religious and racially hegemonic social morality fraying at the seams as a result of substance abuse, gangsterism and poverty (Pillay 2002).

Vigilantism in Africa is difficult to define and delineate in terms of spaces, culture, and discourse. While it is often considered an urban phenomenon, some groups, particularly in Kenya, bridge the urban-rural divide. Most widely discussed in this regard is the Mungiki vigilante sect and other similar groups in Kenya. The Mungiki are legitimized by ethno-centrism, religion, and the contested history of the anti-colonial and intra-ethnic Mau-Mau uprising. They boast strong links to particular political camps that are well established in state institutions. However, depending on which political camp gained a hegemonic position in the apparatus, there were periods when the state engaged the group in intense fighting (Wamue 2001; Anderson 2002; Kagwanja 2003, 2006b). Some groupings show the influence of urban globalized youth culture. One example is analyzed by Remy Bazenguissa-Ganga in Congo-Brazzaville, where politicized frustrated youth formed urban defense groups, which turned into

armed militias that linked up with rival political camps and fought much of the civil war of the 1990s (1999a, 1999b). Their identity, Bazenguissa-Ganga argues, was strongly linked to Western media images. The same can be said about Somalia's Mooryaan (Marchal 1993), and militant youth formations in West Africa (Richards 1996; Ellis 1999; Bayart 2000, 227–29; see also below). Other vigilantes assert religious and local identities at the same time, thus positing an alternative way of relating to global discourses. Fatima Adamu (2008) shows how groups across the shari'a states of northern Nigeria draw legitimacy from different and sometimes competing sources, including traditional, communal, religious, and political elites (cf. Last 2008).

Aside from their anti-criminal merits and complicated relation to state and law, vigilantes in Nigeria have also become vehicles for inter-communal violence. Johannes Harnischfeger detects among vigilantes in Lagos and southeastern Nigeria agendas directed not only against criminals, but also targeting members of other ethnic groups (2003, 2004). The Bakassi Boys, to name one example, were supported by a state governor who capitalized on their anti-crime legitimacy. Such links, however, undermined the group's popular legitimacy as it became seen as the tool of a corrupt political class. Similarly, the Ooduas Peoples Congress, Rufus T. Akinyele argues, established a model for many other ethnicist groups to follow (2001; see also Adebanwi 2005). Inter-communal violence also drew in vigilantes in central Nigeria's Plateau state during conflict from 2002 to 2004, Adam Higazi reports (2008). He describes a shift from action against thieves to protection from armed political militias, which in turn led vigilantes to ever more closely resemble their adversaries.

In a less organized context there have been sporadic outbursts of communal violence against (suspected) criminals. Black South African townships suffering from poverty and unemployment have also cohered against that which comes from outside and threatens, or is perceived to threaten or impede, the life chances of local citizens. This category of external threats includes those who are felt to be taking jobs and income opportunities or undercutting local businesspeople by selling goods at cheaper prices. The target around which the "community" coheres in this particular

instance is foreign Africans, deprecatingly designated *Amakwerekwere*, who have become victims of xenophobic violence (Neocosmos 2010).

While violent exclusion in poor urban zones is thus closely related to a communalization of protection against violent crime, in middleclass areas the same tendency can be traced to a commercialization and privatization of protection (Schlichte 2005). Middle- and upper-class residents are able to mobilize resources, information, technologies, and organization in defense of their residential security, leading to the proliferation of "gated communities." In South Africa these have typically involved residents setting up access control around older neighborhoods and blocking off a street or blocks of streets. Private security guards are employed to regulate the inward and outward movement of people and vehicles. Fortified commercial enclaves for work, consumption, and leisure accompany the residential spaces of safety of the middle classes. These zones are connected by road and transport systems that favor the wealthy, creating an interlinked "fortified network," which could eventually "disembed" the city. The trend towards exclusive malls, highways, and transport systems like the Gautrain high-speed rail link between Johannesburg and Tshwane (former Pretoria) are symptomatic of this trend in South Africa.

In this environment, the forms of "community" that emerge are often mobilized against an "other" in a way that increasingly fosters separation. In her study of spatial separation in Cape Town, Charlotte Lemansky observes that "walls and gates have reinforced a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion by concentrating the poorest social groups in spaces with minimal economic and political leverage. … Furthermore, enclaves do not just respond to difference and fear, but actually deepen segregation and reinforce fear by excluding difference and limiting social mixing, thus increasing paranoia and mistrust between groups" (Lemanski 2004, 107). Another study shows that the view of the white middle class was that "crime originated from outside the community" (Landman 2002, 173). Communities could therefore establish „trust" and social relations that bound them together in relation to an external threat. They could collectively keep a lookout for this "threat," and draw on and develop practices and technologies in order to do so.

Thus the forms of social cohesion that violent crime is creating show signs of being at odds with the forms of social cohesion envisioned and assumed by policies of national governments and international development agencies. While there are positive community formations to manage risk, poor communities are also showing signs of cohering around social exclusion, xenophobia, and susceptibility to gender and sexual violence. While social cohesion exists inside these fragmented and mutually exclusive spatial zones, social polarization between "communities" tends to create separate publics, with different benefits, rights, and obligations, and fragmented experiences of citizenship. Debates about autochthony in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the DR Congo, and elsewhere demonstrate the continent-wide dimension of these phenomena of social exclusion, which often lead to violent exchanges and even warfare (Bayart, Geschiere, and Nyamnjoh 2001; Geschiere 2009).

Studies of criminal violence and societal responses such as vigilantism and gated communities demonstrate the need to move beyond analytical categories of public vs. private or legitimate vs. illegitimate violence. Vigilante groups, for example, blur the boundaries between protection and criminality. They fulfil, in many cases, functions of public authority. Their protection service is, however, often limited to select groups in society. As such, they are not much different from official state security organs or from gated communities protected by „private" security companies. These fluid phenomena ask for a broad, process-oriented view on interactions, moving beyond a focus on single actors or particular societal groupings.

3. Youth and Violence

One societal grouping that has received a great deal of academic consideration regarding its relationship to violence is African youth. However, youth does not feature as a prominent category in every study of violence and conflict. Even if young people – mostly men – play important roles in the majority of conflicts and everyday incidents of violence, these combatants, perpetrators, or victims are not necessarily defined on a generational basis. Class, origin, ethnicity, religion, or gender are some of the many other categories used to explain violent behavior of young

people. Nonetheless, analyses of links between youth and violence have gained prominence in the past two decades.

3.1. Youth in Africa

Any analysis of youth must come to terms with what becomes defined as "youth" in different contexts. "The fact is that in Africa local definitions of childhood and youth tend to differ from those used in international law and by bodies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)," writes Mark Leopold. "People who would be considered minors in Europe and North America are frequently expected to assume a range of 'adult' roles, including working and being sexually active, as well as fighting wars, while others may not count as full 'adults' until their late thirties" (Leopold 2005b, 693–94; cf. Abbink 2005; Last 2005, 37–40). Remy Bazenguissa-Ganga adds another dimension to the changing definitions of youth in Africa, when he points out that during the civil war in Congo-Brazzaville being an elder became detrimental to political advancement and the most powerful – regardless of their age – presented themselves as the youngest (Bazuenguissa-Ganga 2001). Jean and John Comaroff point out that youth is often regarded as a transhistorical and transcultural category, but is in fact a modern construction. They argue that the spread of capitalism created the conditions for the emergence of an autonomous category of youth on a global scale. The current crisis of capitalist society in Africa and elsewhere leads in turn to what can be understood as a crisis of youth. Yet it is exactly in and through this crisis that the young have acquired an unprecedented autonomy vis-à-vis other generations (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

As in other regions, students of Africa regard youth as a group between extremes. Rather than treating it as an ordinary part of society, youth seems to oscillate between hope and despair, construction and destruction, peaceful contribution to and violent denial of society. Titles such as "Vanguards or Vandals" (Abbink and Van Kessel 2005) or "Makers and Breakers" (Honwana and de Boeck 2005) bespeak the ambiguity. Youth symbolizes the future, and thus both fear and hope about coming changes are assigned to the young generation. As Mamadou Diouf shows, the nationalist projects of the early post-independence years projected much of their optimism concerning a fundamen-

tal transformation of African societies – in political, economic, cultural, and social terms – onto Africa's youth. Paradoxically, the idea of youth as "chief agents of transformation" also entailed its definition as a societal group that needs to be „channeled and supervised by adults" (Diouf 2003, 3–4). The long-term economic and educational investments of the post-independence years proved inadequate and ultimately failed.

Youth, not unlike other groupings in society, tend to be oriented towards risk, immediate profits, informal practices, and individualism. Traditional forms of socialization through rites, respects for elders, and obedience to adults and the state became linked to surveillance, harassment and repression (Mbembe 1985). Youth are perceived to have become increasingly independent and critical of older generations. The street became the central stage for youthful (i.e. unruly) behavior. Young African migrants, musicians, loiterers, sapeurs (swanks), and thugs became the subject of moral panic in Africa, but also in Europe and North America. Youth appeared more and more as a threat to rather than a hope for society, fundamentally as a societal element uprooted from social bonds such as family, ethnic group, or nation (Diouf 2003, 4–8). Optimists view these phenomena as legitimate resistance to repression and exclusion (Mac-Gaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000; contributions in Trudell 2002), while pessimists understand it as mere delinquency and symptoms of crisis (Cruise O'Brien 1996). Both perspectives allow insights: The recourse to violence, as a common practice of many youth movements across the continent at least since the colonial era, often targets unresponsive authorities or, in the absence of functioning police forces, criminal delinquents; but there also have been outbreaks of xenophobic violence or the transformation of vigilante to mafia groups. As Diouf notes, even violent demonstrations "always have an element of playing hooky," and hereby express nihilism, childish naughtiness, and idealism at the same time (Diouf 2003, 9).

The ambiguous role of youth as linchpin of positive transformation or catastrophic destruction is mostly been put forward in connection with young men. Young women and children are rarely attributed such positive or negative agency. In particular child soldiers and young females

raped during civil war are often regarded as the quintessentially powerless victims of evil violence. In opposition to such views and in line with a general trend in African studies to emphasize the agency of subordinated groups, youth agency has become a major matter of analysis. The volume edited by Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck, which probes the role of violence as a means of self-assertion, constitutes the current milestone (2005; in particular contributions by Honwana and Utas on war situations and contributions by Diouf and Biaya on questions of legitimacy, identity, and violence; see also Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006).

The study of violence, conflict, and youth in Africa has produced several edited volumes during ecent years, most of which employ qualitative ethnographic methods. These studies link youth with a variety of issues such as historical perspectives and political mobilization (Abbink and van Kessel 2005), migration and conflict (Hart 2008, also includes case studies from other regions), memory and states (Bay and Donham 2006), and inter-generational negotiation and social becoming under exclusionary and violent circumstances (Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006). The lack of a gender perspective in many works on youth and violence in Africa is partly balanced – though only in passing remarks rather than thorough analysis – by contributions to Jon Abbink and Ineke van Kessel's (2005) volume on youth politics and conflict, some of which demonstrate how gender roles foster violent behavior by young men as protectors. Women, on the other hand, are not only victims of violence, but may also become perpetrators, as in the case of "liberation fighters" (Cock 1991; Weber 2006). However, the complexities inherent to the topics of youth, gender, and violence remain understudied save for very few case studies (Heald 1989; Glaser 1998a). The volume edited by Abbink and Van Kessel (2005) also sheds light on the changes in generational power balances, which are particularly strong during and after violent conflict. Violent practices can empower younger generations, but older strata in traditionally gerontocratic (and patriarchal) societies often find ways to co-opt youth and their violent means for their own purposes (Abbink and van Kessel 2005, in particular contributions by Last and Burgess).

3.2. South African Youth after Apartheid

In South Africa youth have been stereotyped in exemplary terms as either "Heroes or Villains" (Seekings 1993). Under apartheid and especially after the student uprising of 1976 the African National Congress (ANC) regarded youth as the "shock troops of resistance" (Glaser 2000, 1). The ANC's strategy of rendering the country ungovernable through strikes, boycotts, and attacks on state representatives was largely based on the "young lions." The destructiveness directed against the apartheid system found a counterpart in youth organizations' campaigns against drug abuse and criminal violence in the townships. Youth activists were seen as, and perceived themselves as, a moral force, entrusted not only with resistance, but also with disciplining the township population. Institutions like ad-hoc "people's courts" emerged, suspected informers were physically punished, and strikes and boycotts violently enforced (Marks 2001, 52–54, 82–98; Seekings 1993, 97).

Towards the final demise of apartheid perspectives on non-white South African youth changed radically. A "lost generation" was "discovered," whose political engagement impacted negatively on their schooling and career chances in a post-apartheid society. Such alienated young men with a wealth of experience with violence were seen as an imminent danger (Marks 2001, 6; Seekings 1993, 5). The term "comtsotsi" (an amalgam of "comrade" and "tsotsi" or small time gangster), invented in the townships, became widely propagated. Clive Glaser's study of Soweto's gangs between 1935 and 1976, "Bo-Tsotsi," details how marginalized and violent youth used the sub-urban space. This stratum of society occasionally joined political demonstrations and riots, but not always for purely idealistic purposes (Glaser 1998b; 2000).

In parallel the high incidence of gendered violence in South Africa gained greater academic consideration. Mamphela Ramphele states that "Apartheid defined black men out of the community of patriarchs" (Ramphele 2002, 113–14; cf. Ramphele 2000; Reynolds 2000; Shefer et al. 2008) The traditional male roles of protecting and feeding the family came under attack as the state was extremely violent and unemployment and labor migration were widespread. Young men reacted to this crisis of masculinity with the formation of peer groups, which were particularly sus-

picious of outsiders' interest in "their" women. Violence was however also directed against the latter: "It was a culture, in many respects defined in opposition to femininity, which subjected women to terrifying levels of coercion and sexual violence." (Glaser 1998b, 308-9; cf. Mager 1998 for rural counterparts between 1945 and 1960).

As Jeremy Seekings cautions, ascriptions of violence to youth do not tally with the everyday experience of a large majority of young people. Rather the regular experience of violence as perpetrator or victim is restricted to a minority. Research, in Seekings's opinion, fails to understand the everyday lives of that majority. As he points out, the moral panic about youth quickly abated in the post-apartheid era as society became more concerned with other problems (Seekings 2006, 4-9). The everyday criminal violence that rose to one of the world's highest rates was unexpectedly ascribed not to the young, but to (Black) criminals in general.

3.3. Young Combatants in West African Civil Wars

Youth as perpetrators of extreme violence became a major issue in analysis of the civil war in Sierra Leone and to a more limited extent Liberia. The debate's starting point in the West was a piece in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "The Coming Anarchy," where Robert Kaplan describes West African youths as "loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting" and goes on to describe "places where the Western Enlightenment has not penetrated and where there has always been mass poverty," where "people find liberation in violence." The author perceived this violence as apolitical and irrational (Kaplan 1994, 2000).

Paul Richards set out to prove Kaplan wrong. His book *Fighting for the Rainforest* describes the leadership, rank-and-file, and social environment of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which started the war in 1991 and lost it in 2000. Richards seeks to demonstrate the RUF's "practical rationality of war" (1996, xxi), even including violent acts as horrific as the chopping off of civilians' hands and arms. He analyses war and violence as performance and discourse, expressive acts through which otherwise disfranchised people empower themselves, delving into the subjectivities of the RUF's leadership, presented as excluded

intellectuals, and their young followers. The latter are understood as embedded in West Africa's rain forest culture. Richards also describes the local adaptation of global media images, including interesting insights into the cultural appropriation of the first *Rambo* film.

Where Kaplan's piece was of interest for its supposed influence in policy circles and its exemplary representation of what may be called a postmodern Orientalism, Richards's equally controversial approach stirred great academic interest and disagreement, particularly among West African scholars. A special issue of *Africa Development* provided a critique of Richards' book. Most pointedly,Yusuf Bangura's extensive review criticizes Richards's framework of violent actors' subjective rationality and his supposedly undifferentiated conception of youth (1997). Indeed Richards's aim of disproving Kaplan's claim of actor irrationality leads him to stark claims about the means-ends rationality, discipline, and homogeneity of the RUF. He also tends to understate and legitimize RUF violence without taking its victims' views into account. Bangura argues that, while actor rationality should not be completely discarded, RUF fighters' logic of action was not only political, but also an expression of banditry, hedonism and brutality (1997). He thereby anticipated more general findings on civil wars and armed groups, positing that political violence in civil wars tends to derail and become mixed up with and even driven by „private" issues (Kalyvas 2003).

Bangura and other authors in the special issue propose a different view of RUF fighters, which they portray as rebellious "lumpen" youth with little ideological grounding and a tendency to anti-social behavior. The reference to Marxist thinking about a usually anti-revolutionary lumpen-proletariat seems, however, not entirely free from disdain for the largely uneducated forces in the RUF. These urban-based and until then urban-oriented scholars seem just as puzzled by the sudden power of the young rural strata as was Sierra Leone's urban (intellectual) public in general (Bangura 1997; Rashid 1997; Abdullah 1997; see also Gberie 2005).

Richards and related researchers continued their inquiry into the "hinterland" of Sierra Leone and its disfranchised

young population, pointing to economic, educational, and socio-political constraints, and the need for protection, as reasons to join Sierra Leone's armed groups (Peters and Richards 1998; Peters 2004, 2006; Zack-Williams 2001; see also Utas 2008 for similar findings in Liberia.). Also related to this are generational conflicts, especially with quasi-feudal customary chiefs (Richards 2005; Fanthorpe 2001, 2006).

4. Concluding Remarks

Since the Cold War, research on violence in Africa has made important advances, focusing more closely on violence that is not employed to directly gain political power. Even regarding some civil wars, as in the case of Sierra Leone, the center of attention moved beyond elite and state interest, to take into account motivations of rank-and-file combatants. Youth has become an important category of analysis, along with vigilantism and criminality. This is a welcome development in the study of violence in Africa, given that intra-societal violence was largely neglected in previous decades.

However, categories like youth are also shown to have only limited analytical value. Youth is a category too broad to comprehend the lifeworlds of specific perpetrators of violence. Currently, if a strict age parameter is employed, a majority of Africans may be categorized as youth. However, only a fraction of Africa's youth is involved as victims or perpetrators of mass violence. The changing and spatially different cultural perceptions of who is considered youth and for what reason also limit the analytical value and comparability of the category. Accordingly, use of the category has been contested in Sierra Leone, where the Marxist term „lumpen proletariat" has been proposed for fighters in the civil war. In South Africa, changing societal categorization of violent criminals also led to a change in academic perceptions. The analysis of youth in relation to violence thus needs to put other parameters, such as class, gender, and location at the center. Only then can we understand which groups in society employ which forms of violence, where, against whom, at what historical moment, and for which reasons.

The category of vigilante, too, promises only limited insight into questions of societal responses to generalized insecurity and criminal violence, given that the term is derived from these armed organizations' supposed motivation for the employment of violence. Vigilantes can be protectors of communities in the positive sense, yet empirical research has shown that they may be better analyzed as part of public authority. It thus seems necessary to move beyond perpetrators' motivations for using violence. While motivations are particularly important for the assignment of guilt and responsibility, social scientists need to be interested in more aspects than prosecutors and judges. Motivations are not only very difficult to assess (given that social science lacks the means of interrogation available to the police), motivations are bound to be heterogeneous (particularly among groups of perpetrators) and subject to change depending on what may be called structures of opportunity and constraint. Future research should thus concentrate more on the outcomes and effects of violence on social structures, on state and societal responses to violence, and on the interaction processes between perpetrators, victims, and observers of violence.

More generally, it seems that the study of violence suffers from the general disregard for the larger political and socio-economic structure of contemporary African societies. During the Cold War, analysts employing Marxist theories aspired to understand African societies as structural hierarchies (admittedly with only limited success). In societies with a large majority of peasants and almost no proletariat, dominated by a thin layer of political elites, classical Marxist class analysis yielded only very limited insights (see for example on Zaire Schatzberg 1980, 14–32). Nonetheless this was at least an attempt to examine a society as a whole and understand interdependencies between its component groups. Contemporary Africanist social science instead prefers to focus on particular actor groups. A renewed focus on societal structures as a whole may thus add valuable insights into causes, processes, and outcomes of violent phenomena.

Which phenomena will dominate empirical research in the coming years? The rise in the frequency of civil wars in the 1990s, it seems, may be in a process of reversal. Major clusters of violent crisis – most notably in West Africa – seem to have become more stable. In the Great Lakes region, most wars and conflicts have been resolved or con-

tained in recent years. Yet the problem of ex-combatants without a social and economic stake in post-conflict societies remains a challenge, as is the exclusion of large parts of the population from political and economic participation. Post-conflict violence, often linked to democratization processes, is likely to become a pressing societal problem in the coming years.

Without portraying Africa as a continent of criminality, it can also be expected that research will shift to delinquency and related societal developments in urban spaces. Along-side the growth of the younger generations, urbanization constitutes the most important socio-geographic and demographic trend on the continent. Rapid economic growth and a more even distribution of wealth, which could by itself do a great deal to resolve societal crisis, seems at the moment a rather faint hope in most countries. The study of violence in poverty-stricken urban areas will quite probably constitute a major area of future research. Given the uneven development of political figurations on the continent, the relation between violence and politics will, however, remain at the top of the agenda.

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